



EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee
A bridge between Europe and organised civil society
December 2015 | EN



EDITORIAL

Since this issue is devoted mainly to the refugee influx into Europe and to poverty, I shall also devote my first editorial as EESC President to the same subject.

We are faced, on the one hand, with a humanitarian crisis and the need to receive these refugees under decent conditions and, on the other, with an alarming escalation in the number of people living in poverty.

Like many Europeans, I am appalled and outraged by the fate of both. I cannot bear the thought of people being forced to leave everything behind and risk their lives in their flight from violence, war, tyranny or destitution, wherever in the world they might be. Those who cause, perpetuate or profit in any way from the plight of these forced migrants should be viewed with contempt whereas those, especially in civil society, who strive to alleviate or put an end to their suffering should be honoured.

And yet, although Europe is still a beacon of hope for peace, democracy and even survival to those who have lost everything, it nevertheless has to contend with an alarming and unfortunately growing number of citizens living in poverty and deprivation. This too must stop.

Our Committee has already issued a number of opinions on both these issues and it is high time that our decision-makers took heed. However, our work is far from over.

I am glad that I suggested that this year's civil society prize should reward members of civil society who play an active part in fighting poverty, and that my colleagues agreed with me on this point. I am also pleased that they agreed to cut the associated costs as much as possible in order to be able to increase the number of prizes. I am proud to have been granted the honour of serving as president of an EU body that does this, because it is also its role to send out messages of solidarity and mutual support on behalf of European civil society and its organisations.

Georges Dassis

President of the European Economic and Social Committee
Brussels, 3 November 2015

Dear colleagues,

As I write these words, we are all devastated by what happened in Paris on Friday evening. In view of these exceptional circumstances, I immediately prepared a statement to be posted on the EESC's website. I wanted to send a powerful message on behalf of the Committee's members to express the complete solidarity of European civil society with the people of France and its outrage at the contemptible acts of these despicable individuals.

The text of that statement is available via this link:
<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.news&itemCode=37465>

I did this without delay, on Saturday morning, because I believed that it was my duty and that this was also why I was elected. However, I would now like to give you all the floor and, for that reason, I would like our Committee to adopt a resolution formally in plenary.

Georges Dassis

Brussels, 17 November 2015

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DIARY DATES

**20-21 January 2016/
EESC, Brussels:
EESC plenary session**

We stand united

Statement by the President of the European Economic and Social Committee on the terrorist attacks committed in Paris on 13 November 2015

In the name of all my colleagues, members of the European Economic and Social Committee, who represent before the European Institutions all the major employer, trade union and citizen-based organisations in the European Union, I would like to express our indignation and outrage on the cowardly and barbaric attacks which have been committed in Paris this night.

Our thoughts are with the victims, their families and friends, the French people and their institutions with whom we express our complete solidarity.

These stupid, vile and despicable murderers obsessed with hatred, attack the people, democracy and fundamental values of the French Republic. In this way, they attack the people, our democracy and fundamental values in Europe because they are one and the same. They will not win over. They will not weaken us. They will not achieve any of their goals: our unity around the values of European democracy, which owe moreover a great deal to the French Republic, will be even more reinforced.

Georges Dassis
President
European Economic
and Social Committee



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One thing is clear: the whole of organised civil society in Europe, and by this we mean, all the employer, trade union and citizen-based organisations in the European Union, is united against them, and is with the French people.

European civil society addresses migration crisis

Despite the risks and suffering faced by migrants and refugees, the EU is experiencing increasing migratory flows. The EESC's contribution addresses both the short-term priorities and attempts to find sustainable, comprehensive solutions. Its threefold approach involves tackling migrant smuggling, integrating migrants into

the labour market, and visiting reception centres on the ground.

Public hearing on the Action Plan against migrant smuggling

On 12 October, the EESC held a public hearing in the context of its opinion on the EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling (2015-2020). The event was chaired by EESC rapporteur Brenda King (Employers' Group, UK) and allowed the EESC to gather knowledge from stakeholders, including the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. "The refugee crisis is a global challenge that individual countries cannot deal with on their own. The EESC supports the fight against smugglers and organised crime both within the EU and outside its borders. However,

it strongly recommends the provision of safe and legal channels for migration and mobility into the EU, as this is the most effective way to secure the EU's borders and remove the demand for smugglers' services."

A visit to Sicily

On 12-14 October, the rapporteurs of the EESC opinion on the Commission's Agenda on Migration (Stefano Mallia - Employers' Group, Malta, and Cristian Pirvulescu - Various Interests Group, Romania) visited Sicily, where they met with stakeholders dealing with the mass arrival of migrants and refugees on the island.

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EESC members Stefano Mallia and Cristian Pirvulescu at Red Cross Centre in Sicily

Honouring real anti-poverty champions, European Civil Society says time to take a stand against poverty in the European Union

Grassroots organisations working to alleviate poverty in **Germany, Ireland, France, Poland and Finland** show the way in providing direct assistance to those in need. The European Economic and Social Committee has dedicated the 2015 European Civil Society Prize to organisations distinguishing themselves through their creativity and success in combatting poverty.

Five projects were chosen from a list of over 100 wide-ranging and high-calibre project submissions:

• **Armut und Gesundheit** (Germany) provides comprehensive

medical care for homeless people, a walk-in clinic for patients without health insurance in unstable



The Civil Society Prize expert assessors: Maureen O'Neill, former EESC member and SOC Section President, Jean Lambert, MEP, Anne Van Lancker, Belgian politician and former MEP, Julius op de Beke, Policy officer at DG EMPL, representing Stefan Olsson, European Commission director

situations, and various other initiatives. One project, the "Street Jumper", also promotes good health among children and young people from deprived backgrounds.

• **Fáilte Isteach**, an initiative of **Third Age** (Ireland), is a community-based project where older volunteers welcome migrants and refugees to Ireland through giving

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Ozark Henry appointed UN Goodwill Ambassador for Belgium against human trafficking

The EESC hosted the ceremony

On 21 October 2015, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in the presence of EESC President Georges Dassis, appointed the well-known Belgian musician **Ozark Henry** as its new National Goodwill Ambassador against human trafficking. This appointment is intended to draw attention to human trafficking and help mobilise support in Belgium for efforts to combat it.

Human trafficking claims over 10 000 victims every year in Europe. For **Georges Dassis, President of the European Economic and Social Committee**, "this modern-day form of slavery is a scandal and a crime against civilised society. Ozark Henry's appointment as UN Goodwill Ambassador is good news for Belgium and for Europe, as it will raise awareness and prompt many to take action. I guarantee that civil society organisations will stand by him, as they are ideally placed to help identify victims and work actively on prevention. You can count on us to be a key partner in the fight against human trafficking."

Speaking on his appointment, **Ozark Henry** explained: "There are many victims of human trafficking out there. We just don't see them or don't want to see them. From the kids being forced to beg on the streets to those being coerced to be sex workers or work illegally in sweatshops. We live happily in our own little worlds, going on with



Ozark Henry at the nomination ceremony

our own daily business. I felt it was time to act and to try and do something about this and make a difference in raising awareness and supporting organisations working to combat this crime."

Jean-Luc Lemahieu, UNODC Director for Public Affairs, thanked the EESC for its members' efforts to support the fight against trafficking by issuing substantial and influential opinions, and he welcomed Ozark Henry's new role in Belgium. On behalf of Belgium, the **Deputy Director General for Multilateral Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Werner Bauwens**, praised the practical work undertaken by the UN and evoked Belgium's leadership in the fight against trafficking. (cad) ●

Appropriate finance facilities for businesses – a key prerequisite for economic growth

EESC supports microfinance as a powerful tool to help fight financial exclusion



EESC President Georges Dassis and Her Majesty Queen Mathilde of Belgium

Microfinance comprises a range of financial services for people who are traditionally considered *non-bankable*, mainly because they lack the guarantees that can protect a financial institution against the risk of loss.

Whilst microfinance has a strong focus on developing countries, it is also provided to borrowers in the EU. **The 1st European Microfinance Day (EMD)** on 19 and 20 October 2015 was co-organised by the EESC to raise awareness of microfinance as a tool to fight social exclusion and unemployment in the EU. In the presence of **Her Majesty Queen Mathilde of Belgium** and **Commissioner Marianne Thyssen**, the President of the EESC's section for Economic

and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion, **Joost van Iersel**, underlined the importance of strengthening competitiveness, sustainable development and social inclusion in the EU: "There are considerable constraints in Member States to developing microfinance. Framework conditions for microfinance have to be improved", he told EU policymakers.

Indeed, microfinance in Europe is quickly becoming a relevant tool to reduce social and financial exclusion through the provision of financial (microcredit, microinsurance, etc.) and non-financial services (training, mentoring, etc.).

The EESC has worked on the issue and is convinced that microfinance is a way of fostering entrepreneurship and creating new jobs in micro-enterprises. In order to reduce complexity and the costs related to microcredit, the EESC proposes, on the one hand, to develop standardised high-tech services and, on the other, to provide guarantees and co-financing.

In the EESC's view, the true revolution of microfinance is that through intermediation activities, it gives a chance to individuals who are denied access to the financial market and empowers people to carry out their projects with their own resources, thus remaining free of assistance, subsidies and dependence. (mm) ●

Continued from page 1 — European civil society addresses migration crisis

Meetings with the Red Cross, the International Organisation for Migration, the EU regional task force office supporting the functioning of the "hotspots", the reception centre in Pozzallo, and NGOs such as Caritas, Centro Astalli and Comunità di Sant'Egidio made it clear that there was a big difference between the situation on paper and in reality.

Stefano Mallia commented: "The challenge is that a decision is taken within 24 hours as to whether or not a migrant may apply for protection. Those

who are not deemed to require protection are either sent back – if they come from a country which has a returns agreement (e.g. Tunisia) – or asked to leave Italy within seven days and thrown out on the street. This clearly leads to a number of problems."

Increased funding would allow NGOs to professionalise, while better stakeholder coordination would prevent people from falling through the cracks of the system. More attention must also be paid to the integration process.

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Honouring real anti-poverty champions, European Civil Society says time to take a stand against poverty in the European Union



The EESC: committed to reducing poverty in Europe

English conversation classes. Each week more than 2 200 students – migrants, asylum seekers and refugees – benefit from tuition from over 750 volunteers.

- **Uniterres**, an initiative of **A.N.D.E.S.** (France), provides fresh, quality local produce to social and solidarity-based food shops by local producers of fruits, vegetables, herbs and eggs. These products are available to vulnerable people and food aid recipients in the social and solidarity-based shops on a self-service basis, at no more than 30% of their purchase price. Uniterres currently supports 124 farmers in the Poitou-Charentes, Aquitaine, Midi-Pyrénées and Brittany regions and supplies 53 social and solidarity shops, providing food aid to 20 000 beneficiaries each year.
- **Social Integration Centres**, which are an initiative of **Barka Foundation for Mutual Help** (Poland), address issues of education and vocational training for long-term unemployed individuals, including the disabled, ex-prisoners, refugees and addicts. The Social Integration Centres organise workshops for

professional requalification, educational courses and support groups.

- **Y-Foundation (Finland)** promotes health and social welfare through the provision of affordable, good quality rental housing while respecting the human dignity of people who have difficulty finding accommodation on the open housing market. The main groups benefiting from these efforts are the homeless and people at risk of becoming homeless. Y-Foundation has also developed and supported housing for young people and people suffering from problems relating to mental health or addiction.

According to MEP Jean Lambert, one of the four assessors, "What we can see is that there is a range of issues which are drawing more and more attention – issues to do with homelessness or food. Some of these were in a way quite shocking because they show that we are still failing to meet basic human needs and human rights."

The Civil Society Prize jury was composed of the EESC President, the two Vice-Presidents, the President of the Employers' Group, the President of the Various Interests Group, a member of the Workers' Group, and the EESC Secretary-General.

The jury chose the five winners based on a shortlist of eleven, put together by an external expert panel consisting of four members. The five winning projects will share the prize of EUR 50 000 with the intention that this money will be reinvested in projects providing further care in the community. (sg) ●

The EYD2015 at the EESC: from the first idea to a dedicated seminar

The EESC did not merely come up with the idea of the European Year for Development (EYD) 2015, it has also contributed to its success. Several initiatives designed to reach a wider audience – business groups, trade unions, NGOs – were organised throughout the year to explore how to streamline and coordinate this policy more efficiently and effectively.

The EESC's External Relations section worked closely with countries working towards achieving the development goals. Most notably it organised the **14th Regional Seminar of ACP-EU Economic and Social Interest Groups**, which strongly advocated a convergence framework for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) centred on poverty eradication and climate change mitigation. At the **EU-Africa ECOSOC network meeting** the EESC insisted that the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa offered by the EU at the Valletta Summit should be managed transparently and that it should be based on, and monitored in relation to, the SDGs, as part of a genuine partnership between the countries.

As 2015 drew to a close, the EESC Communication department organised the **Civil Society Media Seminar 2015** in Luxembourg, focusing on the challenges of communicating about development policy. It was held on 26-27 November and was attended by communication officers from civil society organisations, journalists, students and academics from across the EU. Three interesting panels took place – the first focused on

the EYD communication campaign, the second addressed the role of civil society and the media and the third dealt with communication on the SDGs. EESC members and distinguished speakers from UN Regional Information Centre, the ILO, the EIB, WWF, Welthungerhilfe, the Swedish Development Agency, the European Commission and Parliament, and the Luxembourg government and Economic and Social Council shared their experience, exchanged best practices and debated with some 150 guests. More on this event can be found on the EESC webpage. (sma/dm) ●



Public hearing on the integration of refugees into the labour market

On 15 October, a public hearing took place in Brussels on the integration of refugees into the labour market, with presentations from Caritas, UNHCR, the European Commission, the German Federal Employment Agency and the International Catholic Migration Commission. Among the speakers was Dr Alizoy Temorshah from Afghanistan, who has been granted refugee status; he explained how difficult it had been to take up professional activities in Belgium. The hearing

concluded that having a job would ease social integration, diminish reliance on social benefits and increase the possibility of finding decent housing. Employed refugees would contribute to the social security system and their spending on consumer goods would be beneficial to the economy as a whole. This could help European countries to address demographic decline, ageing populations and labour shortages.

The findings from both the mission and the hearing will feed into opinions which will be voted at the December plenary. (mm/dm) ●



EESC info

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Harmonising progress: Georges Dassis, the new EESC President, sets out the Committee's priorities during his mandate

Elected with an overwhelming majority, Georges Dassis is the 31st President of the European Economic and Social Committee, an institution that he will head with two Vice-Presidents, Michael Smyth (budget) and Gonçalo Lobo Xavier (communication) from 2015 to 2018.

"This mandate will be useful to the people of Europe, and will be devoted entirely to them. We intend to mobilise all the forces of civil society to make the European Union attractive and more present in the daily lives of Europeans. First, there is a need to alleviate extreme poverty and invest in youth employment, infrastructure projects, research and innovation, something that needs to be done on a massive scale. Europe must not be equated with a race to the bottom, but to the top. It must improve life for all citizens in the north, south, east and west: this is what we mean by harmonising progress", said **Georges Dassis**.

The President's programme thus offers a very practical slant on European Union policies, inspired by opinions adopted by the Committee and addressed to the European institutions, in line with the Committee's mission according to the Treaty. Far from taking the Union as "a given", it underlines the severe crisis assailing Europe: economic recession and social decline have dramatically undermined people's faith in the EU. Calling for entrepreneurship, work and solidarity, the programme continues to put the emphasis on **social, economic and territorial cohesion** as the foundation for a fair and equitable Union. Instruments such as the European minimum income or taxation must be used to serve this purpose.

The programme supports the investment plan for Europe, requesting the addition of a **special investment plan** for growth and jobs, and the adoption of specific economic convergence

measures such as a mechanism for joint debt issuance and a temporary fund for eurobills.

The **digital single market**, the creation of a **European transport area** and the development of a genuine **Energy Union** are also priorities for the new EESC President, alongside contributing to the sustainable development of the Union, particularly with respect to climate change constraints, which must be incorporated into all EU policies.

In his programme, the President reiterated his commitment to a **strong Europe in the world**,

a Europe that must defend not only its economic interests, but, more importantly, its social and environmental requirements. The Union needs to take in asylum seekers and put in place a **new migration policy**, based on the principles of solidarity and respect for human rights. The fight against traffickers through closer cooperation between Member States must be an integral part of this policy.

To address these challenges, objectives and emergencies, Member States must also provide the European Union with the means to act, in the shape of a **budget** that matches its ambitions. ●

A Europe of progress that includes everybody

"When they did me the honour of electing me as President, my colleagues knew that I would continue to do what I have always done:

- *champion Europe's fundamental values, democracy, social and civil dialogue and, thus, organised civil society and the Committee; and also*
- *champion the European Union itself, because it is a great and noble project that is smart and generous, and vital for peace and progress, and yet also attacked, often poorly managed and not immune from the worst.*

They are also aware of – and, I believe, in agreement with – my strongly held belief that Europe must strive to ensure that every one of its citizens can enjoy decent working and living conditions. The EU must get the public back on

board, regain their confidence and support and even rekindle their enthusiasm. It must regain the appeal it once had, which prompted many nations, including my own, to wish to be part of it, as it was an area of peace, democracy and prosperity.

To do so, it must cease to be seen as a machine that is indifferent to people's suffering, remote and uncaring, and it must demonstrate in practice to the people of Europe that there is one thing that is ultimately more important than anything else in this famous European project, one thing that ultimately truly matters: them."

Georges Dassis
EESC President



EESC President Georges Dassis and EESC Vice-Presidents: Gonçalo Lobo Xavier (left) and Michael Smyth (right)

Sound financial management

I have been a member of the Committee since 2006 and I am honoured to have been appointed Vice-President. Civil society has an all-important role to play in today's Europe, and the Committee must do more to ensure that the input from civil society is taken fully on board at European level.

As an economist, I am particularly happy to have been put in charge of the finances of the Committee! I am looking forward to cooperating closely with the other members of the Budget Group and the Bureau. I hope I can put my experience as President of a large social housing provider in Northern Ireland, Habinteg Housing Association, to good use in the Committee. This association has a budget roughly the same size as the Committee's.

My priority is really to continue the excellent work of my predecessor, Hans-Joachim Wilms, to prepare the Committee's budget, ensuring that it conforms to the process required, and to continue and strengthen the cooperation with the European institutions and the Committee of the Regions.

In terms of my role in the wider Committee, I think we are going to see much greater emphasis on social issues in the new term of office, with a particular focus on the so-called lost generation of young people which has in many ways been let down by the generation I belong to myself. Our Committee is certainly well-placed to play a prominent role in tackling the problem of the disaffection and alienation of young people.

Since the onset of the financial and economic crisis, the decision-making in Europe has become even more detached from ordinary citizens. The Committee really has to assume its role as the bridge between civil society and Europe much more firmly. In the years ahead, I see many more initiatives under the "Going local" banner and I see our members reaching out more to their own local communities and NGOs and doing more to build up awareness that there is more to Europe than simply the Commission, the Parliament and the Council, and that their voice can be heard through us.

Michael Smyth
EESC Vice-President in charge of Budget

Communicating together to promote the Committee's work

I think that my generation is really fortunate. We belong to the so-called "Erasmus generation", the one that has been living in a mostly peaceful Europe and with an immense opportunity for access to knowledge and sharing of culture. This experience has made a major contribution to making me feel a true European.

I wanted to give something back to Europe. I therefore decided to dedicate my EESC vice-presidency to Europe's future. That is why my ambition, as newly elected EESC Vice-President in charge of communication, is to promote the added value of our Committee and the contribution of members' work towards the continuous European construction process. Rather than communicating on the institutional role and setup of the EESC, we will communicate on our work and results – and how we reflect the real concerns of EU citizens and deal with real issues. We must explain to the people of Europe how we make a difference.

But members are the first to acknowledge that we cannot communicate on everything. If we

communicate on everything, then nothing is important. We must select and prioritise to be more effective and achieve better results.

We must focus on issues that combine policy-making with what really matters to ordinary people. And we must be concrete, with facts and not rhetoric. That is why we are here: to represent organised civil society, with all the pros and cons.

I believe that the renewal of the EESC with 40% new members is a challenge but also an opportunity. They will bring fresh ideas and new spirit to the Committee. Therefore, the immediate challenge is for us to get quickly to work and to help boost the new members' knowledge of the EESC's objectives. And from the communications perspective, that is an opportunity.

I truly believe that each member has a responsibility for communication. Their performance and their ability to act as role models has a huge

Structure of the

PRESIDENCY

The EESC presidency is made up of a President and two Vice-Presidents with a term of office of two and a half years.



President
Georges Dassis
(Group II – Workers – Greece)



Vice-President
Michael Smyth
(Group III – Various Interests – United Kingdom)
President of the Budget Group



Vice-President
Gonçalo Lobo Xavier
(Group I – Employers – Portugal)
President of the Communication Group

Groups

The EESC is divided into three groups: Employers, Workers and Various Interests



**Group I
Employers**

President
Jacek Krawczyk
Poland

Group Vice-Presidents

Milena Angelova	Violeta Jelić
Paulo Barros Vale	Stefano Mallia
Stéphane Buffetaut	Thomas McDonough
Peter Clever	Maurizio Reale
Vladimíra Drbalová	Erik Svensson



**Group II
Workers**

President
Gabriele Bischoff
Germany

Group Vice-Presidents

Andrzej Adamczyk	Wolfgang Greif
Cinzia Del Rio	Judy McKnight
Anne Demelenne	Denis Meynent
Plamen Dimitrov	José María Zufiaur
Bernt Fallenkamp	



**Group III
Various Interests**

President
Luca Jahier
Italy

Group Vice-Presidents

Benedicte Federspiel
Mindaugas Maciulevičius
Arno Metzler
Ariane Rodert
Ioannis Vardakastanis

BUREAU

The Bureau organises the Committee's operations and proceedings. It has 39 members including the President and the two Vice-Presidents. On specific issues, the Bureau is assisted by ad hoc groups.



Employers' Group

Daniel Marels
Manthos Mavrommatis
Bernd Dittmann
Dorthe Andersen
Reet Teder
Patricia Cirez Miqueleiz
Tellervo Kyla-Harakka-Ruonala
Dragica Martinović Džamonja
David Croughan
Joost van Iersel
Jacek Krawczyk
Gonçalo Lobo Xavier
Brendan Burns

Workers' Group

Oliver Röpke
Lucie Studničná
Gabriele Bischoff
Georges Dassis
Pierre Jean Coulon
Stefano Palmieri
Daiva Kvedaraitė
Raymond Hencks
Charles Vella
Martin Siecker
Ellen Paula Nygren
Andrej Zorko
Emil Machyna

Various Interests Group

Ronny Lannoo
Dilyana Slavova
Pavel Trantina
Arno Metzler
Miguel Ángel Cabra de Luna
Reine-Claude Mader
Ákos Topolánszky
Luca Jahier
Gunta Anča
Krzysztof Balon
Cristian Pîrvulescu
Ariane Rodert
Michael Smyth

PLENARY ASSEMBLY

The Committee adopts its opinions by simple majority and forwards them to the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament. The Committee has 350 members.



EESC for 2015-2018

The Committee is made up of six sections as well as the Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI), the Single Market Observatory (SMO), the Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO), the Labour Market Observatory (LMO) and the Europe 2020 Steering Committee.

Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)



President
Pierre Jean Coulon
Workers' Group
France

Section for External Relations (REX)



President
Dilyana Slavova
Various Interests Group
Bulgaria

Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO)



President
Joost van Iersel
Employers' Group
Netherlands

Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT)



President
Brendan Burns
Employers' Group
United Kingdom

Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)



President
Martin Siecker
Workers' Group
Netherlands

Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)



President
Pavel Trantina
Various Interests Group
Czech Republic

Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO)



President
Brenda King
Employers' Group
United Kingdom

Single Market Observatory (SMO)



President
Pedro Almeida Freire
Employers' Group
Portugal

Labour Market Observatory (LMO)



President
Carlos Manuel Trindade
Workers' Group
Portugal

Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI)



President
Lucie Studničná
Workers' Group
Czech Republic

Europe 2020 Steering Committee



President
Etele Baráth,
Various Interests Group
Hungary

QUAESTORS



Antonello Pezzini
Employers' Group
Italy



Laure Batut
Workers' Group
France



Bernardo Hernández Bataller
Various Interests Group
Spain

Secretary-General
Luis Planas



The priorities of the Employers' Group: solid, stable and sustainable growth and jobs for business and the society in which it operates



The Employers' Group

The Employers' Group will continue to advocate growth and jobs for the benefit of business and the society in which it operates. We are currently working on our priorities (to be approved by the Group), which fall under six key headings:

- **A stable macro-economic environment** as a precondition for solid, sustainable and stable growth. **It is essential that Member States carry out growth-enhancing structural reforms in the framework of the European Semester and respect fiscal responsibility.**

- **Encouragement of a stronger culture of entrepreneurship** in Europe: to facilitate business creation and growth, the EU and its Member States must improve the framework conditions for entrepreneurship.
- **Completion of the EU Internal Market**, mindful of the needs of business and leading to greater efficiencies, better regulation and significantly reduced costs.
- **Stimulating a competitive, fully integrated and forward-looking industrial policy** to ensure a strong, solid and competitive industrial base in Europe.

- **(Re-)Building Europe's role in the world**, championing free trade for the benefit of business and its customers.
- **Competitiveness for more employment to safeguard the EU's social dimension:** by focusing on competitiveness and boosting growth, the EU would enable companies to create more jobs. This is the way to give the EU a real social dimension and solve the problem of high unemployment.

Jacek Krawczyk
President of the Employers' Group

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Communicating together to promote the Committee's work

potential. "Example is not the main thing in influencing others, it is the only thing!": this quote from Albert Schweitzer, the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize winner, embodies my thinking on the members' approach to communication. I encourage each member to communicate both in Brussels (the EESC needs recognition from the European Commission and Parliament for the valuable work it does) and back home (with our organisations and with people on the ground). That is why I strongly support the "Going Local" initiatives as part of our commitment. We look forward to working with members, EESC sections and groups to enhance this initiative.

We cannot forget the disastrous events that took place in Europe very recently. And when we think of the attacks perpetrated in Paris on 13 November, we must remember that we are all here to support a united, democratic, solidarity-based, peaceful and prosperous Europe close to its people. This is our contribution to avoiding the repetition of tragic events like the ones that have struck Europe.

Dear reader, as EESC Vice-President with a special focus on communication, I am proud to be working in an area of the Committee's activity where we have a strong starting point. You can also count on my efforts to improve every day. With the help of all involved, I will take advantage of existing tools to help members communicate about the EESC's work and, with your help, develop new ones to be more efficient.

Let's communicate together!
Gonçalo Lobo Xavier
Vice-President in charge of Communication

A positive project for the future of work

Over the past few years, European politics has been dominated by crisis and efforts to save the euro, and increasingly driven by national self-interest. This can be seen in the current "refugee" crisis, which is in reality a political crisis. Collectively, the EU has so far failed to rise to the challenge of coping with a flood of refugees fleeing war and violence.

It seems that the genie of renationalisation is out of the bottle, and the crisis has only exacerbated the problem.

What Europe now needs is a positive project for the future that once again focuses on people's living and working conditions.

Thus, we need to consider the entire labour market, and not just the digital single market, and European solutions must be found to make work fair and equitable in the future. Digitalisation has potential in this regard, but only in the right policy framework. The "social acquis" provides the foundation for this and should be further developed.

Furthermore, the necessary process of deepening the EMU must ensure that it finally becomes more social and more democratic. The development of a social union must be an integral part of a deeper EMU, not just an afterthought. Specific proposals are needed in this regard.

Thus a Eurozone-wide macro-economic dialogue can make a decisive contribution to the democratic and social development of the EMU. The EMU cannot be truly deepened without more involvement of the social partners.

Another aspect of the social dimension of the EMU is that budgetary consolidation is accompanied by an effective investment plan to generate revenue through growth, social cohesion and solidarity, so that Europe's economic integration and prosperity are not jeopardised by growing social inequality.

Gabriele Bischoff
President of the Workers' Group

The priorities of the Various Interests Group



The Various Interests Group Presidency

The end of 2015 finds the EESC reinvigorated with 40% new members for the five-year term 2015-2020. Within the Various Interests Group, the number stands even higher, with 48 new members joining our ranks.

Although our Committee will enter 2016 re-energised, unfortunately the EU is undergoing something of an existential crisis. Mistrust between Member States is at an all-time high and it is the politics of fear that are dominating the political spectrum.

The view of the Various Interests Group is that it is precisely in this politically "charged" and mistrustful environment that the EESC has a key role to play. In the last term of office, we concentrated on three principal themes: sustainable growth and investment; a social, sustainable and inclusive Europe; and thirdly, an active role for civil society in the entire European legislative process. Crucially, our decisions and our actions over the last five years sought to bring leadership, innovation and unity.

Over the next two and a half years we must build on this good work. We aim to do this by tackling novel and urgent topics, where our Group can

use its diverse make-up and networks to engage with European citizens. Already in 2016 we envisage exploring the role of culture in European identity, and engaging with British citizens on the costs and benefits of a possible British exit from the EU. Our principal priority in the foreseeable future is placing the EESC at the centre of this Europe of citizens, encouraging dialogue at the local level and contributing to re-building trust in European policies. At the Committee level, this may entail investing more in policy evaluations and diversifying from our "traditional" role to date. For Group III specifically, this may entail concentrating our work on key policy areas. What is certain is that the Various Interests Group will continue to invest in bringing "Europe" to the local level through a variety of events during the forthcoming EU Council presidencies (to be held by Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovakia, etc.).

What is also certain is that when this term of office comes to an end, we must have left a clear civil imprint behind us!

Luca Jahier
President of the Various Interests Group



The Workers' Group

The reindustrialisation of Europe – Employers' Group seminars

The Employers' Group has recently been focusing on various aspects of the reindustrialisation of Europe. On 26 and 27 October, a two-day seminar was held in Milan and Bergamo in cooperation with AICE, Confindustria, Confindustria and Coldiretti.

The first day's debate dealt with the role of international trade in the reindustrialisation of Europe. Participants discussed the future of EU trade policy, the role of Free Trade Agreements and how to revive European industry through trade and investment. Particular emphasis was placed on the consequences of the future trade policy on the food industry – an important sector of the Italian economy.

On the second day, participants discussed the role of innovation in the reindustrialisation of Europe. Representatives of Italian companies presented examples of how innovation can benefit Europe's agricultural and agribusiness sectors. The second panel focused on Industry 4.0 and its implications for the EU's industry

policy in the future. The Employers' Group is convinced that fully harnessing the potential of the Internet of Things provides a unique opportunity for the EU to forge ahead in terms of global competitiveness. (lj)



The Employers' Group seminar in Bergamo

Have your say on the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Development

On 27 October 2015 the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee held an event in Brussels to present the results of the public consultation carried out as part of the ex-post evaluation of the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Development 2007-2013 (FP7). The online public consultation, run by the Commission from February to May 2015, enabled a wide range of views to be considered and aimed to ensure the transparency of the evaluation project. A total of 202 responses were received – 44% from higher education and public research organisations,

35% from individuals, 14% from the private sector, 8% from ministries and agencies, and 4% from small and medium-sized enterprises. Additional written contributions were received separately from some stakeholder organisations. The public consultation showed there was overall satisfaction with the FP7, with some of its main achievements being seen in its boosting of excellence, in its efforts to create a vibrant innovation ecosystem, and in its contribution to the creation of a European Research Area (ERA). The results indicated it had been most successful in three main dimensions of EU added value – tackling pan-European challenges, increasing competition in research, and improving researchers' mobility. Some of the shortcomings brought to light by the consultation were the high entry barriers, narrow calls and oversubscription, not enough focus on societal impact and industry participation, and the burden of administration.

The ex-post evaluation of the FP7 is being carried out in connection with the Commission's Better Regulation Agenda, which is designed to boost openness and transparency in the EU decision-making process, improve the quality of new laws through better impact assessments of draft legislation and amendments, and promote constant and consistent review of existing EU laws, so that EU policies achieve their objectives in the most effective and efficient way. (sg)



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The Labour Market Observatory: the EESC's specialist forum for monitoring work across the EU

By Carlos Trindade, Workers' Group, President of the Labour Market Observatory

The Labour Market Observatory (LMO) was set up in 2007 with a mandate to identify and analyse labour market trends and challenges, bringing added value to the work of the SOC section and the EESC.

Composed of 33 members, including a President and two Vice-Presidents, it operates within and reports to the SOC section and, as a general rule, deals with complex issues requiring longer and more in-depth consideration than is possible using a normal study-group working method (Decision of the EESC Bureau of 10 July 2007, R/CESE 921/2007 rev).

The EU labour market currently faces two major developments at the same time: firstly, immediate and practical consequences arising from the crisis, which need to be monitored and analysed, and secondly, the new types of occupation and employment models generated by scientific and technical progress, which demand a capacity for proactive forward planning. As a result, the LMO must draw up a clear action plan so it can perform its tasks thoroughly and efficiently.

The LMO's necessary strategic vision therefore comprises:

1. Discussing the new policy on legal immigration and integration of immigrants and refugees in the labour market;
2. Examining the impact on employment of the digital transition and the transition to a low-carbon, resource-efficient and green economy;
3. Analysing the situation regarding youth employment and the long-term unemployed;
4. Researching labour mobility on the European labour market with regard to the law on fair competition between businesses and to the labour and social legislation in place in each Member State.

The specific position of disabled people and of the Roma on the labour market will continue to be the focus of a cross-cutting approach by researchers and other actors in future initiatives.

By concentrating existing resources and the expertise of EESC, European Commission and European Parliament members and other civil society experts on these issues, and by networking in order to optimise know-how and resources, the LMO's conclusions are sure to bring considerable added value. This will enhance the work of the SOC section and help to promote the EESC as a whole.

Intermediary Europe at the heart of the EU2020 strategy: bringing Europe closer to citizens

On 2 December 2015, the Various Interests Group held a conference on macro-regional cooperation in Luxembourg entitled **Intermediary Europe at the heart of the EU2020 strategy: bringing Europe closer to citizens**. The conference was organised in partnership with the European Parliament and held in the former EP debating chamber in the Robert Schuman building.

Using the example of the *Grande Région* which connects regions in Luxembourg, France, Germany and Belgium, the conference, which was chaired by Group III President Luca Jahier, provided an opportunity to exchange views on how integrated cross-border strategies can directly contribute to achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

The conference brought together speakers from different backgrounds. Amongst others, Group III welcomed **Nicolas Schmit**,

Luxembourg's Minister for Labour, Employment and the Social and Solidarity Economy, and **Philippe Ledent**, President of the economic and social council of the *Grande Région*. To read more about the programme and the speakers involved, please go to the Group III website: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.group-3-events-and-activities>

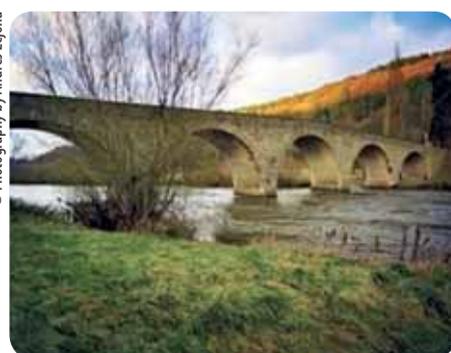
In the afternoon, the group was taken to **Esch-sur-Alzette-Belval**, and more specifically to the "New Belval" site. Once the site of Luxembourg's largest ironworks, this is now one of the most ambitious urban development projects in Europe – with one very special feature: the retention of parts of the former industrial site. During the visit, members got to see, and learn from, one of the best regional conversion projects in Europe, which now offers housing for up to 7 000 people of all generations on a site the size of 120 football pitches where up to 25 000 people are able to work, research and study in Belval. (cl)

SOON AT THE EESC

Crossing Points An exhibition on Luxembourg's checkpoints and related border buildings

An exhibition entitled *Crossing points* was staged as part of the Luxembourg evening on 9 December. It is made up of photos taken by Andrés Lejona at border crossing points between Luxembourg and its neighbouring countries.

It is particularly topical at the moment when there is talk of closing borders because of



© Photography by Andrés Lejona

immigration. The exhibition can be viewed in the 6th floor Foyer of the JDE building from 9 December 2015 to 15 January 2016. (edn)

EESC event for Disability Day

To mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December), the EESC is organising, in cooperation with the UN, a screening of *El desorden de los sentidos* (Disorder of the senses), a documentary about 13-year old Antonio and 34-year old Gerardo, both disabled,

who embark on the Route of Santiago de Compostela by bike with their families. The event, which will be followed by a debate with the families, is intended to help raise awareness about the difficulties encountered by disabled people and their families in their daily life and activities and highlight the lack of consideration for their needs in society, as well as their courage and constant fight to advance the cause of the disabled. The screening is scheduled for 14 December at 6:00 p.m. in Atrium 6 of the EESC main building (JDE). (cad/dm)

EU-Africa: civil society ready to cooperate on refugee crisis

Full cooperation with African countries in tackling the refugee flows into the EU has the unanimous support of civil society from both continents. However, it is necessary to act now: "An action plan is not enough, it is important to equip it with the necessary funding and improve coordination and cooperation".

The second meeting of the EU-Africa Socio-Economic Actors Network in Brussels on 27-28 October ended with a joint resolution outlining proposals which mainly focused on three issues:

- **The fight against migrant smuggling and the strengthening of police and judicial cooperation.** Main targets: Adequate funding, closer cooperation, setting up safe humanitarian corridors and supporting civil society organisations providing assistance to migrants.

- **Addressing the root causes of migration:** Participants endorsed the idea put forward by the Commission of an *Emergency Trust Fund for Africa* based on the SDGs and a real partnership with the implementing countries.
- **Facilitating legal migration and mobility:** Human rights, solidarity and real cooperation between countries of origin and destination should underlie legal migration policies and actions.

More on the adopted declaration, which was forwarded to the EU and African Heads of State and Government meeting at the Valletta Summit (11-12 November), can be found on our website: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-eu-africa-ecosoc-network-02> (sma)

2nd Friedensbrot Conference against the backdrop of the refugee crisis



This year's *Friedensbrot* (peace bread) conference took place in Poznan, Poland, and was organised by civil society organisations from Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

The peace bread, baked with rye grown in places of historical significance – for instance, the German rye came from a small field in the "death strips" of the former Berlin wall, the Polish rye from Suchowola, home to Jerzy Popieluszko, the priest who was murdered by the

communist rulers in 1984 – was handed over during a ceremony by the Polish Agriculture Minister Marek Sawicki.

The EESC was represented by members V. Petersen (Employers, DE), M. Siecker (Workers, NL) and K. Kamiemiecki (Various Interests, PL), who participated in fruitful exchanges with a variety of stakeholders. Initiators of the conference – including former EESC member Adalbert Kienle – have called on the EESC to continue to support this meaningful initiative.

Mr. Sawicki stressed the responsibility of both State and society in tackling the refugee crisis. Peter Bleser, Parliamentary Secretary at the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, stressed that only by joining forces was peace possible. Therefore it was important to stand together, help accommodate the refugees and tackle migration at its roots. (sma)

IN SHORT

President Dassis meets Commission Vice-President Timmermans to present the EESC's recommendations on the Work Programme

On 20 October, the EESC President Georges Dassis met with the First Vice-President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, to present the EESC's recommendations on the Commission's 2016 Annual Work Programme.

The EESC President called for a number of modifications that the Committee believes will make the European Union legislative process more democratic and more transparent. Mr Dassis explained that it is necessary to strengthen the European social model, by guaranteeing social protection for all Europeans and establishing a basic set of social rights. He also called for a new migration policy based on human rights, solidarity and humanity.

With regard to the **better legislation package**, Mr Dassis said that the Committee must be involved in ex-ante evaluations and consultations on the ground, by facilitating social and civil dialogue with social partners, NGOs and citizens. The Committee's role in the REFIT platform needs to be re-evaluated, thus enabling civil society to participate in policy evaluation and act as a "safety net" against gaps in EU legislation or obstacles. (mm)

EESC at EuroPCom 2015

EuroPCom – one of the major conferences for communication professionals from local, regional, national and EU authorities in Europe – took place in Brussels on 21-22 October 2015. Some 95 speakers and 900 participants took part in this conference organised by the Committee of the Regions in cooperation with the other EU institutions. The presence of representatives from the Europe Direct Information Centres this year made EuroPCom particularly relevant to the EESC *Going local* approach.

Under the title *No Slogans*, EuroPCom focused on major challenges in public communication. EESC Vice-President Lobo Xavier took the floor in the closing session and presented his approach to communication, while Ms Di Nicolantonio, Head of EESC Visits and Publications Unit, moderated a workshop on educational communication tools. The EESC also hosted one of the networking lunches. (ac)



Vice-President Gonçalo Lobo Xavier at the opening of the Charity Concert "L'Europe au Cœur"

EESC participates in l'Europe au Cœur

Vice-President Gonçalo Lobo Xavier jointly opened the Charity Concert *l'Europe au Cœur* (Europe at the heart) in support of refugees at the BOZAR in Brussels on 19 November. The event was co-organised with the European Commission, the BOZAR and the Goethe Institut. Addressing a packed room in the main concert hall, he underlined the importance of the Committee's work on migration and announced the EESC's forthcoming "Going Local" action to be undertaken towards the end of the year and at the beginning of next year. The artistic programme that followed brought together musicians from Greece, Turkey, Armenia, Morocco and Syria. The funds collected were donated to the Red Cross and the Belgian registered charity Give Eur-Hope, asbl. (cad)

Food donation project at the EESC!

As of October, certain types of unused food are no longer being thrown away. Instead of ending up in the bin – something that was still happening all too often – leftovers will now be redistributed to people who cannot afford a meal, such as homeless people, people without papers and refugees, etc. The EESC, the CoR and the catering services have just signed an agreement with two Brussels associations, which are partners in the project and will redistribute the food. During the pilot phase, the project will involve sandwiches and wraps. This project ties in with the Committees' general campaign to fight food waste. (fda)

Dear readers,

As the end of the year approaches, we would like to take this opportunity to wish you all the very best for the Christmas Season and a healthy and prosperous New Year 2016.

We would also like to thank our subscribers and readers, as well as our contributors.

The EESC communication team

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