



# EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee  
A bridge between Europe and organised civil society  
April 2017 | EN

## EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

### Brexit and the future

I would like to share with you a few thoughts that came to me during the major conference held by the Committee in Rome on 13 March, on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaties.

The procedure has now been launched and the decision of the United Kingdom must be respected. It is perhaps little consolation, but we should remember that the process of European integration would have made little progress if the United Kingdom had chosen to remain in the EU on the conditions negotiated by Mr Cameron before the referendum. Since the accession of the United Kingdom in 1973, successive British governments have consistently put the brakes on social policy and on any measure tending towards integration.

I am convinced that the only way to win public support for the project is to ensure that integration is progressing and delivering attractive results, and that the pursuit of public wellbeing, greater regional and social cohesion, and upward - never downward - harmonisation is clearly presented as the overarching goal.

With regard to "Brexit" itself, we will be welcoming Mr Barnier to the plenary session and taking the appropriate steps to make our voice heard on the negotiations and on their outcome.

As far as the future of the Union is concerned, I am pleased that the Commission has launched a public debate on the issue, and I am particularly happy to tell you that its president, Mr Juncker, has confirmed to me that the Committee will be consulted on the subject. We are determined to ensure that organised civil society in our countries has an opportunity to express its views on this vital issue, and we will do everything in our power to achieve this.

George Dassis  
EESC President

## Insolvency legislation should treat businesses as a social asset



On 30 March the EESC adopted an opinion on the Commission's proposal for a directive on business insolvency, intended to harmonise preventive restructuring procedures across Europe. While fully supporting the Commission's proposed shift from liquidation to early restructuring in dealing with business insolvency, the EESC is recommending a set of

measures to help mitigate the social impact of insolvency. In particular, it suggests introducing a "social warning" mechanism to alert stakeholders as soon as problems arise, creating special funds to guarantee the payment of salaries and making access to a second chance for failing entrepreneurs conditional on full disclosure of financial information.

Companies are a social asset for Europe and should be treated as such. Rapporteur **Antonello Pezzini** (Employers' Group - IT) noted: "We are striving to start a process that would lead to an enterprise being seen for what it really is, a **fundamental good for society** in which both employers and workers have a stake". A real "second chance" culture needs to be developed and support structures set up to provide assistance to entrepreneurs whose businesses are undergoing restructuring. The EESC believes it could help the Commission in its work here.

Co-rapporteur **Franca Salis-Madnier** (Workers' Group - FR) had this to say about a social warning mechanism: "It is important for employees and their representatives to be fully informed upstream and as early on as possible, as it is by anticipating developments that problems can be better managed". (dm)

## Efficient, WTO-compatible and up-to-date TDIs are pivotal for the competitiveness of European industry

### EESC calls on Commissioner Malmström to ensure industry and jobs are protected from unfair imports

Fairness is a precondition for open trade. Efficient, WTO-compatible and up-to-date trade defence instruments (TDIs) are pivotal for the competitiveness of European industry. The EESC's opinion on *Trade Defence Instruments – methodology*, adopted at the March plenary, supports the Commission's proposal for new anti-dumping methodology but asks for improvements.

The rapporteurs, **Christian Bäumler** (Workers' Group - DE) and **Andrés Barceló Delgado** (Employers' Group - ES), called on Commissioner **Malmström** to speed up the TDIs' reform: "We need to safeguard the level-playing field for Europe's industry and to ensure that jobs and growth are sustained. We are not asking for protectionism but for fair trade".



The opinion supports the proposal to calculate the dumping margin on the basis of benchmarks that take account of significantly distorted production and sale costs. "We appreciate the EC's intention to use specific methodology for determining dumping margins for imports from countries where there is significant State intervention, but we also want the non-respect of ILO standards and Multilateral Environment Agreements to be considered", said Bäumler.

The EESC also believes that country reports should become obligatory for countries with high numbers of anti-dumping cases, that the burden of proof should be clearly defined and not shifted to EU industry, and that complaint procedures must be more accessible for companies and SMEs. (sma)

## DIARY DATES

**6 May/ EESC, Brussels**  
Open Days

**18,19 May / EESC, Brussels**  
Responsible research and innovation in the health industry

**31 May- 01 June / EESC, Brussels**  
EESC plenary session

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## Digital Single Market: consumer protection must be top priority



The intensive and revealing discussions which took place at the EESC's European Consumer Day 2017, celebrated in Malta on 21 March, showed the importance of the Commission's Fitness Check of the Digital Single Market (DSM). Many of the existing standards are ignored when consumers, traders and providers interact in the virtual world. However, e-commerce is not the only issue causing headaches for consumer organisations: self-driving cars, geoblocking, data protection, etc. also need better regulation. The discussions showed that there is room for improvement regarding consumer protection and access to the digital world.

Vice-President **Gonçalo Lobo Xavier** underlined the EESC's role in giving civil society a forum to raise concerns and said: «*The DSM can play a major role in the collaborative economy, provided consumer rights are protected. We need proper regulation and I am optimistic that we'll get it right*». **Antonio Longo** (Various Interests Group – IT), president of the EESC's study group on the Digital Agenda, said the digital society should connect and not divide, and stressed the need to increase digital literacy.

The event, which gathered IT experts, policy-makers, representatives from business and consumer organisations and EESC members, focused on The DSM: How does it benefit consumers?

**Martin Siecker** (Workers' Group – NL), president of the EESC's Single Market Section, concluded: «*For citizens, it is important to feel safe when 'diving into' the digital world. Our common endeavour should be to provide Europe with the necessary regulation to protect the weakest link in the chain, namely consumers.*» (sma)



## Commissioner Crețu urged to recognise the unique challenges of EU islands

Europe's islands are home to 21 million people, accounting for around 4% of the EU's population. Due to their insularity and detachment from the mainland, these territories frequently face serious structural handicaps. In a debate with Regional Policy Commissioner Corina Crețu, the EESC called for the adoption of an integrated policy framework to address the social, economic and environmental challenges of islands.

"EU islands and island Member States face very particular circumstances and the EU must

recognise this. It is not just a matter of money but also policy flexibility. A one-size-fits-all approach is clearly not delivering the right results," stated **Stefano Mallia** (Employers- Group- MT), EESC rapporteur. "We call on the Commission to consider the condition of insularity when designing new policies and ensure a greater degree of flexibility."

**Commissioner Crețu** stressed her commitment for cohesion policy to "remain the EU's main investment instrument in all regions. Islands indeed face substantial handicaps, but they also

have potential in terms of energy generation and as a testing ground for modern technologies, renewable energy, etc. Our duty is to support them in this endeavour, by including more flexible provisions for islands".

In its opinion on **Islands in the EU**, the EESC emphasises the need to step up efforts to recognise the uniqueness of the challenges facing islands, and calls on the EU to define an integrated legislative framework to overcome these challenges. (mq)

## Big data: how to minimise risks while maximising benefits for all

### A study published by the EESC examines the ethics of big data in relation to EU policy

The EESC has recently published a study on **The ethics of big data** carried out by **Evodevo**, an Italian company which specialises in big data, semantic analysis and open source intelligence. The study focuses on the **ethical and social implications of big data** and examines **5 measures** designed to prevent an imbalance between individuals using digital services and data collectors taking ever bigger proportions as the digital revolution gains momentum.

The measures proposed by the study include:

- 1) A European web portal where citizens can access information on personal data that they have given in exchange for services.



- 2) A European certification system – similar to the ISO – to help digital service users identify companies using ethical personal data protection practices.
- 3) A data management statement showing how companies are meeting European standards on data protection.
- 4) A European E-health database.
- 5) Digital education on big data.

**Pierre-Jean Coulon** (Workers' Group – FR), President of the TEN section, said: "*Digital services have become so pervasive that most of us can no longer conceive our lives without them. It is therefore essential to enable European citizens to make the most of them without giving up the rights and protection they have been enjoying in more traditional areas. The EESC intends to play an active role in creating the conditions for this to happen.*" (dm)

## Space is not just rocket science, but plenty of benefits for all Europeans

Space holds huge potential for European society. Data from satellites can be used to provide services that can dramatically improve the everyday lives of European citizens. The European Commission's new space strategy goes a long way in charting the course for the civil use of space in Europe, says the EESC in a recently adopted opinion, but should go even further in reaping the full advantages of space for European society.

From monitoring crops to preventing natural disasters, from geo-positioning to managing migrant flows: these are just some of the existing and potential uses that Europe can make of the data sent back to earth by its satellites. In order to make the most of this data, however, the Commission needs to put in place big data centres which can pre-process it and make it available to companies, SMEs and other players.

"*Space is no longer the preserve of big corporations such as Airbus. There are plenty of opportunities for SMEs to develop new materials and new techniques. SMEs are particularly good at developing creative applications and services*", says the opinion rapporteur **Mindaugas Maciulevičius** (Various Interests Group – LT). Examples can already be seen in various Member States.

The EESC also stresses the need to secure an adequate budget that can compete with those of the major players in the space arena. At present, this is not the case. Although Europe's budget for space activities is the second largest in the world in absolute terms, it is only the sixth as a percentage of GDP. China and Russia also allocate huge budgets to space activities, but the figures are only partly revealed. The EESC also warns that



the EU's space strategy will only be successful if the private sector also invests in space.

In addition, the Committee also focuses on education. Space activities mean highly skilled jobs. Europe must train/retrain European workers and

young people to meet the market demand for space-related skills, particularly as regards the use of data. At the same time, it needs to raise awareness of the potential of space for society at large. (dm)



# Statement by the President of the EESC on the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome



It was exactly sixty years ago today that the Treaties of Rome were signed. They were neither the first nor the last that European countries would agree between themselves, but they marked a crucial stage in the enlightened, noble and bold process that able women and men launched in the aftermath of a terrible war that had seen the most heinous crimes.

This process was the exact opposite of that which had just ravaged Europe and the world. Against all that had wrought destruction, against violence, hatred, racism, selfish nationalism, dictatorship, the senselessness and the trampling of human rights – against all this it placed what was to be built: peace, democracy, justice, freedom, fairness, collaboration, dialogue, solidarity and respect for others.

What was created that day was an «economic» community, but the preamble left no doubt about what this initiative implied: the signatories affirmed «as the essential objective of their efforts the constant improvement of the living and working conditions of their peoples». They declared themselves «resolved [...] to preserve and strengthen peace and liberty» and were not afraid to call upon «the other peoples of Europe who share their ideal to join in their efforts»,

having stated that they were anxious to reduce «the differences existing between the various regions and the backwardness of the less favoured regions». Clearly, the ultimate aim of the economic community were peoples, individuals, citizens and their lives.

There are still quite a lot of us who know what Europe was like in 1957, because we experienced it. And how it continued to be, sadly, for many of us through some difficult years – because the six signatory countries were still only six. The Community that was taking shape, for all the criticisms that can be levelled against it, was a great boon to the people who benefited from it. And it was a model and a source of hope for those who aspired to join, if only as a way out of hardship and dictatorship. I have known a time when nobody in the Community itself seriously questioned the principle behind it – it was rather the slow pace of progress that was criticised – and when virtually everybody outside it saw accession as an ideal.

Rereading these old documents and accounts and pausing a little to think about our history is not a theoretical research exercise or a form of nostalgia. It is very much something of the moment: we have the duty of leaving our children a world in good order,

## LABOUR MARKET STILL NEGLECTING PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

Only between 10% and 24% of adults with autism are in work, a debate held on April 3 by the EESC's Section on Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC) revealed.

The Committee organised the debate, which focused on employing people with autism, to mark World Autism Awareness Day (April 2) and to support a campaign launched by the Autism Europe association to make society more accessible to people with the condition.

Speakers in the debate said those with autism faced prejudice and barriers when looking for jobs or holding on to them, but with proper support and understanding they could become productive members of society.

“Most people with autism are inactive,” said **Donata Pagetti Vivanti**, vice-president of EDF and former president of Autism Europe, adding that fewer than 10% of autistic people work. Autism Europe puts the number at between 10% and 24%.

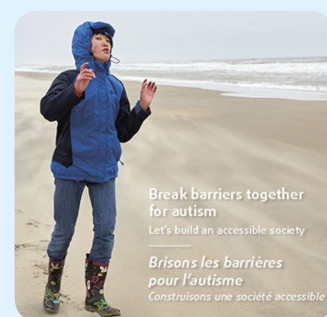
Ms Pagetti Vivanti thinks that lifelong training programmes and better job matching are crucial for their inclusion in the labour market.

One example of good practice was provided by **Dirk Rombaut** of Antwerp-based company Passwerk, which successfully employs software engineers with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). They undergo assessment and tailored training and are then given job coaches to help them adapt to work.

Mr Rombaut said coaching and training of workers with ASD was proving to be an investment which produced incredible returns.

“It is simply nonsense to push people with autism aside,” he said.

To further raise awareness of autism, the EESC and Autism Europe also staged a photo exhibition featuring works by three photographers as part of the campaign entitled *Break barriers together for autism – Let's Build an Accessible Society*. (II)



preferably a world «sustainably» so in all respects, even if nothing is ever gained for all time and we always have to invest to move forward.

It is the Treaty establishing the European Community that created the European Economic and Social Committee, which it described as consisting of «representatives of the various economic and social components of organised civil society, and in particular representatives of producers, farmers, carriers, workers, dealers, craftsmen, professional occupations, consumers and the general interest». It was a wise decision for two reasons: firstly, because it enabled the institutions to hear the views of civil society organisations – even if this term was not yet in use in 1957 – and, secondly, because not only did it enable these organisations to express their views, but – and above all – it put them around a table in Brussels and set them the task of getting to know one another, respecting one another,

talking together, drafting opinions together and being part of the process.

There are a number of things in the Treaty – general principles – that were fair and «politically astute» and which, in the light of the history, remain so.

It is for us to put them centre stage, because this is what counts. We have a duty to say what the European Union is, why it is there and what purpose it must serve.

It is up to us to ensure that, in keeping with the spirit that governed at the foundation of the Community, the EU is united, democratic, solidarity-based, peaceful, prosperous and responsive to its citizens.

Brussels, 25 March 2017

## Glyphosate ban – a question dividing Europe



### EESC invites proponents and opponents to discuss ECI's proposed ban

On 5 April, the NAT section invited supporters and opponents of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) call for a ban on glyphosate, which has already collected 640 000 signatures.

The ECI is making three requests: **a ban on glyphosate, a reform of the pesticide approval procedure and a proposal for EU-wide mandatory reduction targets for pesticide use.**

The discussion revealed opposing views among the speakers. Referring to IARC and WHO assessments that glyphosate was “probably carcinogenic”, Franziska Achterberg (**Greenpeace**) called for an EU ban.

Graeme Taylor (**ECPA**) believed that glyphosate was vital for agriculture, the challenge being to feed nine billion people by 2050, with 40% of global crop yields lost to pests and diseases yearly.

“There is simply no alternative to glyphosate”, said Oana Neagu (**Copa Cogeca**). A ban would have a negative impact on crops, as 20-30 more litres of fuel/hectare would be needed and weekly working time would increase by 50-80 hours.

Oliver Moore (**ARC 2020**) said the main problem was glyphosate's “non-selectivity” (kills all plants indiscriminately) and the fact that it was “antimicrobial” (also kills bacteria, algae and fungi), and instead proposed agroecology.

Michael Flueh (**Commission**) said EU law was among the strictest in the world and noted that EFSA and ECHA had been involved in the decision-making, and both had concluded that glyphosate was unlikely to be genotoxic or carcinogenic.

The EESC aims to provide a discussion platform for all relevant ECI proposals. (sma)



## Obsolete EU rules hamper fight against counterfeit and pirated products

The counterfeit goods industry harms jobs and growth in Europe and deprives governments of billions in tax revenues. But imports of fake goods have doubled worldwide in the last ten years due to digital trade. It is high time for the Commission and Member States to update Europe's legal framework and make it fit for the 21st century, putting in place the necessary checks and market surveillance. Consumers need to be better informed – indeed their right to information is enshrined in Article 169 TFEU. The private and public sectors need to cooperate in the fight against product piracy.

This was the gist of the EESC hearing, held on 6 April, on **The counterfeit and pirated products industry**, which brought together prominent experts from industry, business and workers' associations, relevant platforms, and the Commission.

“The Commission has failed to come up with a robust legal framework”, said **Antonello Pezzini**, rapporteur for the EESC own-initiative opinion on this subject. Mentioning his own experience and the never-ending struggle against counterfeiting in the Italian textiles sector and high-tech industries, he pointed out that Europe cannot continue using pre-2000 tools in this area.

The event was also attended by representatives from some of the industries that are most affected – including the leather, pharmaceuticals, toy, construction and luxury sectors – who reported on the challenges they have encountered with counterfeiting and what they are doing to tackle the problem. (sma)



## Balkan Employers' Round Table – Current Challenges and Future Prospects

by the EESC's Employers' Group

The importance of social dialogue, the role of employers' organisations, the economic situation in the Balkan countries, progress in the accession process and current political challenges: these were the main topics of the discussions held at the Balkan Employers' Round Table, which took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on 22 March 2017. The event brought together representatives of employers' organisations from Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The representatives of the employers' organisations attending the meeting briefed one another on the current political and economic developments in their respective countries. Employers from the countries wishing to join the EU set out a number of the challenges their countries were facing, such as the competitiveness gap and slow progress in the negotiations. The participants agreed that building up regional cooperation would help prepare countries for EU membership.



Concluding the conference, Jacek Krawczyk, President of the Employers' Group, underlined that the group was committed to pursuing co-operation with employers and business organisations from the Balkans.

The conference was jointly organised by the Employers' Group and the Association of Employers of Slovenia (ZDS). (lj) ●

## Workers' Group to discuss Maltese presidency programme and EU trade policy

by the EESC's Workers' Group

The EESC's Workers' Group will hold an extraordinary meeting in Malta on 11-12 May on the occasion of the Maltese presidency.

The first day will be devoted to the economic and social situation in the host country and the priorities and programme of the Maltese presidency. A welcome address by Workers' Group President **Gabriele Bischoff** will open an important panel discussion. Prime Minister **Joseph Muscat** will give a speech on the challenges for the Maltese Presidency and the results. With the Minister for the Family and

Social Solidarity, **Michael Farrugia**, the Minister for Finance, **Edward Scicluna**, the Minister for Education and Employment, **Evarist Bartolo**, and the Minister for Tourism, **Edward Zammit Lewis**, we will address social and economic cohesion, the labour market situation and industrial relations in Malta and in the EU.

Discussions will focus on the urgent need to relaunch the European project through a range of policies that deliver upward convergence between and within EU countries in terms of living and working conditions. Workers and citizens will only regain their trust in the EU if it finds and delivers concrete

solutions to their problems, by providing quality jobs and full employment, equal economic and social opportunities, social protection and personal security and well-being.

The second day will be about how to achieve a fairer, more transparent EU trade policy which actually benefits workers and citizens without jeopardising social standards or the freedom of trade unions. Important contributions are expected by labour law professor **Reingard Zimmer** and Walloon government representative **Thierry Delaval** on CETA. (mg) ●

## 2030 Agenda for sustainable development: a new frontier for rights and progress in the EU, 22-23 May 2017, Brussels

by the EESC's Various Interests Group

Embarking on a "collective journey... to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty..." and "delivering a new universal Agenda... which will establish human rights for all" are very ambitious objectives. However, moving from declarations to tangible action is even more challenging, thus effective governance of the 2030 Agenda is of paramount importance. Without doubt, the agenda will only become a reality if citizens actively support the necessary transitions and civil society is directly involved throughout the process.

With this in mind, the conference organised by the Various Interests Group will take a four-pronged approach:

- Firstly, it aims to reaffirm that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is composed of three equal dimensions (economic, social and environmental), which are intrinsically linked, mutually reinforcing and indivisible. Progress in implementing the sustainable development goals (SDGs) will depend on the extent to which the political, policy and technical decisions reflect this interconnectivity. There is therefore a need to measure growth 'beyond GDP' and to move from indicators to policy design.
- Secondly, the event will showcase the opportunities that the 2030 Agenda offers to develop a much-needed positive narrative on democracy and sustainable European growth. Without doubt,

the 2030 Agenda is the most appropriate framework to guide European and national strategies in dealing with current and future societal changes. The language of rights (both universal and community) provides the overall guiding framework for such an approach.

- The third objective will be to improve communication on the benefits of implementing the SDGs, for both individuals and communities. To this end, a number of case studies on local grassroots initiatives will be presented.
- Finally, the fourth objective will be to explore the most effective role for civil society in the governing and implementing the SDGs at both national and European level, with a view to jointly delivering the 2030 Agenda. (cl) ●

## NEW PUBLICATIONS

### How civil society organisations assist refugees and migrants in the EU

#### Successful experiences and promising practices from the 2016 EESC Civil Society Prize

The 284 initiatives entered for the 2016 Civil Society Prize provide an inspiring set of experiences and successful practices, highlighting the role that civil society plays in providing humanitarian assistance and social solidarity and in contributing to the socio-economic inclusion of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in the EU.

This publication provides a general overview of the Civil Society Prize and presents the five winning projects as well as a selection of initiatives put forward by other candidates. The initiatives have been grouped under eight themes and areas of intervention. The brochure provides an up-to-date



**How Civil Society Organisations Assist Refugees and Migrants in the EU:** Successful experiences and promising practices from the 2016 EESC Civil Society Prize



snapshot of civil society organisations engaged in the field.

The brochure is available online as well as in paper format in EN, FR and DE at: How Civil Society Organisations Assist Refugees and Migrants in the EU | European Economic and Social Committee. (fgr) ●

### The EU's 60th anniversary in Paris



On 24 March, EESC member **Thierry Libaert** (FR – Various Interests Group) spoke on behalf of the European

Economic and Social Committee at a high-level event in Paris for the EU's 60th anniversary. EESC French members **Christophe Lefevre** (Workers' Group), **Laure Batut** (Workers' Group) and **Emmanuelle Butaud** (Employers' Group) also attended the event, which was hosted by the mayor of Paris and sponsored by the European Commission Representation and the European Parliament Information Office in Paris, the French chapter of the European Movement as well as the EESC itself. (dm) ●

### European active citizenship passport now online

The **European Passport to Active Citizenship (EPTAC)**, so far available in print in the EU's 23 official languages, has been one of the EESC's most successful publications. We are happy to announce the launch of its **electronic version**, which offers a **dynamic interface** with additional facts and functionalities as well as quick links, quizzes and infographics to illustrate the information and show citizens' rights at a glance.

The passport links individual citizens, civil society organisations and their ideas with EU institutions and continent-wide decision-making. It is **designed to assist and guide citizens in making their voice heard** by encouraging them to ask some basic questions about timing (*when should*



*you take action?*), cooperation (*who should you join forces with?*) and tools (*what available participatory instrument should you use?*) in connection with **active citizenship** and **participatory democracy** in the EU.

This electronic version is available in EN/FR/DE. (fgr) ●

EESC info in 23 languages: [http://www.eesc.europa.eu/activities/press/eescinfo/index\\_en.asp](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/activities/press/eescinfo/index_en.asp)

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## Our youth believes in Europe – we must not disappoint them!



Dear readers,

I'd like to open this special issue of our newsletter by reflecting on the lessons we can learn from the 8th *Your Europe, Your Say!* that took place at the end of March, and by sharing with you some of the ideas, hopes and concerns that the young Europeans who took part in it asked us to convey to EU leaders.

Following this two-day event, I can confidently say that I am very positive about Europe's future. These young people are the proof that our youth is on the right track. They have shown that they are smart, and that they also care about their fellow Europeans and about the environment we all live

in. They are keen to contribute to a fair, prosperous and peaceful future. Last but not least, they believe in Europe. They trust in the power of unity, cohesion and solidarity.

I count on Europe's youth to be our present and future, as our impressively articulate 17-year-old Cypriot essayist reminded us in the opening session, and I urge them to use all the means and tools they have to make their voices heard.

I call on national governments and EU institutions to boost investment in programmes such as Erasmus (I can proudly say that I'm an "Erasmus product"), and encourage more teenagers to get part of their education or vocational training in other Member States. This is important not only to increase mutual understanding, but also to motivate young people to improve their knowledge of foreign languages. As we all know, foreign languages open doors and build bridges.

For me, it was not surprising that two of the three most popular proposals pointed to the need to build a common European narrative, whether through entertaining but informative audiovisual content and social media, or through school history books.

The young participants called on leaders to stimulate interest in politics by focusing on "attractive content" about the European Union. I would add that all European stakeholders – political leaders and members of parliaments, but also we as organised civil society – need to tell Europe's story, take ownership of the project and show what huge progress it has achieved in 60 years – economically, socially and in terms of how much European society has come to value and be a global champion of the environment. Nor must we forget that it has succeeded in integrating 13 countries which until recently were separated from the rest of us. This is one of the landmarks of 20th century history.

For our young Europeans it is also important to have a shared understanding of European history – from east to west and from north to south. It is important for schools to teach, from a European perspective – focusing on facts, without blame or shame – about the two 20th-century wars that destroyed the hopes and lives of millions of people, and take a deeper look at the causes: why did so much dissatisfaction and hatred spread like an infectious disease through the continent? How did some terrifying authoritarian leaders manage to take over so much power? How could it resurface again on the Balkans late in the century? – Most importantly, we need to learn lessons from this history – first and foremost, that **whatever the problems we face in Europe, we must never give nationalism a chance to tear us apart. We owe this to our European youth. And we all owe it to Europe.**

Gonçalo Lobo Xavier  
EESC Vice-President

## Your Europe, Your Say! 2017 EESC asks European youth: EU@60: Where to next?



**"You are our present and future, and Europe needs you": with these words, EESC Vice-President Gonçalo Lobo Xavier welcomed 99 young people to the yearly Your Europe, Your Say! event organised by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). The Vice-President encouraged them to use this unique chance to mingle with their European peers, apply their foreign language skills, learn about each other and make new friends who can change their lives and perceptions about this magnificent project called European Union.**

On 30-31 March, the EESC held its annual youth event **Your Europe – Your Say!**. As it was taking place in the wake of the 60th anniversary of the European project and of the European Economic and Social Committee itself, the EESC asked the young participants: **"EU@60: Where to next?"**. From over 680 applications, 33 schools had been selected back in December, each sending three pupils and a teacher to Brussels to discuss the future of Europe, and indeed their own future, from a teenager's perspective.

President **Georges Dassis** said in his opening speech that since the financial crisis – "which did not even have its origin in Europe, but in the US" –, the image of the EU project had been somewhat tarnished. "Europe has lost its shine. One of the reasons is that people sometimes have the impression that this Europe only belongs to big industries and banks, but Europe belongs first and foremost to

European citizens." Recalling his own youth and how he had to go to work at the age of 12 – as many of his generation did – he also reminded young people to shoulder their responsibility: "From the seventies on, we have experienced steadily growing prosperity. But things that you take for granted today did not fall from the sky. Older generations – your parents and grandparents – have built Europe's prosperity, often at the cost of great sacrifices. Now it is your task to ensure that this Europe stays a continent of welfare and peace and it's also your task to react and stand up against populists who want to demolish our Europe."

In welcoming the young people, European Commission Vice-President **Jyrki Katainen** referred to this week's final Brexit decision: "It is a sad moment when one member of a community leaves, but we must also see this as an opportunity to create a new EU with 27 countries and possibly other countries joining us in the future." Referring to the *Your Europe, Your Say!* discussions, he encouraged the young people to talk about the Europe they want and keep in mind that "the logic behind the EU is that so many global challenges, such as security, climate change or migration, cannot be tackled by one single member

state but need the combined forces of 27 states."

During this one and a half day event, the young participants worked together in break-out groups and plenary sessions to trace their course for the future of Europe and work out proposals on how to achieve their goals. At the end, they voted and selected three proposals. These will now be sent to the Commission, which, Mr Katainen, stressed, is keen to hear their feedback on the five scenarios for the future of Europe set out in European Commission President Juncker's White Paper.

The 33 teachers also had a very active task in the success of YEYS, by preparing the students and accompanying them on their trip to Brussels. They enjoyed a parallel networking session and a special visit to the European Parliament visitors' centre (Parlamentarium), had a chance to share best practices and to learn more about the EESC's role. "Listen to your teachers", said **Lobo Xavier**, "they do a tremendous job in supporting you and sharing value with you".

This was the eighth consecutive time the EESC organised *Your Europe, Your Say!* and the ever growing number of applications as well as young people's enthusiastic participation confirmed that there is a need for events like *Your Europe, Your Say!* in order to give young people a platform where they can make their voices heard. (sma) ●







## Young Europeans call on the EU to tackle food waste and poverty

Better monitoring and management of food waste, a European history curriculum to combat nationalism, and a Europe day for schools to improve young people's understanding of the EU: these were the main recommendations made to policy-makers by students taking part in *Your Europe, Your Say!* (YEYS) event, with a view to tackling the challenges faced by the EU.

At the youth event organised by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), a group of 100 bright secondary-school students from 33 schools in the EU 28 and the five candidate countries gathered to share fresh ideas on the direction the EU should take in the years to come.

"Many people believe the young generation is nothing more than a future in the making", said **Andri Pandoura**, the 17-year-old winner of the 2016 European Youth Essay Competition. "But we are not. We are the present, a present that cares and has the potential if not to change the world, then at least to try. This is why we need more investment in youth training, programmes and conferences, and, most importantly, more trust in the young generation."

The group discussed current hot topics including youth unemployment, integration of migrants, social and gender inequalities, the environment, economic recovery, terrorism and security. They then came up with ten specific proposals for policy-makers.

After an intense and lively debate on the different proposals, the students agreed on three priorities for improving the future of the European Union:

- reduce food waste to help those living in poverty and promote sustainability;
- combat nationalism through interactive education and an agreed history curriculum;
- increase political interest in Europe by tapping the potential of social media and education, introducing attractive content and a Europe day for schools.

EESC members and policy-makers were struck by the students' capacity to think out of the box and reflect on the main issues currently affecting European societies.

"You are our present and future. Europe needs you", said EESC Vice-President **Gonçalo Lobo Xavier** in his opening speech. "You will have the opportunity to be heard no matter what your beliefs, race or colour, and that is priceless. The big reward is to meet people from everywhere and to state your position on the future of Europe."

### Our young people's priorities

The students demonstrated their concern about environmental issues and poverty by voting for the proposal to **reduce food waste and help people living in poverty**. One student who made the case for the winning proposal said: "Better monitoring of agricultural processes is urgently needed to differentiate safe from unsafe food. The EU has not done enough to reduce waste and encourage food donation to shelters for the hungry".

Education was identified as one of the most important tools to help address current challenges and threats. "The problem we have is that people have lost faith in the EU", said another participant, who suggested introducing a **Europe day in schools** to increase general knowledge about the EU and stimulate debate.

The rise of nationalist sentiment in many Member States, sparked by fear of migration, unemployment or terrorism, was also in the spotlight. To combat this, the young delegates recommended allocating EU funding for the **creation of a European history curriculum** to teach young people about our common history and shared values.

One group proposed the setting up of **national schemes to help refugees integrate**, with EU financial and practical support: "We need an education programme to teach refugees about our culture, but we should also learn about theirs, because if they know about us but we don't know about them, then we will always be afraid of them and multiculturalism will never work".

Participants also flagged up the need to **stimulate youth entrepreneurship** through training courses and internship opportunities, stressing that "only by supporting entrepreneurship can our countries solve unemployment and increase living standards".

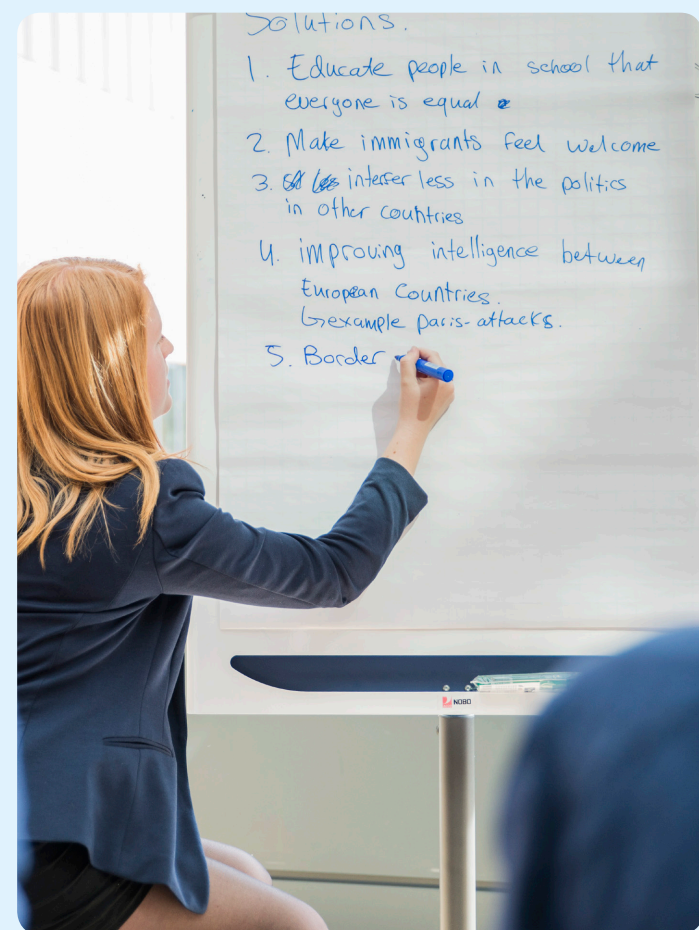
### Young voices to have an impact

The EESC will ensure that these young people's proposals for improving the future prospects of the EU are heard by law-makers by feeding the ideas into Committee opinions and communicating the three most popular recommendations to the European Commission. In addition, a delegation of YEYS students will present the winning proposals at the EESC's **Civil Society Days** on 26 and 27 June.

In her closing speech, EESC member **Evangelia Kekeleki** (Various Interests Group – EL) said: "It is fascinating to talk with you, the younger generation, and listen to your ideas. Today I am totally convinced that you are very good heirs to my generation. You can build another Europe, a Europe of values and solidarity, a Europe that works for its people and not only for money. It is up to you to create the Europe you deserve". (mq) ●



## What other priorities should the EU have?



YEYS students put forward and voted on 10 proposals. Here are the other seven, together with the number of votes they received:

- Create an EU organisation to help refugees integrate in EU countries – integration through education (36 votes)
- An ideal school system leading to youth employment (35 votes)
- Common environmental standards within EU borders (30 votes)
- Focus on the deeper causes of terrorism (+ role of the media) (26 votes)
- Stimulate local entrepreneurship through support programmes (20 votes)
- Gender equality (18 votes)
- Create national bodies to help people communicate with EU institutions directly without relying on national governments (15 votes)

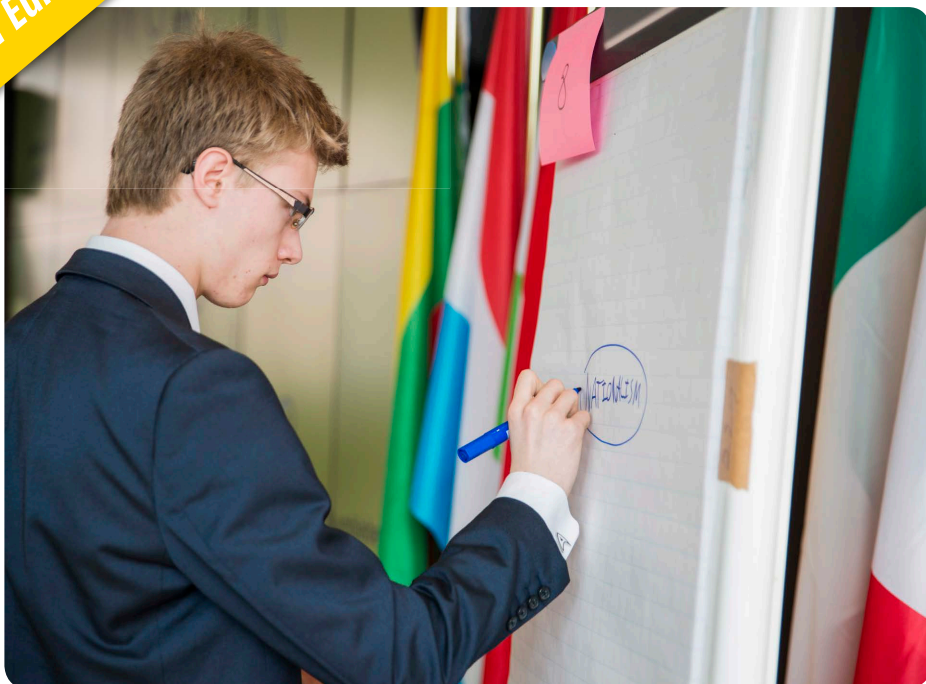
## Members' involvement

A special thank you goes to all the EESC members who visited the schools for their commitment in preparing the students for their debate in Brussels: Martina Širhalová, Martin Siecker, Andreas Pavlikkas, Gunta Anca, Lidija Pavić-Rogošić, Marie Zvolská, Cristian Pirvulescu, Séamus Boland, Roman Haken, Dimitar Manolov, Alfred

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# YEYS in the words of students



## Nationalism

“Nationalism is destroying the fabric Europe is made of”

“The difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is at the root of nationalism”

“Speaking more than one language breaks the barrier of stereotypes and combats nationalism”

“On nationalism, it all goes back to the education system – if students have access to more exchange programmes, this can offer different perspectives for young people and they can challenge what they are being taught in classrooms, because professors of politics might have their own agenda”

## Environment

“Recycling is a global problem and we all have to take part in it. People who don’t recycle should be punished by a fine or a higher tax”

“It is important to spread awareness of the problems related to the environment: we need to educate EU citizens”



## Education

“School is the basis of society, and it is creating robots, not humans. It is a process that values grades more than learning.”

“We should let young people say what they want to change in their education system”

“We should promote learning-by-doing and we should let students and teachers have an influence on what they’re teaching and learning in school.”

## Youth participation

“The EU should bring the decision-making power closer to people through social media, TV and through the creation of an institutional forum for young people from all Member States so youth can feel listened to”

“Politicians should consult citizens more often”



## Migration and refugees

“The integration of refugees should go both ways. They need to understand the culture of the host country, but people from the host country should also try to understand refugees’ culture.”





## Terrorism and security

“ We currently address terrorism by trying to repress it with physical and military actions, but looking at the deeper causes, it is clear that they are marginalised people who believe their only resource is to create terror for their agendas to be presented on TV and mass media. ”

“ By giving less significance to terrorist attacks on the media and social media, we will defeat the purpose of terrorism. ”

“ People do not think of terrorism outside the harmful stereotype of extremist Islam, but other groups like the far right are also committing acts of terror ”.

## European integration

“ I think peace is important because it is the basis of the EU and everything that it stands for ”

“ The Euro – it unites us all, having a common currency makes everything easier ”

“ The EU doesn't need an army: creating a military culture is awful, there are higher values the EU should focus on ”

“ I think Europe is one country and we are all brothers and sisters with different accents ”

## The demographic challenge

“ Most countries have a declining birth rate in Europe and in 10 - 15 years this may become a serious issue. The lack of young people working and putting money into the economy would make it difficult to develop ”

## Gender equality

“ It's the 21st century! It should be totally normal to pursue careers and pursue your dreams, gender should not matter ”.

“ The problem in our society is that we teach girls how to take care of themselves but we don't teach men how to behave. The first step to reach gender equality is education in our homes and school ”

## YEYS

“ The most interesting thing about YEYS is that they always want to hear our proposals, our opinions about different topics affecting Europe nowadays and they are always asking. They let us talk, participate ”.

“ Your Europe, Your Say! is amazing, it should be institutionalised! ”