



EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee
a bridge between Europe and organised civil society
April 2016 | EN



EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

Three months after the terrible Paris attacks, on 22 March Brussels, the very heart of the EU, was the target of brutal and heinous terrorist attacks. Once more, we have been

drastically reminded how one minute can change or even end people's lives. Our thoughts go to the many victims of this tragedy and their families. We are grateful to the tireless volunteers and helpers who lent a hand in the aftermath. We thank the Brussels security forces, including the military, who do their best to protect us. And we condemn the treacherous murderers. These attacks remind us that we all are committed to exploring better ways to integrate migrants into our open European society, which stands for the non-negotiable values of humanity, democracy, equality and tolerance. This is a matter of rights and duties, as mentioned in the Mission Report on refugees last month.

Now we must look forward. Our world is too beautiful to let it be torn down by such destructive forces. To fight them, we cannot concentrate solely on terrorism, but must tackle the challenges confronting modern society in a comprehensive and responsible way.

Despite setbacks we must keep an optimistic but realistic outlook

It is spring time. Let us open our windows, let in the sunlight and fresh air to find inspiration, generate new ideas to review our policies, improve them and find solutions to the challenges ahead.

The European Economic and Social Committee is committed to doing this. Its working programme is rich and comprehensive. Economic challenges and unemployment, climate change and food sustainability call for new ideas, new and better solutions which require the cooperation of both civil society and experts. This is the basis of the EESC's opinions and general work. The Committee's advice and recommendations to the EU law-makers gather together the knowledge, know-how and expertise of a broad majority of society.

I invite all of you to consider the huge progress we have already achieved together and to continue to reflect and discuss on how to meet the challenges ahead – working for a united, democratic, solidarity-based, peaceful and prosperous Europe close to its people, as stated in our President's programme. The EESC is your partner and stands ready to give you a voice in Europe.

Gonçalo Lobo-Xavier

EESC Vice-President for Communication

DIARY DATES

**25-26 May 2016/
EESC, Brussels:**
EESC plenary session

**17 May 2016/
Nottingham (UK):**
CCMI hearing on the cosmetics industry

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President Dassis' statement concerning the terrorist attacks in Brussels

On 22 March in Brussels, a handful of wanton murderers caused death and suffering in the EU.

They committed this appalling crime right where many of us – members, delegates, alternates, experts, guests of the Committee and staff – pass every day. Once again, they have cowardly killed, mutilated and wounded the people of Europe; they seek to strike and tear down Europeans who want to move about freely in a democratic society which upholds the values of peace, dialogue and well-being.

They will not defeat us – ever. There are human beings capable of the worst, but there are also and more importantly people capable of the best – and it is they who will be victorious. The only thing that terrorists will achieve is to make us unite against them: they are

few in number but horrifyingly dangerous. The people who deserve to be given the spotlight are the millions of people, whoever they may be and wherever they may come from, who will not give in to violence even when they are caught up in an unfair situation. These people need to be given the protection of a just society: a society which embodies the first articles of the Treaty.

I devoutly hope that the public displays of solidarity by our national and European leaders will have the effect of rallying as many people as possible to the democratic ideal of a united Europe. I hope that this trying time will encourage them to be more united, supportive, mindful of the fundamental values of our society and aware of the fact that this and every other critical situation is the same for every Member State of the EU.



Naturally, on behalf of the Committee I wrote to the prime minister of the Kingdom of Belgium on the day of the attacks expressing our complete support. I am once again deeply moved and outraged at the thought of the innocent victims of this or any other barbarous act. It is they whom we must do our utmost to help.

Georges Dassis,
President of the European Economic and Social Committee

EESC member Pasi Moisio, among the victims of the Brussels attacks, shares his experience



EESC Finnish member Pasi Moisio and his wife happened to be at Brussels airport during the terrorist attacks of 22 March. Mr Moisio, who is still recovering from his injuries, has agreed to share his experience with EESC Info readers.

● Mr Moisio, what was your experience of the tragic events of 22 March?

My wife and I were standing in line to check in for a flight to New York when I was swept off my feet by the first blast. The blast came from the left, and was so powerful that it perforated my left eardrum and my wife's too and burned our faces and clothes on that side. Luckily, we were far enough from the explosion to escape with limited injuries, and our metal suitcases shielded us from the shrapnel that was sent flying.

● How has this experience affected you? Has it somehow changed your ideas and perceptions?

I remain attached to the concept of European integration and feel that now, more than ever, we must support freedom of movement and the Schengen agreement. However, following this experience I have become painfully aware of the need to control our external borders effectively and of the dangerous implications of a lack of such controls. We must prevent terrorists from taking advantage of our rights and achievements in order to forward their own aims. The EU institutions have discussed this theme extensively; now it is time to move from discussion to action.

● What is your message as a survivor to the people around you and to EESC Info readers?

We are deeply grateful to the many colleagues and friends who sent us their messages of solidarity and support in the aftermath. We received hundreds of text messages, emails and telephone calls and, through these lines, we would like to thank them all and let them know how precious

their support has been. This crisis has brought people together and we hope that this new unity will enable us to achieve something positive.

EESC Info special issue on migration

To mark the presentation of the EESC's final report on the current migration and refugee crisis, EESC Info is publishing a special two-page supplement featuring some vivid accounts of the fact-finding missions behind the report, an interview with EESC Vice-President Gonçalo Lobo Xavier, the missions' initiator, a reflection by Pavel Trantina, co-author of the EESC's strategy on migration. A review of *Your Europe, Your Say!* 2016 together with previews of a Giles Duley exhibition at the EESC and the *EESC Civil Society Media Seminar 2016* – all centred on refugees and migration – complete this special edition on migration.



56% increase in product sales when labelled “long-lasting”: new EESC study on planned obsolescence



but less so for smartphones, with an increase of 41% in sales for models indicating a longer lifespan.

90% of the study's participants said that they would be prepared to pay more (+ €102) for a dishwasher (priced between €300 and €500) that would last two years longer. Labelling types makes a difference, with a ranking from A to G being the most effective, with an increase in sales of 84%. The study also highlights the social dimension of programmed obsolescence, with people on low incomes having to purchase cheaper products and therefore facing planned obsolescence. Finally, 80% of participants think that producers have a very high degree of responsibility for the lifetime of a product.

The study covers Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Spain and the Netherlands, involves nearly 3 000 participants, and concurs with the EESC's 2013 opinion *Towards more sustainable consumption: industrial product lifetimes and restoring trust through consumer information*.

The EESC calls on the European Commission to draft EU-wide legislation on planned obsolescence, recommends that industry establish voluntary certification schemes, and urges Europeans to mobilise and campaign for change. (cad)

On 29 March 2016, the EESC released a study, entitled *The Influence of Lifespan Labelling on Consumers*, which demonstrates the effect of lifespan labelling on consumer purchasing behaviour. Products labelled as long-lasting, such as suitcases and printers, would see a huge boost in sales, by 128% and 70% respectively,

New forms of employment require social policy measures

On 31 March 2016, the EESC held a public hearing entitled *The changing nature of employment relationships, the sharing economy, zero-hour contracts and the living wage* to discuss the growth of non-standard forms of employment with a focus on workers' protection.

Changes brought about by popular online platforms in the field of transportation or accommodation, for instance, have important implications for the labour market and tax and social security systems, as well as the living wage, the EESC meeting heard.

It is for decision-makers to frame these trends so that these new forms of employment can lead to positive outcomes for all members of society. Therefore, the EESC wants the European Commission and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to help develop new social welfare models and a framework of decent working conditions that are adapted to more flexible labour markets. Efforts should be focused on adequate training for all workers, notably in ICT skills, on statistical tracking of the impact of new forms of employment on the labour market and the economy, and on increased clarity of employment relationships to determine liability for accidents, damage and service failures. (cad)

Embracing change in the world of work

Gonçalo Lobo Xavier urges Portuguese people to see changes in work patterns as opportunities

EESC Vice-President Gonçalo Lobo Xavier was among the guest speakers at the opening session of *Viewpoints on work*, a series of debates with key members of Portuguese society held in Braga on 26 February.

Sharing the floor with the Portuguese Minister for the economy, Caldeira Cabral, and the Portuguese sociologist, university professor and former leader of the Portuguese Confederation of Workers' Trade Unions (CGTP-IN), Carvalho da Silva, Mr Lobo Xavier warned that changes to work patterns threatened half of the world's existing jobs: the 4th industrial revolution, the Internet of Things and new consumption patterns are endangering many jobs. "It is estimated that over the next ten years, 50% of the jobs we are accustomed to seeing will be wiped out by these changes – changes that we cannot stop," he said. Therefore, "we must adapt, defend jobs and prepare workers for these changes that, in my view, are irreversible, but they are also an opportunity, as many new jobs will be created, requiring different skills".

He stressed that the need to anticipate change, the demand for new skills and the need to modernise traditional professions by offering new solutions and services must be seen as opportunities. He also expressed the hope that Portugal would not rest on its tourist laurels and abandon other strategic sectors which are vital for the country's economy. (dm)

The EESC calls for new thinking to prevent radicalisation

Closer cooperation needed to defeat terrorism and curb firearm access

On 16 March the EESC adopted an opinion entitled *European Agenda on Security* (rapporteur: Cristian Pîrvulescu) calling for the development of new tools to prevent radicalisation as part of a broader EU anti-terrorism strategy. The opinion responds to both the Commission's EU Action Plan against illicit trafficking in, and use of, firearms and explosives and its proposal for a directive on combating terrorism.

The EESC underlines that it is possible to be both secure and free in Europe, and considers it dangerous for any democracy to legislate against anticipated crimes. Article 3(2)(i) of the proposal [on threatening to commit a terrorist act] should therefore be removed. The EESC also urges the EU institutions and Member States to abide by the proportionality principle, and to reflect the seriousness and intention of actions when criminalising and combating them. With regard to criminalising the act of travelling abroad for terrorism, the EESC finds the definition of "for terrorism" in the proposal extremely unclear. While someone organising an attack or taking part in training can be defined as a "terrorist", this is not necessarily the case for someone carrying out cyber-terrorism or taking part in an armed rebellion or civil war.

Recent events have shown that terrorism has become globalised. Europe's foreign policy in

the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) must become better coordinated. The Committee wants to see a clearer commitment to stabilisation, development and democratisation in the region and is pleased that the Commission intends to enlarge the scope of the EU-South East Europe Action Plan and strengthen cooperation with MENA. The EESC also considers that drastically curbing access to firearms and explosives should be prioritised. Institutional cooperation between Member States must be significantly improved, both as regards information exchange and linking up existing databases.

The EESC wants to see the Commission support closer cooperation between Europol, INTERPOL, the main iTRACE actors and other bodies, such as customs and firearms import-export licensing authorities. However, while encouraging the pooling of resources, it warns that increasing the number of European and national safeguards could have a cumulative effect and harm fundamental rights. If fundamental rights are undermined, the EU puts at risk one of its guiding principles.

The opinion was adopted by 145 votes with 3 abstentions. (dm)

European Consumer Day 2016: EESC for smart and better regulation, but not at the expense of consumers

The EESC supports cutting red tape and removing constraints on small, medium and micro-enterprises through better regulation, but at the same time this process should not mean complete deregulation, warned the EESC during European Consumer Day on 10 March 2016. Better regulation aims to make rules simple, workable and less costly for users and taxpayers but it is not a dispensation from complying with regulations designed to protect consumers and workers, or from upholding environmental standards. The EESC urged the Commission to take better account of civil society's views via public consultations and impact assessments. Representatives of consumer organisations, policy-makers and European institutions gathered at the 18th annual conference, organised by the EESC, to discuss better regulation and its impact on consumers.

According to the EESC, the Commission should focus on quality rather than quantity and prioritise cutting red tape, which is expensive for businesses and is a brake on their competitiveness and an obstacle to innovation and job creation, especially for SMEs. At the same time, the Think Small First principle is not intended to exempt micro-enterprises and SMEs from legislation. The EESC has always insisted on the protection of the 500 million European



consumers, who have legally binding rights enshrined in the Treaty. Consumer protection is one of the greatest and most tangible achievements of the EU and it should not be compromised. (sg)

EMU: EESC encourages European Commission to go further without delay

The EU's economic and monetary union should be deepened as a matter of urgency, said the EESC at its March plenary meeting, having adopted a package of four opinions on the matter.

In its opinion on *Steps towards completing EMU*, the EESC raised the issue of democratic legitimacy, proposing a tripartite social dialogue to bridge this gap. The EESC also made several recommendations on the *Establishment of National Competitiveness Boards within the Euro Area*, notably on the definition of competitiveness to include "beyond-GDP" objectives, and the set-up of better-balanced boards.

In its opinion on the *European Deposit Insurance Scheme*, the Committee recommended that the introduction of further risk sharing should be accompanied by additional risk reduction in the banking sector. In *Euro area external representation*, the Committee highlighted the clear need to strengthen the area's relative weight in international financial institutions and give it a more prominent position in international financial markets. The EESC also recommended clearly and explicitly defining the role of euro area external representation and coordinating it with that of the EU as a whole, with a view to preserving the integrity of the single market. (cad)



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EDITORIAL

Europe needs long-term integration policies and the input of civil society

Faced with the largest influx of people since World War II, civil society has emerged across the EU as a key actor in alleviating the humanitarian impact of this crisis. The European Economic and Social Committee, as the formal European civil society platform, early on identified the refugee crisis as a major concern, urging governments and politicians to follow the lead of civil society.

The EESC has published a report based on recent fact-finding visits by EESC delegations, which met with more than 180 civil society stakeholders working with refugees and migrants in eleven Member States and Turkey. The report sends significant messages to Member States and EU institutions, including the need for a fair distribution of refugees, sufficient resource allocation, effective border controls, combatting human smuggling and a common European asylum system starting with a revision of the Dublin regulation. It reiterates the need to uphold the Schengen agreement and free movement, which are major European achievements.

This initiative should equip the EESC to contribute to appropriate European policies on asylum and migration. Yet, much remains to be done and "integration" is a key word. According to Commissioner Avramopoulos, we need to "think long term" and "act now" to ensure the "full integration of those who have arrived and have a right to stay".

Sustainable integration requires the vital input of civil society. It is high time for civil society's efforts to be recognised and its views fully integrated into EU policy-making on migration. Europe needs long-term integration policies that focus on migrants' and refugees' integration into the labour market, based on skills recognition, education and training. The cost of non-integration of migrants and refugees would be devastating for all.

Georges Dassis
EESC President

"A strong document that will make a difference" – Gonçalo Lobo Xavier talks about EESC migration report



At last March's plenary session the EESC presented a report summing up the results of its 11 country missions. The report was drafted by Vice-President Gonçalo Lobo Xavier with members Pavel Trantina, Christa Schweng and Anne Demelenne and finalised by a 12 member ad hoc group appointed by the Bureau. EESC Info has interviewed Gonçalo Lobo Xavier on this major collective effort.

What are the EESC's main concerns regarding the migration crisis?

Europe is facing a tremendous challenge. The EESC believes that all citizens must be mobilised to face this crisis. This particular test can be seen more as an opportunity than a threat.

We believe that civil society organisations (CSOs) must play a role and can contribute solutions regarding health care, clarification of migrants' legal status and the integration of families wishing to come to the European Union, with its rights and duties.

What specific role do you see for the EESC in the migration crisis?

We decided to prepare 11 specific, carefully organised missions to better understand the different situations. The result is a strong document that I really believe will make a difference in the next months, with some key findings concerning migrant security, full clarification of migrants' rights and duties, the need for integration through training and work, and clarification about the legal

framework. Of course, our document highlights the specific participation of CSOs in the process.

What support do CSOs need from Member States and the EU?

We can safely say that the greatest need is coordination between institutions. Of course, funding is also necessary to implement measures and function more efficiently, but what we find crucial to handle the situation effectively is coordination between all players on the ground. CSOs are very pro-active but sometimes there are aspects (legal, financial) that must be addressed by national and local authorities, which should not only coordinate between themselves but also with CSOs formed by employers, employees and other social actors. (dm)

European Migration Forum: employment and integration first!



EUROPEAN MIGRATION FORUM

On 6 and 7 April, the EESC hosted the second European Migration Forum, the platform for dialogue between civil society and the EU institutions, co-organised with the European Commission.

This year, the Forum was tasked with translating civil society's feedback into a practical, long-term migration policy for the European Union, with a focus on employment and integration of migrants and refugees. Further to the Commission's announced intention to prepare an "EU Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals", the European Migration Forum gathered inputs on the specific challenges faced by low- and medium-skilled migrants, undeclared work and exploitation, access to the labour market, and the role of the local level and civil society in the integration process.

Georges Dassis, EESC President, opened the Forum by calling on "European decision-makers to listen to and take on-board our recommendations: Europe needs to adopt long-term integration policies that encompass migrants' and refugees' skills recognition, education and training, and we need to help them integrate into the labour market. The cost of the non-integration of migrants and refugees would be disastrous for all sides."

Dimitris Avramopoulos, European Commissioner in charge of Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship argued that "While we cope with the immediacy of the refugee crisis now, we also have to think long term (...) Making sure that those who have arrived and have a right to stay become a full part of our society is crucial. Ensuring swift and full integration is essential and we need different stakeholders – not least civil society – involved in this process". (cad)

A project in line with the EESC's core mission and long-standing concerns



The results of the EESC Going Local initiative on refugees show one basic thing: it was mainly thanks to the extraordinary mobilisation of civil society organisations and volunteers in many Member States and the leading role they took that Europe has largely avoided an unmitigated humanitarian catastrophe. That is why we wanted to give them a voice at EU level, because

the role of civil society organisations and volunteers is often underestimated and they themselves have to contend with significant difficulties and sometimes even hatred – to such an extent that they are sometimes prosecuted for assisting refugees, which defies all understanding. The European Commission must therefore work with the Member States to give them better protection and support.

Our initiative of undertaking eleven missions to Member States to look at the situation of refugees did not come out of the blue. The Committee's work on refugee issues and migration has been a long-term – I would say even groundbreaking – commitment. Our permanent working groups – especially the Labour Market Observatory and the Permanent Study Group on

Immigration and Integration – support and will continue to support the development of a common European immigration and integration policy while stressing the protection of fundamental rights, solidarity and strong civil society involvement. We are currently drafting a number of opinions and the personal experience our members have gained from their missions is essential for putting together useful proposals and recommendations to the other EU institutions.

Pavel Trantina,
President of the Section
for Employment, Social Affairs
and Citizenship



Members back from missions share their experience

The following articles represent the personal views of EESC members who took part in the missions and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EESC

Irini Pari, member of the Employers' Group, about the mission to Greece

"In December, I went on a mission that I will never forget. I went with EESC colleagues to Lesbos, an island in the Aegean, and to Eidomeni, a little village on the northern border of Greece. This is the entry route for thousands of refugees fleeing war and seeking a better future.

It was impressive to take stock of, see and feel the unprecedented numbers of refugees. In Lesbos alone, an average of 5 000 to 6 000 are arriving every day on this island of 86 000 inhabitants. It is a monumental task to welcome them, meet their primary needs, start the screening and registration process... and from what everybody said, more are expected to come as time goes by.

We met with a lot of people working on the ground – national and local authorities, Frontex, EU, UNCHR, IMO officials and local and international NGOs. They were all deeply involved, motivated and committed.



From the discussions we had, I believe that Europe has an enormous role to play. First, it is essential to create safe routes for refugees and migrants so that they are not exploited by smugglers and lose their lives at sea. Secondly, we need to strengthen the role of Frontex, which needs to have the means and resources to save lives and help in the complex registration process. Thirdly, the Dublin II regulation has to be revised; the responsibility cannot be shouldered by just a few Member States: it has to be shared on a permanent basis.

But above all, I met refugees who had just crossed the sea the night before, a cold night during which 15 people lost their lives. I met with refugees just before they crossed the borders or were denied passage on their way to Central Europe. I saw pain, sorrow and hope in their eyes. Let's not disappoint them!" ●

Peter Schmidt, member of the Workers' Group, about the mission to Germany

"At the beginning of January I, and fellow members Mr Balon and Mr Ahtela, went on a mission on behalf of the EESC to investigate the situation in Passau and Munich with regard to incoming refugees and cooperation between the authorities and civil society.

What impressed us most was how enthusiastic such a wide variety of organisations were about helping the people who were arriving, and the way the various voluntary groups within mainstream society organised themselves, with no need for specific instructions. This commitment has made it possible to avoid a humanitarian disaster, despite the huge numbers of people arriving. Even the competent governmental authorities and the federal police have (after a few initial difficulties) not only acknowledged the capabilities of the public, but accepted them as the most important element in addressing the issue.

One key prerequisite for achieving this was social media, without which none of this self-organisation would have been possible.



We also visited some existing integration projects. Everyone agreed that this was going to be the greater challenge. It became clear that there were two essential points. First of all, examples have shown that greater deployment of language teachers a) helps refugees to integrate more quickly, and b) reduces boredom, which can be a source of conflict.

Secondly, there is an urgent need for coordinators: the efforts of the various aid organisations are very admirable, but they often lack the coordination that would make the aid they provide more direct and immediate.

Moreover, the creation of refugee ghettos is strongly advised against, as they prevent integration. The examples we saw showed that integration can only work within municipalities and cities: although it initially leads to more conflict within the population, this quickly settles down with the realisation that refugees are just people. Civil society has a fundamental role to play here. Providing help to the refugees, and conversely getting them involved in community work etc., enables them to integrate much more quickly." ●

Antonio Longo, member of the EESC Various Interests Group, about the mission to Italy



"Owing to its position in the Mediterranean, Italy is the first point of contact for the hundreds of thousands of people fleeing Africa and war-torn countries such as Syria in search of a better life. The island of Lampedusa has come to symbolise both reception and the drama of struggling boats which land every day bearing women, children and men of all ages and which often take the hope for a better life to the depths with them. The EESC also sent a delegation to Italy. My colleagues Vladimíra Drbalová and José Antonio Moreno Díaz accompanied me. We met with the heads of agencies and organisations active in the field of reception and integration in Milan and Rome on 18 and 19 January. What struck us most was the view held by everyone we spoke to that Europe is facing a dramatic, long-term problem, coupled with the realisation that without strong commitment by every state and the EU as a whole, it will be quite impossible to cope with the sheer scale of the problem. The people of Italy, particularly in the south with the symbolic case of Lampedusa, have always shown enormous solidarity, but this is not enough to provide lasting solutions. The "Casa Suraya" in Milan was one of the most interesting projects, a reception facility where public measures and private/volunteer work dovetail to good effect providing excellent reception for families, with legal assistance, help learning Italian, psychological support and job training. There is no shortage of difficulties, particularly when immigrants do not want to provide information on their legal status and place of origin. The social partners and civil society have a fundamental role to play as regards integrating these people, in terms of initial assistance, often largely carried out by volunteers, and in the later stages, providing training and getting migrants into school and work." ●

Christa Schweng, member of the Employers' Group, member of the mission to Austria



"The discussions we had in the Member States we visited produced very similar messages:

The EU needs a functioning asylum system, a uniform application procedure and a common list of safe countries. Hotspots must be fully operational around the clock and their number increased. The Dublin Regulation must be revised, countries of first arrival must be given additional support and the relocation system must be made operational.

Common criteria for international protection should be defined. Tackling root causes should be a priority in EU foreign policy and more support should be given to countries bordering Syria.

A distinction needs to be made between refugees and economic migrants. People whose cases are judged unfavourably must be sent back to their country of origin. Readmission agreements should be concluded as a matter of priority.

Civil society organisations often perform tasks which are the responsibility of Member States. There must be better coordination between civil society organisations and national authorities and easier access for CSOs to EU funding.

Integrating large numbers of people into our societies and labour markets is both a challenge and an opportunity. Integration is vital in order to avoid parallel societies and should start as early as possible.

The scale of arrivals has created fear and led to the closure of internal borders. The media and public authorities have an important role to play in allaying this fear.

The lessons we are learning the hard way will hopefully prepare us for the future. Sustainable solutions cannot be found at national level, only at EU level." ●

José Antonio Moreno Díaz, member of the Workers' Group, about the mission to Turkey



"As a result of the visit, I have changed the way I look at the migrant crisis. In one meeting, for example, we began by talking about migrant pressure on border areas. Civil society bore out what we said – but by talking about Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey itself, where the situation is truly critical: Turkey – 3 000 000 refugees, Lebanon – 1 070 000, Jordan – 640 000. To talk about a "crisis" in the EU, with a population of 500 million and which took in some 1 000 000 people in 2015, is not serious.

What impressed me most was the commitment of NGOs working with refugees, especially in the Izmir area. Even so, I was struck by the hopelessness felt by many of these activists – they are very pessimistic about how the situation is unfolding and especially about the role that the EU might play. Regrettably, their fears have been entirely justified by the EU-Turkey agreement.

I personally believe that integration is impossible given the legal and political environment in Turkey: if a stable and comparable legal status, containing a recognisable set of rights and obligations, is not acknowledged, no framework for integration can be put in place. Consequently, civil society must help the Turkish population to see refugees as human beings who are seeking protection, and pave the way for the Turkish state to consider them as refugees under the Geneva Convention. Integration policies can only be shaped within a stable and secure legal framework. If this is achieved, NGOs will have a decisive role to play in identifying real needs." ●

Dilyana Slavova, member of the Various Interests Group and president of the REX section, about the mission to Bulgaria

"After crossing into Bulgaria from Turkey most asylum-seekers find themselves in a reception centre of the State Agency for Refugees, where they wait for their application for refugee status to be processed. This status would grant them legal protection, together with most of the rights and privileges of all Bulgarian citizens. Refugees must leave the reception centres once protection has been granted. No further support is available from the government in finding employment or affordable housing, nor are refugees entitled to welfare benefits. It is families that struggle the most after leaving the refugee centres. Refugees often face housing problems, one accommodation issue being the small size of apartments, normally designed for families of four, which makes it extremely difficult to house families with eight or more children.



The Red Cross is one of three NGOs – along with Caritas and the Council for Refugee Women in Bulgaria – that run integration-related activities. These include free language courses, as well as assistance throughout the job-seeking process. The organisations work with small groups of people, as most refugees do not speak Bulgarian and so have few job opportunities and are often subject to discrimination. Regular language classes for refugees take place in the Red Cross Information Centre in Sofia. The main challenge for refugees is to fit into society and find a job – for which they must be able to communicate in Bulgarian. A total of 170 people completed the language course successfully during the first half of 2015. These NGOs thus make a real contribution to the integration of asylum-seekers." ●

YEYS 2016: Teenage refugees are the future “workers and geniuses” in Europe



Your Europe, Your Say! (YEYS) lived up to all expectations, as young people from the EU-28 and candidate countries shook things up with their enthusiasm and fresh ideas on helping migrants integrate into European societies.

The EESC invited a group of outspoken 16 and 17 year-olds from all over Europe to debate one of the hottest topics on the political agenda right now: migration and integration.

The debate took place in Brussels back to back with the EESC's March plenary session. The youngsters explored a range of issues, from the role of schools, sports clubs and cultural outreach in countering

discrimination, to the way information about the refugee crisis is communicated, the role of the media and the importance of a well-defined, humane way of handling integration.

After an open and lively debate on ten different proposals, the youth delegates agreed on three overarching proposals to better integrate migrants, especially children, into European societies:

- **Media and migrants, media reform using investment from the EU:** ideas to impose stricter guidelines for reporting on migrant issues and other measures to raise awareness and reduce discrimination

- **Revision of Dublin agreement:** hotspots, faster processing of asylum applications and language and cultural training before allocating refugees
- **Education plan, no grading at first, exchange of culture, adjusting at own pace:** easing refugees into the education system, recognising the importance of education for integration

“As the voice of civil society, we are eager to ensure that the views, experiences and ideas of Europe’s younger generation on this vital issue are heard,” remarked Vice-President Gonalo Lobo Xavier in charge of communication at the EESC. *“We want to see a unified and humanitarian approach to immigration and asylum. Refugees have rights but they also have obligations to respect EU values and social responsibilities,”* he added.

Some 33 schools – each representing a Member State or candidate country – were chosen randomly and invited to attend this unique annual

youth initiative that simulates the work done by members of the EESC.

Members and EU policy-makers were struck by the young ambassadors’ thought-provoking ideas and practical suggestions to promote a more integrated response to the migration crisis.

EESC member Jose Antonio Moreno Daz said he was impressed by the proposed solutions to some hard questions, “even for adults and politicians to answer”, and he applauded the common sense on display. *“You are the spirit of Europe,”* he concluded. (dm)



SOON IN THE EESC

This is Europe, this is now: Giles Duley’s photographs of refugees at the EESC

The EESC will be hosting the exhibition *This is Europe, this is now*, consisting of photographs of refugees taken by Giles Duley, a British photojournalist known for his photography of humanitarian issues and the consequences of conflict. In 2011, Duley was severely injured after stepping on an IED (improvised explosive device) in Afghanistan and as a result became a triple amputee. Despite that, Duley has remained determined to return to work as a photographer and is currently working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to capture the stories of the refugees arriving on the Greek island of Lesbos on film. Although documenting challenging and occasionally horrific situations, Duley captures the strength of those who fight their adversity rather than succumb. The exhibition will run from 27 April to 20 May in Foyer 6 of the JDE building. The opening will be attended by Duley himself. (sk/dm)

Timely boost for maritime security efforts

The EESC is backing moves by the European Commission to boost cooperation and information exchange between various EU agencies and national bodies currently carrying out coastguard functions. But it stresses that “time is of the essence in implementing the proposed measures”.

“The situation whereby the flow of refugees continues to claim lives at sea, the irregular influx of migrants persists and Member States take unilateral measures by introducing permanent border controls cannot and must not be allowed to continue,” the Committee stressed in **an opinion on the proposed amendment** to the Commission’s regulation, adopted at the EESC plenary session in March. It further calls into question whether the proposed changes to

the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) are adequate to cover the human and financial resources required to respond quickly enough to pressing humanitarian and security needs.

A more efficient and cost-effective coastguard system would enable Member States to loosen or even forego permanent controls and allow Schengen to be fully and properly reinstated, suggests the opinion by rapporteur Jan Simons from the Employers’ Group.

Among the measures proposed by the Commission, the Committee endorses the use of remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS) to support the sometimes patchy surveillance from satellite coverage alone – smaller wooden or rubber boats are difficult to spot. (sg)



© Giles Duley/UNHCR

Open Day – 28 May 2016 – United in diversity

The EESC – along with other European institutions – will open its doors to the public on Saturday, 28 May. The theme for the 2016 edition of this event will be the European Union’s motto “United in diversity”. Together with the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, the European Committee of the Regions and the European External Action Service, the European Economic and Social Committee is happy to welcome over 30 000 visitors, all keen to learn more about how the institutions work and the issues they deal with. Site visits, information stands, interactive activities, concerts and exhibitions are all on the menu. This is a unique opportunity to discover the diversity of Europe in a fun and family-friendly atmosphere. For the full schedule, take a look at europeday.europa.eu (online from 16 April onwards). The EESC’s main building, the Jacques Delors building (Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 99, 1040 Bruxelles/Brussel), will be open to the public on **Saturday 28 May 2016 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.** Come and discover the EESC and our Europe with your family and friends! (sk)

Civil Society Media Seminar 2016: Communicating Migration

The 2016 Civil Society Media seminar, which will be held in Vienna on 24 and 25 November, will mark the 10th anniversary of this EESC event. This year’s edition will be entitled *Communicating Migration* and will cover various aspects of media reporting and communication on refugees, migration and migrant integration.

It is no secret that the media, including social media, has played a key role in providing information on the refugee and migration crisis – to such an extent that public opinion and policy itself have undoubtedly been influenced by the media and the way governments and civil society organisations have communicated on various aspects of migration.

The seminar will involve journalists, civil society communicators and experts on migration, and European and international institutions with a mandate in this area. Sessions will be organised on the communication-related aspects of migration, refugees, migrant smuggling and migrant integration (including integration into the labour market).

The event will be organised with the support of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, which is providing the venue at the Vienna Diplomatic Academy, and the City of Vienna. (sma)

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Upcoming activities of the Workers' Group

The Workers' Group is convinced that the current crises, whether it be the challenge of terrorism, the economic and social crisis or the refugee crisis, can only be solved by a strong, united, caring Europe that is profoundly democratic. This is why the Workers' Group welcomes the launching of a public consultation on the European Pillar of Social Rights that will strengthen the Union's democratic character. The workers fully endorse the goal of this initiative, which is to deliver a deeper and fairer EMU, in particular by guaranteeing fair and properly functioning labour markets and social protection systems. To make Mr Juncker's idea of a "social AAA rating" a reality, the Workers' Group has made this initiative its first and foremost priority. For this reason, its president, Ms Bischoff, will be one of the rapporteurs of the relevant EESC opinion (together with the other two Group presidents and several EESC members).



The Workers' Group

and repeated efforts to reduce social rights. As a follow-up to this resolution, the Workers' Group is organising an extraordinary bureau meeting in London on 21 April 2016 to talk about the risks of the UK's EU referendum not only for UK workers but for all European citizens. An in-depth exchange of views with the UK trade unions will take place on this occasion.

Social rights are at the centre of the Workers' Group's concerns also in relation to the "Brexit" issue. In this framework, in its relevant declaration of 18 February 2016 it warned against the possible undermining of the principle of free movement

Finally, on 31 May 2016, the Workers' Group will hold an extraordinary meeting in The Hague to carry out a detailed evaluation of the Dutch EU Presidency with the participation of representatives of the Dutch government. (mg/fs) ●

What future for EU SME policy?

The original vision of the Small Business Act (SBA) should be revived to be used more effectively as a tool for boosting SME competitiveness. The needs of SMEs must be taken into account in all EU policies by applying the Think-Small-First and Only Once-principles. The SBA should be governed, monitored and implemented more efficiently – these are the major points raised by the participants of the SME Round Table organised by the EESC Employers' Group. The discussion took place on 5 April in Brussels with the participation of the EU Commissioner for the Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, Ms Elżbieta Bieńkowska.

In a joint declaration, the representatives of major EU employers' organisations (BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, EuroChambres, Eurocommerce, Copacogeca and CEEP) called for a reinforced EU SME policy and SME Action Plan to ensure a revival of the SBA and to energise national SME policies. They identified a number of priorities that must be addressed, such as promoting entrepreneurship, completion of the Single Market, improving access to finance for SMEs and facilitating trade, including accessing non-EU markets.

„SMEs are major job and growth generators in Europe and their further growth is crucial for the European economy. By organising the Round Table, we wanted to draw the attention of policy makers to the variety of challenges that SMEs are facing and to propose concrete measures to improve their business environment” – stated Jacek Krawczyk, President of the EESC Employers' Group, that organised the meeting. He underlined that both EU and national employers' organisations are eager to cooperate closer with the European Commission to make sure that legislation responds to the needs of businesses. (lj) ●



Elżbieta Bieńkowska, EU Commissioner for the Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, and Jacek Krawczyk, President of the EESC Employers' Group, at the SME Round Table

Strengthening EU-Japan cooperation

A seminar at the EESC's Brussels headquarters in March discussed the common challenge of migration and the role of civil society in implementing the EU-Japan Free Trade Agreement. EESC Vice-President Gonçalo Lobo Xavier took this opportunity to invite Japanese civil society organisations for a study visit. "Although civil society in the EU and Japan is organised differently, its role and responsibilities are fundamentally the same." Civil society on both sides must be actively involved in the implementation and monitoring of the Strategic Partnership Agreement and the EU-Japan Free Trade Agreement. Furthermore, priority has to be given to inter-regional

exchanges and developing closer links between civil society in the EU and Japan.

Participants expressed the hope that the trade agreement would go deeper and trigger initiatives enhancing people-to-people contact, mutual understanding and friendship, and so bring Japanese and European societies closer together.

Regarding migration, the seminar revealed that despite different historical and geographical circumstances, the challenges both societies are facing are similar, for example finding legal routes for workers and economic migrants. (sma) ●

To be or not to be in the EU? That is the question...

by Luca Jahier, President of the EESC's Various Interests Group



Luca Jahier, President of the EESC's Various Interests Group

On 8 March 2016, the Various Interests Group organised a debate on *The UK in the EU: What Matters to You?* in which 130 people took part and which was moderated by Shirin Wheeler, former presenter of the BBC programme *The Record Europe*.

With speakers from academia and think tanks, the voluntary and environmental sectors, social enterprises, trade unions, local and national authorities and our Members, it has to be said that our event stimulated one of the liveliest discussions that we have ever had at a thematic conference of our Group. Whether speaking about jobs, growth, economic and social cohesion, security, sovereignty and identity, or whether discussing the "Morning After" and the consequences of a majority vote to leave the EU, one thread of thought was common throughout: the referendum on 23 June will be about people and people's quality of life. Arguably for this reason, despite the facts and the partisan political dimension to the Leave/Remain campaigns, the discussants agreed that most

UK citizens will vote based on their emotions. It is the sentiments, perceptions, fears, passions and values to be passed on to the next generation which will ultimately determine the referendum result. We could call it "project hope", for the European Union is a common journey for the development of our society, for justice and dignity. However, this journey is obviously not without its challenges.

Almost five centuries ago, William Shakespeare wrote: "All the world's a stage" and life is a play that we must enact. On 23 June, UK citizens will be the principal actors! So "To be, or not to be" a member of the European Union? That is the question! Personally, I stand firmly in the camp "To Be" in the EU. I am a fan of #UK-IN! ●

Providing enough food for all requires a radical change in food production and consumption

The global population is projected to reach a staggering 9.6 billion by 2050, but the global food production system is struggling to feed the current population of 7.5 billion. In addition, the way we currently grow, produce, transport and consume food is unsustainable.

1.6 billion tonnes (around 30% of production) globally. Eating healthier food and consuming less meat is also good for the health of the planet. But it does not end there. The food sector is the world's largest producer of greenhouse gas emissions – and the EESC will propose measures to address this.

The EESC is currently preparing an opinion on *More sustainable food systems* at the request of the Dutch EU Presidency. Stakeholders' and experts' views on this issue were gathered at a hearing organised by the EESC in Brussels on 11 March 2016.

In addition, more coherence is needed not only across policies but also across sectors. EU food policy must be comprehensive and encompass agriculture, trade, the environment, health and social policy, and combine different tools, such as legislation, economic incentives and taxes in order to develop a truly sustainable food system. (sma) ●

In the EESC's view, one of the major themes is the issue of reducing food waste, which currently stands at 100 million tonnes in Europe and

EESC and French CESE seeking closer links

The EESC and the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) are looking forward to closer links.

In January an EESC delegation presented the EESC's activities to the recently renewed French CESE following an invitation from incoming President Patrick Bernasconi, who from the beginning of his mandate has proposed that the CESE should centre its work on strategic priorities. One of these is "mainstreaming the European dimension into all CESE opinions and reports. This calls for some genuine joint work with the EESC".

on 21 March between French members of the EESC, led by Thierry Libaert, EESC contact point for France, and the CESE leadership. At these meetings the two bodies decided to work together in a variety of areas. Major issues for cooperation include the follow-up to COP21, migration, social Europe, posted workers, Europe 2020 and the EU network of national ESCs and the EESC. They also agreed to encourage direct contacts between their respective presidents, section administrators and rapporteurs and to facilitate and multiply exchanges between their consultative sections, commissions and delegations, while expressing the wish to hold similar meetings on a regular, biannual basis.

Several other steps have been taken since then, most notably a working meeting between President Dassis and President Bernasconi held in Brussels on 10 March, followed by one in Paris

The next step will be Mr Bernasconi's attendance of the EESC's May plenary. (dm) ●

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