The EESC September plenary adopted an opinion targeting aggressive tax planning by multinationals, which is estimated to evade EU tax revenues by up to EUR 70 billion a year. The European Commission proposal on income tax transparency requires multinationals with an annual turnover of over 750 million EUR to disclose publicly the income tax they pay and other relevant tax information on a country-by-country basis.

Although endorsing the new measures, the EESC called on the Committee to gradually lower the EUR 750 million turnover threshold: “Following the public outcry of recent years concerning multinationals’ EU tax engineering, the EU has a duty to address these concerns and applying this measure to a token 15% of multinationals would put the EU completely out of touch with the concerns of nearly every European citizen”, said opinion rapporteur Victor Alistar (Various Interests Group – RO).

In addition, the EESC called for separate financial statements to be published not only for each Member State, but also for each non-EU country where large multinationals operate and for the latter to make available a list of operations carried out in non-EU countries regarded as tax havens together with data on assets and sales.

The Commission’s proposals were brought forward in the wake of the Panama Papers and LuxLeaks scandals. The tax dealings of Apple in Ireland, Starbucks in the Netherlands and Amazon and Fiat in Luxembourg have also brought the issue to the fore.

The additional information that the EESC wishes to see published is part of the OECD’s BEPS (base erosion and profit shifting) standards, which have already been adopted by the EU and most Member States. It is an automatic exchange of tax-related information between Member States’ tax authorities, but not available to the public.

The EESC also recommends that data be made more easily accessible through publication in a central register in each Member State, in an open system, a standard EU-wide format and a major international language in addition to the local language, thus enabling genuine access to data for the whole single market. (dm)

Nuclear programming: the EESC urges the EU to adopt a more comprehensive strategy

Competitiveness, economy, security of supply, climate change and public acceptability are key considerations for the future of nuclear power, according to an EESC opinion adopted on 22 September 2016.

“The European Commission’s proposal does not offer a clear and comprehensive approach to the future of nuclear power in Europe”, deplores EESC rapporteur Brian Curtis (Workers’ Group, UK). “The recent reactor point controversy shows it again: after the Fukushima catastrophe, our citizens rightly demand long-term planning for nuclear energy. Today’s EESC opinion aims at re-balancing perspectives on the European energy mix which will ultimately help deliver on the Energy Union commitments.”

As set out in Article 40 of the Euratom Treaty, the EESC is the Commission’s single interlocutor in drafting nuclear

The opinion’s recommendations will be presented by Pierre-Jean Coulon (Employers’ Group – FR), president of the EESC Energy and Transport Section, to the political decision-makers and top stakeholders at the European Nuclear Energy Forum (ENEF) scheduled for 3-4 October in Bratislava. “I will bring to the attention of Europe’s decision-makers these concrete ideas from civil society, and I will insist on the vital role of public understanding of the energy ‘dilemma’. Indeed, we are faced with the sometimes conflicting objectives of security of supply, affordability and environmental sustainability. But we have to embrace these aspects to shape a solid energy policy equipped to face the challenges of our future.” (cad)
European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker was warmly welcomed to the EESC plenary by Georges Dassis, President of the EESC, who assured Mr Juncker of the Committee’s strong support and emphasised the need for the European Union to be close to its citizens and work for them and for more solidarity in Europe.

Mr Juncker led a debate with EESC members on the state of the European Union during this, his second, visit to the EESC plenary session. “Europe is not doing well. However, we too often focus only on the bad news. Indeed, unemployment is too high in Europe, but since 2010 the European Union has created 8 million jobs”, he pointed out. With regard to the migration crisis, he called on Member States to shoulder their share of the burden currently borne by Italy, Greece and Malta.

Lucia Jahier, president of the EESC’s Various Interests Group, thanked the Commission President for his determination and welcomed his vision for the future set out in the State of the Union speech at the European Parliament. “At the next European summit, we would like to see Member States cooperating rather than dividing. Yesterday was the International Day of Peace, and this reminds us that Europe has really worked hard for its peace. But now if we collectively do not help people fleeing war, Europe will lose its soul. It is a shame that Member States are not shouldering their responsibility”.

Jackie Krawczyk, president of the EESC Employers’ Group, noted that “business is part of the solution and business wants to be part of the solution” to the economic crisis in Europe. “It is time to rebuild entrepreneurship in Europe, because it is for enterprises, not for government, to provide jobs. Europe needs to become less risk-adverse, more innovative, and more entrepreneurial. We need freedom to operate for businesses.” Mr. Krawczyk concluded by stressing that adaptability was of the utmost importance to the business sector.

Gabriele Bischoff, president of the EESC Workers’ Group, agreed with Mr Juncker’s analysis of “Europe’s existential crisis and its lack of solidarity, unity and a sense of common purpose”. She underlined the importance of finding a consensus within civil society, and called for joint action, as “words are not enough”. On the Pillar of Social Rights, Ms Bischoff said that although the project was still surrounded by uncertainty, “this is a very good initiative to regain trust, citizens’ trust. But we have to get out of the Brussels bubble, and that is why the EESC has started a series of debates in all Member States. This is the kind of positive project that will enable us to regain workers’ and citizens’ support and we must have the strength to influence the future of work”.

The First edition of the financial education document was widely welcomed by institutions and stakeholders. It was the first step towards introducing a programme that would help all citizens to face their financial responsibilities. It is with this aim that the EESC publishes the second edition of the Financial Education for All document.

The new version of this document aims at adapting the content of the previous version to fit better the needs of citizens and making it open to a wider public. After the success of the first version, the EESC decided to update the information contained in the brochure, and to make it more interactive, in line with the objectives of the new Financial Education strategy in the European Union.

The new version of the Financial Education for All brochure will be available for download on the EESC website and in English, French and Italian. The brochure will also be presented at a conference on the future of work in Europe, in the second half of 2017.

The benefits of TTIP should be felt by SMEs, consumers and citizens, according to a new EESC opinion entitled The position of the EESC on specific key issues of the TTIP negotiations adopted by the EESC at its September plenary session. With discussions on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership now at a critical point, the opinion by Philippe de Buck (Employers’ Group – BE) and Tanja Buzeck (Workers’ Group – DE) assesses some key issues of the negotiations and identifies the main implications for European civil society. It analyses how the EESC’s concerns have been addressed so far in the EU position papers and the proposals put forward, and offers recommendations concerning further clarification, reassurances and precautionary steps.

Prepared by the Financial Services and Institutions’ Group, the brochure is a part of a campaign by the EESC to improve financial literacy, financial education and financial protection for all European citizens. The campaign, which will run during 2017, is part of a larger action plan to help citizens manage their personal finances. The campaign will include a series of events and activities to promote financial education and help citizens make the most of their financial resources.

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TTIP talks — what are the key issues for civil society?
The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) will hold its 10th Civil Society Media Seminar at the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna in less than two months, from 24 to 25 November.

Communicating Migration is the challenging topic which will be discussed by four separate panels with journalists, migration experts and representatives of civil society and international institutions. Other major organisations active in the area of migration, such as the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations and the Austrian social partners, will take part.

The aim of the event is to discuss and consider how communication tools and the media have been instrumental in telling the story of migration into and across Europe and to learn about best practices in effective communication on this challenging issue.

Specifically, the seminar, which is aimed at journalists and communications/press officers from civil society organisations representing employers, workers and other social, economic and professional organisations, will look at the communications aspects of migration and the integration of refugees and asylum seekers, and the role of policy makers in communicating on the “migration crisis”.

If you are interested in attending please contact pressofficers@eesc.europa.eu

Applications for the EESC Civil Society Prize hit all-time record!

Applications for the EESC Civil Society Prize hit a new record this year, with 284 projects submitted by the deadline (9 September). The largest number of applicants came from Italy, followed by Austria and Germany. The number of entries for the EESC Civil Society Prize has increased steadily from its humble beginnings in 2006, when only 15 projects were entered for prizes totalling EUR 20,000. This year, EUR 50,000 will be awarded to up to 5 winners.

The theme of the 2016 Civil Society Prize is migration, which during the last two years has filled newspaper pages, been widely covered on radio and television, fomented political debate and dominated ordinary conversation, polarising families, communities, countries and Europe as a whole.

However, migration has also shown what Europe’s civil society is capable of: a spontaneous, massive wave of solidarity rose from the ranks of civil society organisations as well as from individuals, who lent their invaluable support when it was most needed at the height of this migration flow and are still providing their vital assistance now. The EESC believes that this major contribution deserves recognition and wishes to reward those projects that have provided migrants and refugees with practical, social or psychological support, offered them shelter, helped them integrate into their host society or have contributed to mutual understanding and the fight against xenophobia and racism.

The great number of projects submitted reflects the European public’s strong commitment to helping people in need. It is also proof that European citizens and civil society at large cherish European values such as solidarity and social responsibility.

The eligibility of applications has been checked and eligible applicants will be evaluated and shortlisted by a four-member evaluation committee. A selection board consisting of the EESC President, Vice-Presidents, Group Presidents and Secretary-General will then pick the ultimate winners. The award ceremony will take place on 15 December 2016 in Brussels.

It is time to implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals, says EESC

“Time is running out for a sustainable world” is the EESC’s wake up call for the Commission and the EU Member States to finally get on with the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This agenda aims to drive the transition of Europe’s economy towards sustainability, resilience, competitiveness and – last but not least – more social justice. In its opinion on Sustainable development: a mapping of the EU’s internal and external policies, drawn up at the request of the European Commission, and adopted on 21 September, the EESC comes up with a number of proposals for key policy areas to set this transformational change in motion. What we need is:

- A just transition to a low-carbon, circular and collaborative economy;
- A transition towards a socially inclusive society and an economy with decent working conditions and respect for human rights;
- A transition to sustainable food production and consumption patterns;
- Investing in innovation and long-term infrastructure upgrade and encouraging sustainable businesses, and;
- Making trade work in favour of global sustainable development.

The EESC calls on the EU to lead by example in this very challenging process worldwide by mainstreaming sustainability and social inclusion in all EU policies.

The UN 2030 Agenda should be turned into a new and compelling narrative of the prospects of a sustainable, resilient future. To this end, the EESC calls on the EU to:

- Keep the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs firmly in the political agenda and boost the formation of high-level political bodies to spearhead implementation;
- Use its global influence for pushing implementation of the Agenda in key areas such as global health, hunger, peace and security; and
- Involve civil society and the private sector in implementation, ensuring that their voice is heard at EU level.

The results of the mid-term review will be used to help draw up the next framework programme. Mr Moedas’ white paper proposal for the review is the creation of a new funding body to support applied research – a European Innovation Council to reflect the European Research Council’s success as a funder of excellent basic science.

IN SHORT

Guests at the EESC’s October plenary session

On 20 October at 10 a.m., Carlos Moedas, European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, will take part in a debate on the Horizon 2020 programme, the world’s largest research and innovation funding programme, in connection with the adoption of an EESC opinion on its mid-term evaluation, which is to start now and expected to end by the end of 2017.

The results of the mid-term review will be used to help draw up the next framework programme. Mr Moedas’ white paper proposal for the review is the creation of a new funding body to support applied research – a European Innovation Council to reflect the European Research Council’s success as a funder of excellent basic science.

Money, jobs and much more – culture’s contribution to Europe as seen by the EESC

Did you know that the cultural heritage and related industries employ 7.8 million people in the EU? Or that at the height of the crisis the creative and cultural industries were growing by 0.7% a year? The EESC has just published a factsheet on the role of culture in the EU. Building on a recent study by the EESC’s Various Interests Group on Culture, Cities and Identity in Europe, the factsheet provides the latest data on the creative and cultural industries’ contribution to the economy and employment in Europe and its potential for further growth and job creation. At the same time, it offers an EESC’s recipe for cultural players and policy makers to turn culture into a tool to boost social cohesion and inclusion and to develop a vibrant European identity in a crisis-ridden Union.

Paper copies of the factsheet can be obtained from the EESC press service (email: press@eesc.europa.eu)
by the Various Interests Group

In September, the Various Interests Group president, Luca Jahier, visited the Belgian social enterprise Les Petits Riens. The social economy is a little known key contributor to our economy – but it actually employs over 14 million Europeans or 6.5% of the active population. Social enterprises such as Les Petits Riens are not charities, they make a profit just like any other SME – they contribute directly to job creation and growth and provide much needed services. However, the key difference is that their principal objective is social: either in the services they provide or in the methods used. For the Various Interests Group, the sector has enormous relevance and the potential to provide services to the public which the state may be unable to provide, and over the last 15 years, the EESC has helped the sector to grow, going directly into the field and helping to forge alliances and promote the exchange of know-how, not only among social economy enterprises in Europe but in developing countries as well. The EESC has also actively promoted the sector vis-a-vis national and European authorities, explaining why and how a supportive financial and legislative environment should be shaped. Creating opportunities for the public, looking out for their well-being, addressing local social and environmental challenges and unmet local needs – this is the objective! There is no doubt that social investment and the social economy are multipliers of growth and that this growth can spill over beyond regions to the national level or beyond. As Mr Jahier said, “let us look to the future: a future of public empowerment, cohesion, local communities and solidarity.”

More information about the work of the EESC’s Social Economy Category, chaired by Group III members Alain Coheur (BE) and Krzysztof Balon (PL) is available at http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.categories-social-economy (cl)

The social economy, or putting people before profits

Circular economy – beneficial to all by the Employers’ Group

Transition to a circular economy is a must if we are to protect our planet, but also if we are to increase the competitiveness of European industry. This is a long-term process that will require numerous initiatives at European, national and regional level. Companies see the circular economy as an opportunity. “Going green” is beneficial not only for the environment, but also for businesses, providing real savings in terms of raw materials, water and energy. Apart from its environmental and economic benefits, the circular economy also has social advantages, providing new jobs and new business models. These are some of the conclusions emerging from the conference entitled Sustainable industry in the context of the circular economy, which took place on 13 September in Kosice, Slovakia. Kosice was chosen as the venue of the event due to the fact that local industry is an example of an efficient transition to a circular economy. The steel industry, of major importance for the region, has already notched up numerous achievements in waste reduction, increasing usage of recycled raw materials and using materials, energy and water in more efficient manner. The members of the Employers’ Group had an opportunity to see concrete examples of this during their study visit to the US Steel Kosice plant. (jm)

EESC President at ILO centenary conference in Athens and meeting with Ivory Coast ESC President in Brussels

On 17 September, Georges Dassis spoke at an international conference in Athens hosted by the Greek Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity. The EESC President participated in a round-table at the invitation of Greece’s labour minister, Georgios Katrougalos, who also moderated the discussion. Entitled Collective bargaining in the European social model and the future of work, the conference was being held as part of celebrations to mark the centenary of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

On 20 September in Brussels, the EESC President held a meeting with a delegation from the Economic and Social Council (ESC) of the Ivory Coast, led by its President, Charles Koffi Diby, and with the Ambassador of the Ivory Coast to the EU, Jean Vincent Zinsou.

This fruitful exchange was an opportunity to discuss issues of common interest and led to a decision to develop common activities. Mr Dassis said that the EESC was willing to provide advice to the Ivorian ESC on matters concerning its functioning and to share the Committee’s experiences with regard to the impact of economic and social councils, in order to make its work as effective as possible for the benefit of civil society. (jm)

News from the EESC Workers’ Group

The priorities of the Workers’ Group for the Slovak Presidency

On 12-13 October 2016, the Workers’ Group held an extraordinary meeting in Bratislava. Participants included Slovakia’s prime minister Robert Fico, the Minister of the Economy, Peter Ziga, and the Minister of Labour, Ján Richter who stressed that the Slovak Presidency would be working on issues touching upon the social and economic conditions of Europeans.

One of the major subjects discussed was the future of the European venture and the risk of losing the achievements gained by the EU over the last 60 years, particularly in terms of fundamental rights. This panel was introduced by EESC President Georges Dassias.

The second part of the meeting focused on the free movement of workers and the fight against social dumping, a fundamental right vigorously defended by the Workers’ Group. (imm)

Solidarity address of the EESC Workers’ Group regarding the closure of the Caterpillar site of Gosselies

After 50 years of presence in Gosselies (Charleroi), the multinational company Caterpillar has decided to close down its factory with 2 200 workers laid off as a result and probably about another 4 000 in subcontracting risking to lose their jobs. This is an unprecedented social drama for a region in regeneration.

The company has decided to relocate its activities to Grenoble in France, and the French workers have already expressed their solidarity with their colleagues in Charleroi and voiced serious concerns about the future of their jobs, in a company purely driven by profit that has clearly chosen to defend its shareholder over its workers.

We too wish to express our full support to all those workers, trade union organisations, politicians and investors who are mobilising to ensure a future for this region already seriously affected by the crisis that has plunged a whole region into a precarious situation.


EESC President Georges Dassis shaking hands with Charles Koffi Diby, President of the Ivory Coast ESC

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The conference was jointly organised by the Employers’ Group and the National Union of Employers of Slovakia