

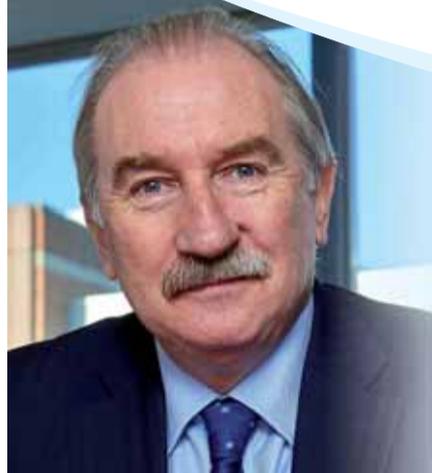


EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee
A bridge between Europe and organised civil society
February 2016 | EN

EDITORIAL

Death, Taxes and Budgets



According to the old adage there are only two certainties – death and taxes. Sometimes it can be argued that there is a third certainty – budgets. The European Economic and Social Committee has been very modest in its budget requests over the last five years and has seen a total nominal increase of just above 1% – a drop of around 5% in real terms. In the kind of financial climate Europe has experienced in recent years, it goes without saying that the EU institutions should tighten their belts, just as many national administrations have had to do. But this does not mean that making savings at the Committee has been easy. Staffing levels, for instance, have taken quite a hit, clearly affecting the members' working environment.

There is one particular aspect that we perhaps need to be aware of when it comes to ensuring sound public finances: the far-ranging practical cooperation between the EESC and the Committee of the Regions. The two Committees share their services in translation and logistics (buildings, IT, security, etc.) and co-finance most work in these areas, using an agreed distribution key, to the tune of around EUR 40 million a year. This excludes staff costs, as all staff members are employed by one or other of the two Committees. This has a number of obvious advantages in terms of both budget (economies of scale) and quality of output: pooling translation resources, for instance, makes a wider spectrum of language skills available to both Committees.

A new cooperation agreement between the two Committees came into force on 1 January this year and runs for four years. It not only creates a firm framework for continuing this excellent cooperation, but also provides scope for boosting it to make even better use of public money.

The Committees remain politically independent under the cooperation agreement. They have their own distinct institutional role to play and their own political identity. This is a good example of interinstitutional cooperation. The cooperation agreement makes us all winners – and all it takes is some good will and common sense. Happy New Year!

Michael Smyth
Vice-President in charge of Budget

The Tunisian quartet / EESC: our partnership is more important than ever

Five years after the Jasmin Revolution that toppled an authoritarian regime and its president, the representatives of the "Tunisian quartet" presented their analysis of the country's current situation at the EESC plenary session. Tunisia stands out in a number of ways: a unique governance model based on the vibrant forces of civil society, an example of peace in a region torn apart by violence and civil war, and an economic challenge in terms of finding employment for a country overwhelmingly made up of young people.

The EESC President, **Georges Dassis**, said that *"We, the representatives of European civil society, not only want to pay tribute today to your success in a region that is going through difficult times, but also take inspiration for our work from your achievements and support you in your ongoing and future activities, as we must support all civil society actors in other countries of the region, committed*



Georges Dassis, EESC President with Slim Ghorbel, member of the Executive Board of the Tunisian Union of Industry, Commerce and Crafts (UTICA) and Ahmed ben Tahar Galai, Vice-President of the Tunisian League of Human Rights (LTDH), at the EESC plenary

to the establishment of pluralist and participatory democratic systems."

Slim Ghorbel, member of the Executive Board of the Tunisian Union of Industry, Commerce and Crafts (UTICA), **Ahmed ben Tahar Galai**, Vice-President of the Tunisian League of Human Rights (LTDH) and **Kacem Afaya**, Deputy Secretary General of the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT), spoke of their commitment to the unique model of partnership between Tunisia and Europe. This partnership, addressing

economic, social and cultural cooperation, must be preserved and strengthened and be based on civil society. They stressed that a new era had begun for Tunisia, in which people would no longer engage in politics to gain or hold on to power; instead, they would aim to establish freedom and democracy. (cad)

Dilyana Slavova,
President of the External Relations
Section (REX), pays tribute
to the Tunisian quartet on p. 2.

Make consumers active participants in the energy market and ensure transparent energy pricing, urges the EESC



An energy package of three opinions was voted on by the European Economic and Social Committee at its plenary session on 20 January 2016.

To reach the EU's ambitious climate-related policy goals, a new energy market design will need to be developed, with a particular focus on renewable energy. According to the **EESC's opinion on a new energy market design (Rapporteur: Lutz Ribbe, Various Interests Group)**, the EU will need to take more action – it must ensure that energy prices become more transparent and reflect

actual generation and external costs; it must enable consumers to become active market participants by providing them with adequate information and resources; and it must remove obstacles to market access for the rising number of local self-generation and self-supply initiatives.

Consumers and their central and proactive role in energy markets are the main focus of the **EESC's opinion Delivering a New Deal for Energy Consumers (Rapporteur: Lutz Ribbe, Various Interests Group)**. The EESC agrees with the Commission on the need to put the "consumer at the core of the Energy Union" – however in order for consumers to participate actively in the energy market they need access to smart technologies, information, training, and finance. Consumers should have the freedom to play an active role in the energy system by having the right to choose and switch easily between both energy producers and distributors.

The EESC also made a series of recommendations to ensure effective and uniform energy efficiency labelling across Europe in **its opinion Framework for energy efficiency labelling (Rapporteur: Emilio Fatovic, Workers' Group)** in response to the Commission's proposal. Product characteristics should actually correspond to those on the label, there should be stricter controls on products on sale, and a common Europe-wide system of penalties should be introduced. Labels should also include other consumer information, such as the product's energy consumption and its minimum life expectancy. Particular attention should be paid to products imported from third countries, to protect against unfair competition and fraud. (sg)

DIARY DATES

16-17 March 2016 /
EESC, Brussels:
EESC plenary session

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Official visit of the EESC President to Bulgaria focuses on civil and social dialogue



Georges Dassis, EESC President, with prof. Lalko Dulevski, President of the national Economic and Social Council of Bulgaria

On 14 January, the President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), George Dassis, began his two-day visit to Bulgaria. This was his first official visit in response to an invitation from a national economic and social council of an EU Member State since being elected EESC President in October 2015.

During his visit to the Bulgarian National Assembly, Mr Dassis was presented with an honorary plaque by the speaker Tsetska Tsacheva. The meeting revolved around the possibility of organising a European forum to seek solutions

to the problems of young people migrating from Southern Europe and Bulgaria towards northern EU countries. Other topics included mechanisms to promote opportunities for young people in their home countries and to improve Member States' demographic policies.

During the meeting, Mr Dassis outlined the EESC proposal for the establishment of a special European fund to tackle poverty in the least-developed regions of Europe. The President of the national Economic and Social Council of Bulgaria, Prof. Lalko Dulevski, recognised the EESC President's contribution to the development of organised civil society in Bulgaria by awarding him a badge of honour.

On 15 January, the EESC President discussed possible EU policies to combat poverty and joined a debate with the deputy prime minister and minister for labour and social affairs, Mr Ivaylo Kalfin, on demographic and social policy. He also visited the University of National and World Economy (UNWE). Last but by no means least, Mr Dassis met with the Presidents of the Bulgarian trade unions and members of the European Economic and Social Committee, Mr Plamen Dimitrov and Mr Dimitar Manolov. (mm)

EESC completes round of eleven fact-finding missions to the Member States aimed at tackling the refugee and migration crisis

On 25 and 26 January a delegation from the European Economic and Social Committee visited Bulgaria to hear first-hand from civil society organisations about their experience dealing with the migration and refugee situation on the ground. This visit was one of twelve missions organised by the EESC – to eleven EU Member States plus Turkey – starting with Austria in December 2015 and concluding with the visit to Turkey in February 2016.

The EESC delegation to Bulgaria included EESC members **Evgeniy Ivanov, Veselin Mitov and Bogomil Nikolov**. The members met with representatives of government agencies and NGOs, and visited two reception centres, in Sofia and Harmanli. During their meetings with NGOs, refugees, regional and national authorities and volunteers, the EESC delegation discussed the challenges faced by the various stakeholders. The meetings focused on identifying problems and specific needs, as well as successes and best practices employed by the various organisations dealing directly with the current refugee crisis. This information will help to establish a set of best practices and policies with the goal of creating



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a seamless reception, relocation or integration process for refugees.

The series of missions has been organised by the EESC as part of its ongoing local programme to gain an insight into the work carried out by civil society organisations dealing with migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. The EESC will collate the findings of these visits and present an overall report at its plenary session in March. The conclusions from the report will also be shared with the other EU institutions and stakeholders. (mm)

IN SHORT

Presidents' meeting: Georges Dassis and Martin Schulz

On 26 January, the Presidents of the EESC and the European Parliament met and agreed to step up cooperation between the two institutions. In particular, they discussed how to jointly safeguard the values and achievements of the European Union, such as freedom of movement under the Schengen agreement, and how to stimulate social progress in the EU. On the latter issue, they agreed to draw up practical proposals on a future European pillar of social rights. The Committee has long fostered debate on a social protocol that would guarantee high social standards and ensure that European social systems would be improved.



Alarmed at the plight of refugees in Europe and the situation of migrants, the Committee also highlighted the leading role of civil society organisations and announced that it would deliver a full report on the situation to the European Parliament by March, using information gathered in the field during fact-finding missions carried out by EESC members in 11 EU countries and Turkey (see above). (cad)

New Year Reception at the Royal Palace

Traditionally, the King and Queen of the Belgians hold a reception at the start of the year for the European institutions in Brussels and for the heads of the permanent representations to the



European Union. This year, the EESC was represented by its President, George Dassis, Vice-President, Michael Smyth, and Secretary-General, Luis Planas and Dominique-François Bareth, Head of Protocol. (ab)

Access to the labour market – the easiest way to achieve integration

Gonçalo Lobo Xavier, the EESC Vice-President for Communication, attended the First European Dialogue on Skills and Migration, which took place on 27-28 January in Brussels.

Mr. Lobo Xavier began by explaining the EESC's role in examining the human dimension of European policy, which also includes the fate of refugees. In the opinions planned for 2016 the EESC will continue its work on the integration of refugees, a coherent labour migration policy and the Commission's legal migration package.

"The most successful integration happens through the labour market as it not only provides refugees with the possibility to take care of themselves but also, by working together with European citizens, to get a sense of European culture and lifestyle", said Vice-President Lobo Xavier.

Your Europe, Your Say! 2016 school debate kicks off: 33 schools from across Europe selected to come to Brussels to discuss migration



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has selected **33 secondary schools** from across Europe to participate in this year's edition of *Your Europe Your Say!* (YEYS), which will take place in Brussels on 17-19 March 2016. One school from each of the 28 EU Member States and the 5 candidate countries, for the first time from Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey, were chosen from over 400 applications.

Gonçalo Lobo Xavier, EESC Vice-President for Communication, who oversaw the draw with fellow EESC members Renate Heinisch and Adam Rogalewski, said "We are debating fundamental issues in Brussels which will affect young people for years to come. Through this initiative, future generations will have a clear voice in their own future."

This year's edition will focus on **migration**, which is one of the most important issues concerning Europe at the present time and which will continue to feature high in the Committee's agenda. Each school will send a delegation of three 16 to 17 year-old students and a teacher to Brussels to participate in a youth plenary session on **17-19 March**, back to back with the EESC's own plenary session. In Brussels the students will work together, debate and propose practical action that could be taken in schools and youth organisations to help young migrants integrate more effectively and raise awareness about the importance of effective integration, especially for younger refugees.

The first phase of the YEYS initiative will begin soon with EESC members visiting the selected school in their own country to help students prepare for the youth plenary, introducing them to the EESC's functioning and activities and explaining its role in the EU's architecture.

Through this initiative the EESC, which represents the voice of civil society, is acting to ensure that the views, experiences and ideas of the younger generation, are heard in EU policy making. (dm)

The other extreme we are facing is that of over-qualified migrants whose skills are underutilised in unskilled labour because their foreign qualifications are not recognised. The process of recognition needs to be improved, including by involving employers.

The EESC Vice-President also stressed the important role of civil society organisations – employers and trade unions – but in particular the many NGOs that already help migrants to gain access to education, training and employment and give them advice on the many challenges of everyday life. "It is the citizens and civil society who bear a big part of the burden – it is therefore important to keep them informed, involve them in decisions but also listen to their advice and concerns," concluded Mr. Lobo Xavier. (sma)

Making the Circular Economy happen

Tons of waste and pollution accumulating on one side, resources shrinking and materials becoming rarer on the other: there is no more time to lose to switch from a *throw-away* economy to a *circular* one where waste becomes the “raw materials” of a re-manufacturing industry.

After the withdrawal of the previous circular economy package from July

2014, the European Commission adopted a revised set of proposals promoting the transition towards a circular economy in December last year. For the EESC it is important that these proposals have a positive impact on the environment as well as on the economy and employment. Therefore the EESC is drafting an opinion – to be adopted in April – elaborating on the whole circular economy package. To ensure that it reflects the views of all European civil society stakeholders, the EESC organised a public hearing under the title *Making the circular economy happen*, on 28 January.

The innovative role of civil society

It is indisputable that a circular economy conserves resources and protects the environment. At the same time it has great potential for creating new jobs, not only in the service sector (repairing), but also in waste recycling and the production of eco-designed goods. For research and innovation, turning end-of-service life goods into as-pure-as-new resources is a key challenge.

Civil society has already recognized that the current economic model will cause more and more problems unless we change it. In many European Member States and regions waste recycling is already an important economic sector. In some areas, as in the Basque country, the change to sustainable product design has already started: small enterprises have joined together to create the *Basque Ecodesign Center* and – with the support of the government – to conceive and carry out innovative eco-design projects that have been very successful in terms both of revenues and job creation.

Renaissance of the “re”years – reuse, repair, remanufacture

The process of transformation into a circular economy should be driven by information, incentives and regulation, including eco-design requirements, eco-label standardisation and traceability (e.g. the introduction of a “product passport”), but also by new consumer warranties. We need to revive the “recycle, reuse, repair” culture. (sma)

Planned obsolescence back under EESC scrutiny

The EESC, which was the first among EU institutions to raise the issue of planned obsolescence in a specific own-initiative opinion in 2013, followed by a more comprehensive programme involving both planned obsolescence and collaborative consumption between 2013 and 2015 (for more information, see EESC brochure *Shaping Europe, 2015 edition*, pp. 26-27), has launched a study entitled *Influence of Lifetime Information on Consumer*, which is being conducted by Sircome agency, the University of South Brittany and the University of South Bohemia. The study is expected to be published at the beginning of March. (dm)

NEW PUBLICATION

Civil Society Media Seminar on Communicating European Development Policy

The 2015 EESC Civil Society Media Seminar, organised at the end of November in Luxembourg, once again received very favourable feedback from participants – nearly 100% agreed with the topic, the speakers and the overall organisation.

An outcome brochure will be available on the EESC website and the main conclusions are summarized below:

- **Draw a new picture of development policy**
Development aid is not about charity, but about investment in the future of both developing and developed countries. Communication on development policy needs to change in line with this and adapt to current needs.
- **Communicate development consistently across policy areas**
Migration and climate change dovetail into development policy. Communication on development policy must take the broader context into account. The “momentum” generated by the current migrant crisis could be used to communicate the importance of supporting developing countries.
- **Show journalists the different facets of development policy**
Journalism on development policy cannot be centred solely on aid: it needs to look at issues from different angles. In this way, it can inform and inspire audiences and help them understand broader issues.
- **Let human beings take centre stage**
Human interest stories, interactivity, an emphasis on positive news and content from local sources are especially effective means of communicating development policy.
- **EU institutions should listen to civil society**
The original idea of a European Year for Development came from civil society and the EESC: this shows how important it is for EU institutions to listen to civil society, and how the EESC can help them identify topics that European citizens are concerned about and responsive to, if properly communicated.
- **Use communication opportunities and resources to best advantage**
Ordinary people have a role to play in communicating development. They can tell their own story much better than an advertising company would do – and will not charge for it!
- **De-Brusselise communication – use stories, images and figures**
“De-Brusselising” communication also means replacing “Eurospeak” with more practical language, showing pictures and telling stories. Images and narratives are important awareness-raising instruments. (sma)



The UK in the EU: What Matters to You?

The Various Interests Group of the EESC, chaired by its president Luca Jahier, is organising a conference in Manchester on Tuesday 8 March entitled *The UK in the EU: What Matters to You?*

The UK’s future membership of, and role within, the EU is undoubtedly one of the most important political issues to be debated in the coming months at both the national and European levels. The decision of EU Member States taken in December 2015 to “...work closely together to find mutually satisfactory solutions in all four areas at the European Council

meeting on 18-19 February 2016”, has increased the time pressure and placed the topic squarely in the public domain. Arguably, the grass-roots movements and civil society initiatives that are springing up across the UK, either in favour of or against EU membership, are prime examples of the active citizenship that the EESC has espoused for decades.

Within this context, the Various Interests Group has decided to organise a civil society event in Manchester, UK. Specifically, the objectives of the conference include:

- engaging with, listening to and learning from British civil society and citizens;
- providing a forum for local civil society organisations, citizens, the media, as well as economic, social and political actors to come together and openly debate the pros and cons of continued membership of the EU;
- demonstrating that the EESC and European civil society recognise the importance of the topic and that the outcome of the UK referendum will have direct repercussions for both the UK and other EU Member States. (cl)

Communicating TTIP in Poland

on TTIP challenges and opportunities in Warsaw. Jacek Krawczyk, President of the Employers’ Group and EESC rapporteur on TTIP, took part in the panel discussion organised during Froman’s visit in Warsaw University.

Mr Krawczyk presented the EESC’s work on TTIP. He emphasised what was stated in the first Committee’s opinion on TTIP, i.e. that only a comprehensive and ambitious agreement can provide the expected results. In his view, “TTIP-light” is not an option. He underlined the importance of transatlantic dialogue for both individual Member

States and the EU as a whole. TTIP is an opportunity to reconfirm and revamp transatlantic dialogue. The conclusion by the US of the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) agreement makes it even more necessary to deliver an ambitious and comprehensive transatlantic agreement.

Mr Krawczyk appreciated the efforts of EU Commissioner for Trade, Cecilia Malmström, to explain TTIP to the public and to increase the transparency of the negotiating process. (lj)



As TTIP negotiations are ongoing, both the EU and the US are doubling their efforts to inform their societies about the idea of the agreement and the progress of negotiations. The representatives of civil society have taken an active role in this process. On 25 January, US trade representative Michael Froman widely elaborated

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