



EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

Over the past months, many European citizens have been gripped first by anxiety and then by pessimism. The social costs of the ongoing economic crisis are enormous in terms of youth unemployment, social exclusion and the worsening situation of more and more SMEs. We can't deny that there are reasons to be worried about our future, the future of Europeans.

But before we throw in the towel, we should look back at the history of the EU, and then we will see that it has been a collective success story which has always been threatened by different types of crises. A whole generation of Europeans has grown up with the values that forged this ambitious political, social and economic project. These principles have had significant results, two of which lie in the fact that the EU is the world's most attractive single market and that it represents the highest level of political integration among states anywhere in the world. Over the last 61 years, solidarity, integration and innovation have given our generation completely new and better opportunities. That is why we must not give up our values.

Standing by European values means combining a long-term vision with the capacity to react fast. On the one hand, the Europe 2020 strategy offers a comprehensive agenda of reforms designed to secure sustainable growth and to make the Union more resilient in the future. This is the way to improve competitiveness through innovation and to create better opportunities for young Europeans struggling to cope with the crisis. Our everyday work at the Committee has always focused on this long-term perspective, which involves adopting opinions and holding public hearings on all the issues affecting European civil society. These day-to-day efforts are our contribution to Europe's future.

However, the current situation demands immediate measures to secure confidence in our long-term project and this is what the Committee tried to do at its last plenary session. During this session, we discussed eurobonds, financial regulation and fiscal policy, once again offering our institution as a platform for exchanging different civil society viewpoints.

European citizens have elected very different governments over the last six decades. All these political representatives have made European integration a driver for welfare in Europe. The best example of this is the steady improvement to the single market, to which many EESC opinions and initiatives have contributed. The European Council meeting in December has agreed on a number of important measures, but European civil society, which we represent, tells us every day that we need more Europe. This is a message that we have been hearing for over 50 years at the EESC and this should encourage decision-makers to take the necessary actions.

Anna Maria Darmanin
Vice-President

Students' initiatives win EESC Civil Society Prize 2011



EESC Civil Society Prize winners

The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is the winner of the 2011 EESC Civil Society Prize for its SocialErasmus programme. Since its launch in 2008, hundreds of exchange students have volunteered for tasks ranging from planting trees to playing Santa Claus for children in local hospitals, donating blood or fighting forest fires.

The idea is to help students get connected with their host countries by encouraging them to take part in activities beneficial to the local community. 'Some people think international students come, take what they want, and then leave. But this project shows local people the benefits of Erasmus, and creates real integration,' explains ESN President Tania Berman.

The second prize went to European Alternatives for their annual TranseuropaFestival, which in May 2011 took place simultaneously in 12 European cities featuring music, films, exhibitions, lectures and debates. TranseuropaFestival is at once a cultural festival and a political event aimed at celebrating political integration, solidarity, social diversity, tolerance and exchange, over two weeks of free public events throughout Europe. 'We campaign for an alternative Europe, a democratic Europe created by the people, where all citizens are equal,' says Niccolò Milanese, Co-President of European Alternatives, which is made up of individual members and local groups in some 17 EU countries and beyond.

The third prize was awarded to the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU), which brings together secondary school student unions from 21 European countries and campaigns to boost school students' rights. Its 'Light on the rights' bus tour took off in autumn of 2010, when OBESSU activists made a 10 000 km bus trip through Europe, gaining an insight into the challenges facing school students from the Balkans to Finland. It was part of a wider project aimed at supporting the European Declaration of School Students Rights and the accompanying campaign 'Light on the rights'. 'We see the prize as a further push to promote the Declaration of School Student Rights,' says Secretary-General Viviana Galli.

For President Staffan Nilsson, the Civil Society Prize is a symbol to highlight the excellence of initiatives generated by civil society players in Europe who have developed projects having a positive impact on Europeans' lives and have promoted European identity and integration. For 2011, he chose the theme 'Dialogue and participation for EU values: integration, diversity, solidarity, tolerance'. (cw)

For more information, please visit:

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.organised-civil-society-prize-2011>

DIARY DATES

31 January 2012

EESC, Brussels: conference on 'The European Union moving towards a European energy community'

7 and 8 February 2012

EESC, Brussels: conference on 'Go sustainable, be responsible! European civil society on the road to Rio+20'

9 and 10 February 2012

EESC, Brussels: hearing on 'Revision of 1994 and 2005 EU aviation and airport guidelines'

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European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations 2012



The year 2012 is the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. It provides a chance for all of us to reflect on how Europeans are living longer and staying healthier than ever before — and to realise the opportunities that represents.

The challenge for politicians and stakeholders will be to improve opportunities for active ageing in

general and for living independently, in areas as diverse as employment, healthcare, social services, adult learning, volunteering, housing, IT services or transport.

The European Year seeks to raise awareness of the issues and the best ways of dealing with them. But above all it seeks to encourage all policymakers and stakeholders to set

themselves goals and take action to meet them. It should not just mean debating; it should start bringing tangible results. (ail)



More Europe: the only way out of the crisis



The second day of the 476th EESC plenary session opened with a statement from the President, entitled 'Overcoming the crisis — Towards a policy programme for sustainable recovery'. Mr Nilsson affirmed that there is only one way to drive the EU out of the financial, sovereign debt, economic and social crisis: deeper European integration. More Europe was needed in terms of fiscal policy, the mutualisation of sovereign risk and the restoration of long-term solvency, and also growth, competitiveness and jobs. The Community method must be reasserted and the Commission's leadership strengthened. Mr Nilsson emphasised how important it is to safeguard our economic and social model, and stated that the Committee was determined to deepen its network of national economic and social councils, as for the exit from the crisis to be acceptable

from a social standpoint all players would have to be involved.

J.-P. Delevoye, President of the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council, gave a realistic and pro-European speech, convinced that 'Europe is not the problem but the solution'. For him, deeper integration meant, above all, the Member States recognising the EU's assets.

The three group presidents expressed their support for both speakers. George Dassis (Workers' Group) shared his concern about the power of the financial markets. Luca Jahier (Various Interests Group) called for a structured system of eurobonds to avoid more financial turbulence. Henri Malosse (Employers' Group) pointed out the need for better education and stronger support for SMEs. (asp/mvd) ●

The single European sky is too important to fail



From left to right: Jacek Krawczyk, Vice-President of the European Economic and Social Committee; Sławomir Nowak, Polish Minister for Transport, Construction and Maritime Economy; and Siim Kallas, Vice-President of European Commission responsible for transport
Source: Polish Ministry of Transport, Construction and Maritime Economy

There was a palpable sense of urgency at the high-level conference held in Warsaw on 28 November to look into the faltering implementation of the 'Single European sky II' package. Adopted two years ago and intended to do away with the costly and inefficient division of European airspace along national borders, the package has not yet been put into effect.

'The creation of a single European airspace is still far off. We risk failing to meet ever-growing demand for air travel in the coming years,' warned Siim Kallas, EU Transport Commissioner. His view was echoed by Jacek Krawczyk, EESC Vice-President and rapporteur of numerous opinions on SES II. 'Failure to implement the

package will have a hugely negative impact on the future of European aviation and will hit operators and passengers alike,' Mr Krawczyk said.

The key element of the package is the establishment of functional airspace blocks (FAB), within which navigation services are provided on the basis of stringent performance requirements and regardless of national borders. However, out of nine blocks envisaged, only two have so far been signed into existence: Denmark-Sweden and United Kingdom-Ireland. Urging countries that are dragging their feet over establishing FABs to act, Jacek Krawczyk said: '*Pacta sunt servanda*. You cannot just walk away from what you have agreed on.'

The implementation delay was further highlighted by Commissioner Kallas, who said that as few as five EU countries had fulfilled the agreed capacity and cost-efficiency targets. 'I am not here to name and shame particular countries but it is worryingly clear that the time for reflection is over. We need to deliver now,' he said.

In line with his country's open-door policy, Sławomir Nowak, the new Polish Minister for Transport, Construction and Maritime Economy, representing the Polish Presidency, made it clear that 'the external dimension of the single sky is of key importance to Poland'. Referring to the title of the conference, 'Implementation of the single European sky (SES) and its extension beyond the European Union', he said that 'the common aviation area must not stop at EU borders'.

The conference was concluded by the adoption of the Warsaw declaration reiterating the need for rapid implementation of SES II, which 'will deliver significant benefits to all actors involved'. 'The single European sky is too important to fail,' it said.

This successful conference hosted some 300 participants and was a joint event of the Polish EU Council Presidency, the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee. (mb) ●

White Paper on transport



From left to right: Pierre Jean Coulon, EESC rapporteur; Siim Kallas, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for transport; Staffan Nilsson, EESC President; Jacki Davis, conference moderator; Anna Midera, Deputy Director, Polish Ministry of Transport, Construction and Maritime Economy; and Antonio Costa, COR rapporteur.

On 5 December 2011, the EESC and the European Commission held a one-day joint conference entitled 'The White Paper on transport — The viewpoint of European civil society' at the EESC headquarters. The event brought together a broad range of transport users and stakeholders to discuss their views on this major policy document. As President Nilsson underlined, 'We are here today because the measures proposed in the EU plan must be fully endorsed by European civil society to deliver

their full benefits. The main aim of today's event is therefore to discuss the Commission proposal from a critical perspective.'

The European Commission presented its 'Roadmap to a single European transport area' in March 2011. It includes a set of 40 specific initiatives for the next decade aimed at building a competitive transport system, which will increase mobility, remove major barriers in key areas and fuel growth and employment. At the same time,

the proposals will dramatically reduce Europe's dependence on imported oil and achieve a 60% cut in carbon emissions in transport by 2050.

Interested parties were consulted on a number of occasions while the White Paper was being drafted and it has been under scrutiny from EU stakeholders since publication. The conference, however, gave the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Parliament the

opportunity to communicate their opinions to a wider audience. Pierre Jean Coulon, rapporteur for the EESC opinion, stressed that: 'Striking the right balance between meeting the long-term emission reduction targets set out in the road map and continuing to meet the transport needs of European society will clearly be a tall order and will call for more guidance from the Commission.'

Three European citizens were also invited to play an active part in the

discussions by expressing their main expectations as regular transport users. 'Like the European Commission, we are aware that some of the proposals made in the White Paper might suffer from a lack of political and public consensus,' stressed the EESC President. 'Over the next three years, the Committee will work on promoting a regular debate with civil society on the implementation of the White Paper's measures,' he added. (ac) ●



EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

The upcoming United Nations summit-level Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio will focus on greening the economy and reducing poverty, which are interlinked. The summit aims to renew the commitment of our political leaders to meet global sustainable development milestones.

While such initiatives should be applauded, the conference is an apt reminder that politics and policy alone cannot defeat poverty and disease, or guarantee clean water and air. Less than five years on from the millennium development goals, nearly a billion people are still suffering from hunger.

These issues recognise no borders. Renewed political commitment alone cannot build schools, clean our air or change our excessive consumerist behaviour. Nine planet Earths would be required to absorb the world's carbon if every person had the same consumer lifestyle as that enjoyed in rich countries.

Global responsibility has to be taken by governments at all levels. For it to work, civil society will need to take part in all the transitional phases. This involves strategising and planning, implementing changes and ensuring consistent follow-up. Civil society must have a say in Rio+20 because it is civil society which will actually make the policy, govern and implement behavioural changes towards a sustainable and greener future. Civil society can pave the way for transition.

The EESC will push world leaders at Rio to invest in sustainable technologies and projects while phasing out the types of subsidies that damage the environment. A fair transition to a green economy requires a dialogue with civil society and the social partners on the effects of transition on the labour market and society at large.

We need to guarantee dialogue between and among civil society and decision-makers. Civil societies will both recommend and implement the necessary policy recommendations.

We are ready. We are part of the change.

Staffan Nilsson
EESC President

Laying the ground for Rio+20



European
civil society
on the road to

The EESC is to hold a major conference on sustainable development on 7 and 8 February 2012 in the run-up to the United Nations Rio+20 summit in June. The purpose of the EESC conference is to voice the positions of European civil society on Rio+20 and to contribute to its success. The EESC will forward its conclusions to the negotiating parties at the UN conference and to civil society partners around the world.

Following an introduction to the current status of the Rio+20 process, the EESC conference will focus on the green economy as a means of enhancing sustainable development by respecting the limits of natural resources. The first general debate will tackle the European contribution to sustainability, while the second will address sustainable development in non-EU countries.

The four workshops listed below will provide the opportunity to discuss

issues in more depth and to develop conference conclusions:

- Food, water and energy for everyone;
- Sustainable consumption and production;
- A fair transition to a green economy — the social dimension; and
- Involving civil society in the transition to a green economy.

For the past year, the EESC has been coordinating with stakeholders in the EU and the rest of the world to prepare for Rio+20. It also intends to issue a joint statement with its counterparts in Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa, to be presented at/to the UN conference.

After a broad consultation of European civil society organised by

the EESC's Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) through a series of hearings, the Committee adopted an opinion setting out civil society's contributions to Rio+20 in September 2011. This opinion contributed to the European Union's position on sustainable development, which was then submitted to the UN Rio+20 conference secretariat.

The EESC's position is that Rio+20 must push for a global shift towards a green and sustainable economy. Heads of government will also need to engage in the conference. And finally, global responsibility has to be taken by all governments at all levels and by civil society.

The EU also needs to promote a change in consumption behaviour and ensure that the transition towards a greener economy does not come at the expense of people living just above or below the poverty line. For this reason, eradicating poverty and meeting the seemingly elusive millennium development goals must figure high on the Rio+20 agenda.

The EESC conference intends to pay particular attention to the environmental and social pillars of sustainable development. According to the Committee, any transition towards a greener economy must find a balanced synergy between the environment and social development. A greener economy should reinforce sustainable development, preserve natural resources and mitigate climate change. ●

Is a sustainable economy an unachievable goal?



Hans-Joachim Wilms,
President of the EESC's Sustainable
Development Observatory

Sustainability concerns so much more than just the environment. Sustainability cuts across our economies, governance and people from all walks of life. This is why solutions to global problems mean weaving sustainability into so many disparate policies.

Given our reliance on each other in a globalised world, it is astonishing that sustainable solutions are still lacking. Short-term benefits and

profit returns often ignore long-term consequences. As our demand for resources and energy increases, the overall challenges we face become increasingly complex. This is common sense.

The world as we know it is powered by the economy and operated by people. But the often devastating impact of our economic machine on the environment has direct consequences for billions of people. Water, a primary resource, is becoming scarcer in many regions that rely on arable and livestock farming. Fossil fuels poison our rivers and skies. Changes in the balance of nature mean that many plants and animals can no longer survive. These factors only exacerbate widespread poverty and poor health.

We need to decouple economic growth from environmental damage. This is the foundation of a green economy. A green economy can help

eliminate poverty and social injustice while preserving natural resources for future generations. To make it happen, the transition must respect the principles of justice, cooperation and shared responsibilities. But that takes a lot of effort and political will — two commodities too often in short supply.

The EESC, however, has a plan that could finally transform the world's fuel-guzzling engine into a more harmonised, just and sustainable economy. We are proposing a 'green economy' UN mandate based on six pillars: indicators; regulations; education; fiscal policy; research; and targets for a green economy.

We believe we can make it happen. We believe we can shift the balance back in favour of nature and people.

Hans-Joachim Wilms
President of the EESC's Sustainable
Development Observatory

The EESC has launched an online interactive platform to engage with its stakeholders, mainly for but not limited to civil society organisations willing to contribute to a joint European civil society input to Rio+20.

We are eager to learn from and exchange views with experts, organisations and citizens with a keen interest in sustainable development issues.

Take the road to Rio+20 with us here:

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/rio20-platform>



RIO+20, a time for change



The United Nations Secretary-General of the Rio+20 Conference, Sha Zukang, has the unenviable task of making sustainable development a functioning global policy. Twenty years after the Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro, leaders, high-level officials, civil society and institutions from around the world will gather once again in Brazil.

The aim is to agree to a set of broad binding principles that will secure a brighter future for everyone — and our natural planet. Yet, 20 years on, there is still no universally accepted definition for sustain-

able development. The stakes are nonetheless high. The EESC President, Staffan Nilsson, has called Rio+20 a 'make-or-break moment for a new economic order'.

In the run-up to the summit, divergent views have emerged on how best to address sustainable development. Two preparatory meetings have taken place, the first in May 2010 and the second in March 2011. The third and final meeting will be held at the end of May 2012. Such meetings provide an insight into what to expect in Rio.

'During the preparatory process so far, we have reviewed progress and gaps in implementing existing commitments, and we have identified new and emerging challenges,' said Mr Zukang. 'While there remains a diversity of views and perspectives, we have seen a growing convergence of understanding and approaches toward the two themes,' he added.

The conference will focus on greening the economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development. It will also aim to create an institutional framework for sustainable development. However, the EESC believes that success hinges on direct input from civil society. Consequently, the UN is actively mobilising civil society for a global conversation via the Internet and social networks.

The EESC is urging leaders to ensure that any transition towards a green economy is based on qualitative economic growth. Such growth involves eliminating poverty and social injustice. Indeed, the social dimension is imperative for sustainable development and a more just global society. ●

Action on Nepal



Nepal's struggle for food security is threatened by massive imports of hybrid seeds that are not suited to local climatic conditions and soils. The hybrid crops do not produce seeds for subsequent crops and require expensive chemicals.

'Every year, farmers are forced to purchase new seeds from the companies that manufacture them,' says Bed Prasad Khatiwada of ActionAid Nepal. 'To offset the costs, Nepal's government subsidises the imported seeds and chemicals.'

But the long-term effects and onus on monoculture agriculture are counter-productive, added Mr Khatiwada. Nepal's climate and environment range from subtropical to temperate to arctic. One crop cannot grow in all such conditions.

In 2009, hybrid maize crops failed, ruining the lives of thousands. In 2010, hybrid rice crops also failed. Nepal's government compensated the farmers with chemicals for next season's harvest.

'In September [2011], Monsanto signed a deal with USAID in Nepal. They wanted to partner with Nepal's Ministry of Agriculture,' Mr Khatiwada told *EESC info*. 'But local farmers protested and the government backed off.'

'We [ActionAid] are not against Monsanto but we are against imported hybrid seeds that are not climate-treatable and sustainable in terms of supply and costs,' he continued, adding that Nepal's agriculture employs around 75 % of its population and accounts for nearly 34 % of its GDP.

'The EESC is convinced that the transition to a green economy must be integrated into an overarching sustainable development strategy. Active policy measures are needed to ensure a fair transition to a green economy,' he added. These include measures to strike a balance between green jobs created and jobs lost, as well as to apply the 'decent work' principles of

In 2008, through ActionAid Nepal, Mr Khatiwada started a seed bank of 60 different cereals and legumes. The seeds are endogenous and produce high-yield crops that help pave the way to greater food security, he explained. Around 400 Nepalese farmers use the seed bank. The project is set to expand in 2012.

The numerous challenges faced by ActionAid's Nepal project are similar to those experienced by local communities throughout the world. The EESC considers access to resources, food and energy for everyone as a top priority on the global sustainability agenda.

Any transition to sustainable development must address the social dimension, according to the EESC opinion 'Rio+20: towards the green economy and better governance'. Indeed, food security and sustainable agriculture is one of seven top priorities that will be addressed at the summit.

However, Kirsten Hjørholm Sørensen, policy adviser at ActionAid Denmark, fears the UN summit may not take into consideration the concerns addressed by developing countries, like Nepal's small farming communities. 'The risk at Rio+20 is the focus on the transition towards the green economy because it may replace one position of power, enjoyed by rich countries, with another,' she told *EESC info*. Any transition must be coupled with sharing technology, debt relief, ensuring democratic participation and action on climate change, she added. ●

the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to them, and to maintain ongoing dialogue between governments and social players. Achieving these goals would require significant public funding to be allocated to the social dimension of the green economy. ●

A green economy requires buy-in from a green society



Without the active involvement of civil society, Rio+20 will not be able to navigate efforts to green the economy, said EESC member Hans-Joachim Wilms.

As part of European preparations for Rio+20, the EU and its Member States submitted their collective position to the conference's secretariat in November (see related article). In keeping with the Union's stance towards the importance of bolstering civil society involvement, the EESC's aim was to provide valuable input to this document.

'For us at the EESC, it's very important to involve civil society from the outset,' said Mr Wilms (Workers' Group, Germany), the rapporteur for the EESC's opinion. 'We didn't just want to produce a big report, [...] we wanted to find answers and, above all, get the whole of civil society on board,' added Mr Wilms, who is also the chair of the Sustainable Development Observatory.

In the opinion on European civil society contributions to Rio+20, the EESC welcomed the fact that the EU is also now addressing 'the social

dimension of sustainable development'. However, the European Commission, in its Rio+20 communication, did not stress the social dimension enough, according to the Committee.

'A successful transition to a sustainable economy depends on it being accepted and supported by civil society,' said Mr Wilms, noting that this required the involvement of non-governmental organisations and businesses before, during and after the conference, not just internationally, but also at regional, national and local levels. This is because civil society — especially consumers and businesses — is going to have to invest heavily in new innovations, change its behaviour and perhaps even make some sacrifices.

In addition to its call for full civil society participation in the Rio+20 process, the opinion on which Mr Wilms worked urged the EU to put its own house in order so as to strengthen its position in the negotiations and to act as a role model for other regions.

Efforts to green the economy, he pointed out, hold the potential to help eradicate the poverty that keeps over a billion people in hunger and destitution, and to create millions of new and sustainable jobs.



Towards the low-carbon revolution



Low-carbon economic prosperity is possible, but it needs the right policies, technologies and political commitment. Above all, it requires a revolution in attitudes, asserts EESC member Richard Adams (Various Interests Group, United Kingdom).

As the global population passes the 7 billion mark, one thing seems certain — humanity is consuming too many resources and causing too much pollution for the earth to handle.

‘The fundamental principles underlying sustainable economics need to be taken to heart,’ stressed Mr Adams, who is also a consultant in social, environmental and ethical business. These principles include striking a sustainable balance between the global economy and ecosystem and concentrating on meeting people’s needs rather than their wants.

In the belief that real change begins at home, the EU has been making

significant strides in shrinking its climate footprint. Over the past two decades, it has slashed its emissions by 16 % while its economy has grown by 40 % — which demonstrates that economic growth coupled with low emissions is a feasible reality.

The EU is also on track to meet its 2020 targets of cutting emissions to 20 % below their 1990 levels and boosting the share of renewable resources in its energy mix to 20 %. However, Europe is currently only

half way towards achieving its target of improving energy efficiency by 20 %.

Looking beyond 2020, the European Commission has unveiled its ‘Road map for moving to a competitive low-carbon economy in 2050’ which seeks to reduce European emissions by a staggering 80–95 % by the middle of the century. Achieving this requires substantial investment in, among other things, new renewable energy, energy-efficient buildings,

hybrid and electric vehicles, ‘smart’ energy grids and low-carbon power generation.

In its opinion on the road map, which was compiled by Mr Adams, the EESC ‘urges all the European institutions to take it fully into account as a guide’. In order to pave the way to the 2050 targets, the EESC believes more ambitious intermediary goals are required, such as raising the 2020 emission targets to a 25 % reduction, and aiming for a 40 % cut by 2030.

The opinion also recommended that the Commission put together ‘a comprehensive new package of measures to incentivise the massive new investment needed’. In addition, it calls for civil society to ‘be fully involved through structured and permanent dialogue on the particular strategic plans’.

This is necessary because the transition to a low-carbon economy ‘will require a radical change in public attitudes towards a simpler, low-carbon lifestyle to give politicians the confidence to make the necessary decisions’, emphasised Mr Adams. ‘In short, economic sustainability needs a revolution in people’s expectations and values.’

‘Our global institutions are still in their infancy, unable to carry the burden of the future,’ he concluded. ‘My hope is that the EU will keep trying to find a way forward.’ ●

Crystallising Europe’s resourcefulness



The EU’s strategy for becoming more resource efficient is promising but requires fleshing out with specific targets, according to EESC member Lutz Ribbe.

The Europe 2020 strategy launched seven ‘flagship initiatives’

aimed at promoting smart, green and inclusive growth over the current decade. These include the ‘resource-efficient Europe’ flagship which seeks to exploit scarce resources — from food and water to raw materials — in both a smarter and more efficient way.

The initiative places resource efficiency as the guiding principle for EU policies in a wide and diverse range of areas, including energy, transport, climate change, industry, commodities, agriculture, fisheries, biodiversity and regional development. In order to empower the

various stakeholders to fulfil their resource-efficiency potential, the Commission has outlined a number of specific sub-strategies, including a low-carbon road map (see above).

‘The EESC welcomes the flagship initiative, but considers it too vague,’ noted Lutz Ribbe (Various Interests Group, Germany) who was the rapporteur for the EESC’s opinion on the initiative. ‘It is essential to set out in the most concrete terms possible what changes are needed and how these are to be implemented.’

For the 20 individual sub-initiatives outlined, the EESC asked the Commission to flesh out what exactly it means by ‘resource efficiency’; what can already be achieved through technical optimisation; which sectors precisely require ‘significant transition’; and what specific behavioural changes consumers and producers are required to make.

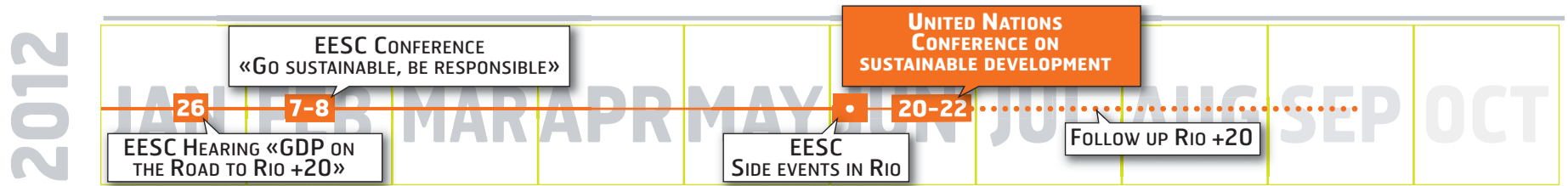
Moreover, the EESC questions why ‘resource-efficient Europe’ has been made part of the Europe 2020 strategy. ‘Resource-efficient Europe is a central part of the sustainable

development strategy, but no substitute for it,’ explained Ribbe, who is the Director of the Department for Nature Conservation Policy of the European Nature Heritage Fund (EuroNatur).

To highlight the crucial importance of getting it right, Ribbe noted that ‘the negative consequences of unsustainable economics will impact fully on future generations and have to be borne by them.’

‘The challenge and the question is how to develop a collective sense of responsibility towards future generations amongst those alive today,’ he said. ‘We need to move beyond our focus on GDP, so a fundamental public debate on the concept of growth is overdue.’

‘It is absolutely crucial that civil society and business are properly included in this process from the outset,’ Ribbe concluded. ●



Young businesses sidelined



Green investments should theoretically help to create new business opportunities and jobs in numerous sectors. But Europe's economic dynamism and venture capital remain wholly inadequate, according to Dimitris Tsigos, President of the European Confederation of Young Entrepreneurs.

'The key problem is capital and R & D to create new products and services which require risk financing,' said Mr Tsigos, adding that Europe's single market has yet to reach the real economy. 'Risk financing for start-ups in Europe is terrible when compared to the USA,' he continued.

Europe's short-term trends in investment, employment and unem-

ployment, as well as GDP per capita and labour productivity, remain bleak. Nearly one third of Europe's population aged 25 to 64 still have no formal qualifications.

Given such conditions, creating and finding opportunities for businesses is proving difficult. Despite the bleak outlook, Mr Tsigos believes that the current financial crisis may actually help Europe to boost innovation in the real market among enterprising SMEs.

Yet Europe's young entrepreneurs are struggling to get new and greener businesses into jittery markets. Banks are still not lending. And buyers for unproven products are not guaran-

teed — especially if you are young, claims Codrin Paveliuc-Olariu, President of the Young Professionals in Local Development (YPLD). YPLD aims to empower local communities to grow faster and better.

'Young professionals are considered "second-rate" citizens of the world. Although highly qualified, the opinion of young professionals is not asked or taken into consideration by decision-makers,' said Mr Paveliuc-Olariu.

According to him, the result is that young professionals focus more on service-oriented businesses. The challenges they face, and indeed the barriers to upward labour mobility, are just too onerous for them to launch innovative businesses, he explained.

Creating the conditions for businesses to flourish in the transition towards a greener economy is pivotal for sustainable development, the EESC insists. The Committee wants policymakers at all levels of government to encourage the transition.

But this requires regulatory measures, fiscal policy instruments and public spending and investment. It also requires the involvement of enterprising individuals like Dimitris Tsigos and Codrin Paveliuc-Olariu. ●

Food for thought on sustainability



With a growing global population and tighter food supplies, European consumers and businesses can play a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability of the food supply chain, according to European Health and Consumer Policy Commissioner John Dalli.

The global food crises of recent years and the unacceptable fact that over a billion people in the world go hungry have ensured that food security will be high on the agenda at the Rio+20 conference.

'The economic crisis, increasing globalisation, climate change, increasing commodity prices and scarcity of commodities as well as sociodemographic changes are having a considerable impact on the food supply chain at every level,' explained Mr Dalli.

But the fact that there are now 7 billion mouths to feed, and agricultural surpluses have been in decline for years, does not mean that Europeans need to eat less so that others can eat more. One of the most vital contributions Europeans can make is to waste less.

'[Food waste and food packaging] are two very important aspects in the wider context of resource efficiency, the financial crisis, global food security and combating hunger,' said Mr Dalli.

Of the estimated 89 million tonnes of food waste produced in Europe each year, over 60 % can be avoided if consumers plan their shopping better, retailers manage their stocks more effectively and leftovers at restaurants get used,

according to a recent EU study. Reducing such unacceptable levels of food waste, Mr Dalli suggested, requires the scaling-up of current piecemeal awareness campaigns; it requires information tools, logistical improvements and food redistribution programmes such as food banks.

'Minimising food waste is a challenging task that requires the full commitment and cooperation of all actors along the food chain and public authorities to reduce environmental, economic and ethical impacts,' the Commissioner emphasised.

More broadly, the EESC is committed to promoting the idea of global food security, as highlighted by several of its initiatives including its recent 'Food for everyone — Towards a global deal' conference.

In his conclusions, EESC President Staffan Nilsson highlighted years of neglect and underinvestment in the developing world's agricultural sector as one of the most important reasons for strains on global food supply. Remedying this requires greater investment in agriculture and agricultural research and innovation, as well as effective market and environmental policies, he argued.

'[We must] recognise that food security is a global issue and that it needs the involvement of all stakeholders, and in particular a strong contribution from farmers, consumers, the private sector, workers and NGOs,' Mr Nilsson said. ●

Greener economy, better jobs



The transition towards a greener economy aims to create decent work and high-quality jobs. But in the face of global recession nothing is guaranteed.

In Europe, trade unions welcomed the 2010 Cancun Declarations to ensure a 'just transition' to a low-carbon economy. However, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) slammed the European Commission's Energy Roadmap 2050 for failing to make any reference to how jobs and employment will be maintained and developed during the transition.

'A coherent EU energy policy is an essential condition for the move to a low-carbon and sustainable society, one which is sustainable in both social and environmental terms, via democratically controlled regulators that guarantee affordable prices for all and safety and security of supply and via social dialogue,' Emanuela Bonacina, ETUC press officer, told *EESC Info*.

The Energy Roadmap 2050 is part of the 'resource-efficiency flagship' of the Europe 2020 strategy. The European Commissioner for the Environment Janez Potočnik described the

road map as an agenda for a better environment, more sustainable lifestyles, and future growth. However, the EESC has also expressed reservations about the road map, calling it 'too vague'. The EESC opinion on 'resource-efficient Europe' argues that resource efficiency should be a separate stand-alone policy and not embedded into the Europe 2020 strategy.

Nonetheless, the prospect of creating new work, new businesses and more growth without destroying the environment is appealing for both Europe's trade unions and policy-

makers. But climate change and carbon-reduction targets cannot be sidelined or ignored, said the ETUC, warning that the economic crisis is eroding political will and undermining green policies. Investments are required to help guarantee the transition, it added.

Indeed, green investments generate more employment in the short and medium term, according to a report released earlier this year by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). According to the report,

evidence supports the view that such investments generate short-term opportunities. Such opportunities, continues the report, translate into higher long-term employment levels.

'The greener economy will be based on the capacity for research and innovation in green technologies, which should — through public policies, regulation and social dialogue — generate quality jobs and social progress,' concluded Judith Kirton-Darling, ETUC Confederation Secretary. ●

2011 Euromed Summit in Istanbul: an opportunity to take stock and to look realistically and positively to the future



From left to right: Dimitris Dimitriadis, President of the EESC Euromed Follow-up Committee; Staffan Nilsson, President of the EESC; Cevdet Yilmaz, Minister for Development of Turkey; Rifat Hisarciklioğlu, President of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB)

A pivotal year for the Euromed region culminated between 16 and 18 November in a key event for the region's civil society organisations. The 2011 annual summit of Euromed economic and social councils (ESCs) and similar institutions was the first major gathering of all sectors of civil society in the region since the beginning of the Arab uprising. With President Staffan Nilsson at the helm, the EESC delegation travelled to Istanbul to co-host the summit with the EESC's partners, the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey and the Turkish delegation of the EU-Turkey Joint Consultative Committee. The in-depth discussions at the summit will help to shape, amongst other things, EU policy towards civil

society in the Euromed region in the course of 2012.

As in previous years, the summit brought together representatives from economic and social councils, employers' organisations and trade unions, and other economic and social interest groups in the region, albeit with many new faces. The summit also saw, for the first time, a number of representatives from NGOs take part. The purpose of their involvement was to enhance ties between the new, vibrant NGO sector which is emerging in the region, and the socio-occupational organisations that continue to play a crucial role in the economic and political development of their countries.

As was to be expected in a year which has been described by most commentators as being a historic one for the Euromed region, the sense of anticipation was palpable as the summit got under way with two crucial themes — 'The policy response to the new environment in the region', where discussion centred on the outlines of future policy in the region, and 'The current and future role of civil society in a new UfM', a topic that is at the heart of the EESC's work and indeed has become pivotal in the eyes of all policymakers in the region.

These discussions were punctuated by the participation of high-level speakers such as Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Commissioner Štefan Füle and Turkish Development Minister Cevdet Yilmaz. Together with the participants they gave a flavour of what the priorities will be for the region looking ahead: consolidation of democracy and of basic human and social rights, regional economic integration and social development, amongst others. So there are clearly many challenges but also an overriding sense of optimism that civil society can make a major difference in the year ahead. (gh)

The 10th EU–China civil society round table: 'Time to go a step further in our partnership'



10th EU–China civil society round table, 1 and 2 December 2011

For the 10th time, the round table has brought together civil society representatives from China and the European Union to exchange ideas and best practices about issues of common interest. The meeting, hosted by the European Economic and Social Committee in Munich on 1 and 2 December 2011, addressed two main topics: sustainable urban development and the ageing population, as well as social security.

With regard to social protection, Staffan Nilsson, EESC President and Chair of the EU delegation, expressed his satisfaction that 'for the first time, on the sidelines of the G20 Summit, the B20 (business organisations of the G20 countries) and the L20 (trade union organisations of the G20 countries) issued a joint statement on employment, social protection, fundamental principles and rights at work and multilateral coherence'.

On demographic issues, Barbara Stamm, President of the Bavarian parliament, encouraged the audience to consider the low birth rate and increasing life expectancy not as a burden but as an opportunity to enhance intergenerational solidarity. According to Ursula Männle, Chair of the Committee for European Affairs in the Bavarian parliament, these two issues need to be tackled at national level, in line with the subsidiarity principle.

On the subject of sustainable cities, the EESC president reminded the audience that the next EU–China Summit will launch a partnership for sustainable urbanisation. On the issues raised at this round table, the job of civil society will be to make its voice heard, Mr Nilsson insisted. (mvd)

PLENARY SESSION IN A NUTSHELL

Victims' rights in the EU

Is there sufficient protection for victims of crimes that occur abroad? The EESC wants to ensure that victims of crime are given non-discriminatory minimum rights across the EU, irrespective of their nationality or country of residence. The EESC opinion on victims' rights, drafted by Ms Walker Shaw (Workers' Group, United Kingdom), follows the European Commission proposals intended to reinforce existing national measures. With this legislative package, the EU will contribute to making crime victims' needs a central part of the justice systems, alongside catching and punishing the offenders.

The EESC also advocates strengthening the role of the victim and the rights and recognition of the family or representative of the victim. The EESC believes that rather than identifying certain 'vulnerable victims', and thus potentially creating a hierarchy of victims, the Commission should propose that all victims of crime have access to special supporting measures. (ail)

Tachographs prove their worth but can be further improved

Although tachographs measuring driving times have already gone a long way towards increasing road safety, improving working conditions and ensuring a level playing field for transport companies across Europe, they can still be further improved, says the EESC. In an opinion drafted by Jan Simons (Employers' Group, the Netherlands), the Committee said that more use should be made of remote communication from the tachograph for inspection purposes, thus reducing the inconvenience of roadside checks.

The EESC also called for more research into European satellite communications, which may pave the way towards cheaper, easier and more reliable recording.

Moreover, the Committee suggested installing weight sensors capable of indicating overloading. It also proposed enabling recording equipment to record the location at which each journey starts and ends. This would help Member States to monitor cabotage until it is fully liberalised. (mb)

Revised trade policy: a useful tool for achieving the Europe 2020 strategy

In response to a European Commission consultation, Opinion REX/331 (rapporteur: Evelyne Pichenot, Various Interests Group, France) notes that the proposal on a revised trade policy offers useful insights into trade priorities in line with the Europe 2020 strategy. In particular, it aims to ensure that trade, as an external component of the strategy, contributes to sustained growth and the sustainability of the social market economy.

However, the opinion also calls for greater attention to be paid to development cooperation, global solidarity and

discussions on the millennium development goals, taking into account the EU's leading role in a global green economy.

Taking the recent free trade agreement with South Korea as an example, the EESC highlights the growing role of civil society in implementing and following up on these trade agreements, particularly with regard to sustainable development issues. Along the same lines, the opinion suggests that the Committee could be a facilitator of cooperation with civil society in each partner country, in order to increase confidence and trust on all sides. (mvd)

Evaluation of the first European semester: more commitment needed from national governments

Opinion EUR/002 (rapporteur: Michael Smyth, Various Interests Group, UK) evaluates the first European semester, a new governance method aimed at improving economic policy coordination between the EU and its Member States. The main focus of concern is that commitments set out by Member States in their national reform programmes are insufficient to achieve the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy, as shown by the 2012 annual growth survey. Joost van Iersel, President of the Europe 2020 steering committee, who summarised the opinion at the plenary session, pointed out that the success of the strategy depended mostly on the Member States, which have to implement their declarations and intentions back home. As most of the reforms have to be implemented at national level, it is essential that organised civil society follows what national governments are doing. Adopted unanimously, the EESC opinion also stresses the important role of education, seen as the only way to achieve innovation, technological progress and entrepreneurship. (mvd)



476th EESC plenary session

For more information please consult http://www.eesc.europa.eu/documents/opinions/avis_en.asp?type=en



Sixth meeting of the European Integration Forum



Home Affairs Commissioner Cecilia Malmström; moderator Prof. Fargues; round table rapporteurs A. Xuseyn, T. Baghajati and J. Bains

Over 90 representatives of European and national organisations dealing with the integration of migrants met for the sixth time (on 9 and 10 November) in the Committee building for the twice-yearly European Integration Forum, organised jointly by the Commission and the EESC. Representatives of the relevant national ministries and 21 members of the EESC standing study group on immigration and integration (IMI) also took part.

The particularity of the forum is that the Commissioner and other VIPs do not leave after delivering their speeches, but engage in a dialogue with the participants (often

migrants themselves) and listen to their views and concerns. The participants also value the forum as a space for networking and exchange of ideas at European level: a place where an Afghani from Slovakia, a Filipino from Greece and a Senegalese from Ireland can meet and discuss their common concerns.

The original topic of the meeting — ‘The role of the countries of origin in the integration process’ — required participants to look at integration from the ‘external’ point of view. In round tables, they analysed the opportunities and challenges of pre-departure integration measures, including

preparatory courses and information for prospective migrants; they looked at how diasporas can act as bridge-builders for developing economies; and they discussed the benefits and pitfalls of circular migration. These issues are part of the new European ‘Agenda for integration’ (adopted in July 2011), which paves the way for the next developments in this policy field. The EESC opinion on this agenda, drafted by the IMI group, will be adopted in early spring.

The forum will meet again in May 2012, to look at the economic aspects of migrant integration. (bw)

Soon in the EESC

The EESC and the ‘Notre Europe’ think tank bring together decision-makers and civil society to promote a common energy policy

The own-initiative opinion on ‘Involving civil society in the establishment of a future European energy community (EEC)’ offers a concrete vision of the form a more integrated and inclusive European energy policy should take. Mr Pierre-Jean Coulon (Workers’ Group, France) is the rapporteur for this opinion, which the EESC will discuss at its plenary session in January 2012.

The first event under this new approach will be a conference entitled ‘The European Union moving towards a European energy community’, to be hosted by the EESC and the ‘Notre Europe’ think-tank on 31 January 2012 with the support of Mr Jacques Delors. The conference will tackle the major challenges facing EU energy policy: creating the single market, securing energy supplies and the transition to decarbonised energy systems by 2050.

In the presence of Mr Delors, who initiated the European energy community project, political leaders and representatives of civil society will discuss the operational steps required to achieve genuine energy integration within the EU. The aim is to better coordinate the actions of Member States, the European Union and operators, and to meet the European citizens’ high expectations in relation to energy, in particular greater protection against disruptions to supply, controlled and affordable prices and greater solidarity. (ac)

IN SHORT

Laure Batut receives French Legion of Honour award



Laure Batut, EESC member

On 14 November, Laure Batut (France), EESC member since February 2004, was made a knight of the Legion of Honour. The medal, which rewards outstanding merit in the service of the nation, was presented to her in Paris by Michel Charasse, a former minister and senator and a member of France’s Constitutional Council. At the EESC, Ms Batut represents the Confédération générale du travail-Force ouvrière trade union confederation and is both a quaestor and a member of the Workers’ Group (SOC/TEN). (mvd)

Henri Malosse on economic innovation



Henri Malosse, EESC member

The annual event ‘Economy Days’ (Journées de l’Économie), which took place from 9 to 11 November 2011 in Lyon, brings together more than 2 000 personalities from the political, economic and business communities, such as Laurence Parisot, President of MEDEF, and François Baroin, French Minister of State in charge of Economy and Finance. Henri Malosse, President of the EESC Employers’ Group, spoke on the topic of relations between large and small firms. He emphasised that ‘we must move from subcontracting relationships and dependency to relationships of trust and partnership, particularly in the context of “clusters” that can promote innovation, research and development. We must build a European model of “ecosystems” enabling us to be more competitive and also to preserve the vast majority of jobs in Europe.’ (mm)

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