



EESC Info

European Economic and Social Committee

A bridge between Europe and organised civil society

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EDITORIAL

Transforming the EESC into a true new generation forum for the youth



Editorial

Dear readers,

As we are heading for another busy plenary session with many opinions on numerous important issues, there is one topic in particular that I wanted to bring to your attention: youth. Engaging young people in our democratic processes is not something that is simply "nice to have" – it is a "must have", because the future of Europe is their future. This is why transforming the EESC into a true new generation forum, where young people can speak up and, more importantly, where their voices are heard, is one of my key political priorities. And this week, we will have an opportunity to discuss and decide on some of the first building blocks of this new generation forum.

Firstly, we will decide on a new EESC Youth Group. Building on the European Year of Youth and the fantastic track record this house already has, we have a solid ground to take this initiative a step further. The idea is for the group to concentrate on understanding the diverse challenges faced by young people today and formulating effective solutions for their participation in EESC activities. The group will look into the different options for setting up a permanent youth body within the EESC. By creating the group, I want to ensure that youth-related issues are addressed comprehensively with the utmost dedication, and most importantly, that they stay at the top of the EESC's agenda.

Secondly, in the coming weeks we will look into a pilot project to implement the EU Youth Test in EESC opinions. The idea is to make sure that our opinions pass the test from the perspective of young people. This will help us fully incorporate their perspectives, needs and aspirations into our decision-making process, fostering a truly participatory and inclusive approach in shaping EU policies.

In the coming days, I will count on our members' support and commitment to push through these decisions. This will be our testimony to young EU citizens, that we can turn words into action, promises into reality and this forum into their forum.

Oliver Röpke

EESC President

DIARY DATES

5-6 July 2023, Alexandria, Egypt

[2023 Euromed Summit of Economic and Social Councils and similar institutions](#)

12-13 July 2023, Brussels

EESC plenary session

19 July 2023, Brussels

[Tackling energy poverty for a just transition](#)

TO THE POINT TO THE POINT

In this issue, EESC rapporteur Jan Dirx shares the EESC's views on one of the hottest issues driving the EU agenda: the reform of the EU electricity market.

The EESC has been looking into the European Commission's blueprint for this market and in this column Mr Dirx explains in a nutshell what the Committee is proposing to make it more beneficial for consumers, businesses and, more generally, people.

The [EESC's report](#) on the reform of the electricity market is up for discussion at the EESC June plenary.



ELECTRICITY MARKET REFORM: LIBERALISE WHERE POSSIBLE, REGULATE WHERE NECESSARY

By Jan Dirx

The reform of the EU electricity market should be based on a hybrid model combining market forces and government-led management, because energy is not a commodity like any other.

The European Economic and Social Committee has long been calling for a reform of the EU electricity market. The risks to which the EU's electricity market is exposed are, in practice, largely passed on to consumers and businesses. After Russia started its war against Ukraine, energy prices, which had already been on the rise since 2021, went up even faster. The war had a major impact on the cost of fossil fuels – particularly gas, which is used for generating a lot of electricity – and those price increases were passed on to end consumers in their bills.

These developments led to a European Commission proposal for a reform of the EU electricity market. The EESC recognises that the Commission's proposal takes some significant steps, but considers that they are not

sufficient.

The Committee therefore puts forward a number of further-reaching reform proposals. The key principle for us is that **energy should not be treated like a typical commodity; it is a crucial building block in our economic and social system, and thus a central element in public service provision**. It is therefore necessary to create a regulatory framework for future energy that guarantees both an environmentally friendly, affordable and reliable supply of energy and the right to energy. This framework will be a hybrid model of market forces and government-led targeted management, with the motto "**liberalisation where possible, regulation where necessary**".

In our proposal, the heart of this model is a **government-established "e-facility"** which buys electricity from the producers and sells it to the suppliers of household customers, SMEs, citizen energy communities and large consumers, and where appropriate and possible to other countries.

We welcome the Commission's intention to make the electricity market more consumer-centric, but we believe that it could have gone further in this regard. For example, in our view the market should be organised to ensure that **consumers and other small market participants that generate their own electricity can benefit as much as possible from the electricity they generate themselves, even if they feed it into the grid**. Another, fairer way of giving small producers this opportunity is our idea of an "**electricity bank**", an example that can be further thought through and worked out.

Finally, we point out that the electricity market is in the midst of a paradigm shift and will therefore undoubtedly need to be further reformed in the coming years.

ONE QUESTION TO...



One question to...

The European Commission has recently put forward a new proposal to promote the repair of goods as opposed to their replacement, which has become the default option in recent years. This month, the EESC will be finalising its proposals for a better "right to repair". We asked Thierry Libaert to explain what the EESC is asking for.

Mr Libaert is the rapporteur for the EESC opinion on this issue and was the author of a pioneering [EESC report](#) which in 2013 first put planned obsolescence on the EU's radar. Some of his original proposals are now

becoming a reality.



For a genuine European right to repair

EESC question: What are the new elements that the Committee wants to introduce into the right to repair opinion?

Thierry Libaert: the repairability of products is a topic that really epitomises our Committee's work, for two reasons.

Firstly, because it is part of a long-standing dynamic rooted in consumer protection, in particular in favour of sustainable products and against misleading environmental claims. And secondly, because on topics like this we almost always manage to achieve a huge majority in plenary session votes.

The [opinion on the right to repair](#), which I co-authored with **Emilie Prouzet** (the co-rapporteur) demonstrates the ever closer alignment between consumer issues and environmental protection concerns. Repaired products require the extraction of fewer raw materials – in particular critical raw materials – and, above all, less landfill, at a time when waste from the electric and electronic sectors is estimated at 7.4 million tonnes a year.

In our opinion, we support the Commission's proposal, but we call for it to go further so that the right to repair exists in more than just theory. This will include banning certain practices that aim to prevent repair (such as serialisation), supporting reconditioned products and 3D printing, and offering effective support for repairers, for example for their training. It will also be necessary to raise awareness among consumers, many of whom have lost the reflex to have their things repaired instead of simply replacing them. Action in this area must be holistic, and must involve all stakeholders.

THE SURPRISE GUEST



The surprise guest

In our "Surprise guest" column, we welcome distinguished personalities from science, journalism, culture and social and political life.

This month our guest is **Oleksandra Matviichuk** a human rights defender and head of the Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine). She has experience in creating horizontal structures for mass involvement of people in human rights activity, in particular, the Euromaidan SOS initiative, as well as several years of practice in documenting war crimes. Author of a number of reports for the UN, the Council of Europe, the EU, the OSCE, the International Criminal Court. Initiator of the #SaveOlegSentsov campaign for the release of Oleg Sentsov and other political prisoners in Crimea and Donbas. She received the Democracy Defender Award for "Exclusive Contribution to Promoting Democracy and Human Rights" from missions to the

OSCE. In 2022 Oleksandra Matviichuk was awarded with the Right Livelihood Award and recognized as one of the 25th influential women in the world by Financial Times. Also in 2022, the Centre for Civil Liberties which Oleksandra Matviichuk heads was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, jointly with Ales Bialiatski, a Belarusian activist for independence and democracy and Russian organization Memorial.



Ukraine will make NATO stronger

By Oleksandra Matviichuk

As a human rights lawyer, I have been documenting war crimes in this war since Russia started it in 2014, so that sooner or later they would all be punished. As a human being, however, I understand that we cannot wait until then to stop them. That's why I advocate a quick start to the process of Ukraine's accession to NATO.

The number of war crimes we have faced is unprecedented. Russian troops have deliberately destroyed residential buildings, churches, schools and hospitals, attacked evacuation corridors, established a filtration camps system, organised forcible deportations, committed abductions, rapes and tortures and murdered civilians in the occupied areas.

This is not a war between two states. This is a war between two systems – authoritarianism and democracy. Russia is attempting to prove that democracy, the rule of law and human rights are fake values. If they are genuine, why can't they protect anyone? Why can't the entire international peace and security system stop Russian atrocities? Why am I, a human rights lawyer who has been using the law for many years to protect people, now forced to answer the question: "how can we help protect people from Russian aggression" by saying "give Ukraine modern weapons"?

Because for now, the law is not working. Although, I trust, this is only temporary.

For decades, the Russian military has been committing international crimes in Chechnya, Moldova, Georgia, Mali, Libya and Syria. They have never been punished for them.

We must break this circle of impunity. We must establish a special tribunal on the crime of aggression now and hold Putin, Lukashenko and others guilty of this crime accountable.

Yes, this is a bold step, but it is the right thing to do.

However, while as a human rights lawyer, I have been documenting war crimes so that one day all Russian criminals would be held accountable, as a human being I understand that we cannot wait until then to stop these crimes. That's why I argue as follows:

As long as Ukraine remains vulnerable, the entire Euro-Atlantic security system remains vulnerable. Instead of NATO membership, some politicians are talking about some security assurances, which in reality cannot even be equated to Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. How can separate assurances guarantee the security of such a large country, which cannot be covered with a single shield from Russian missiles? How much will they cost in the long-term perspective, particularly because of the direct consequences of insecurity, such as the "food crisis"? Do particular assurances allow us to achieve sustainability, when what is rebuilt today can be destroyed again

tomorrow? Or to make it safe for millions of Ukrainian refugees to return to Ukraine?

Ukraine deserves to be a member of NATO. Ukraine shares the values of freedom and democracy and is ready to defend them. Ukraine will not be just a beneficiary, but a powerful contributor to the security of the Alliance. These are not promises; this is a fact proven on the battlefield. Ukraine will make NATO stronger.

The beginning of the actual accession of Ukraine to NATO is a way to end the war, not to expand it. Because "strategic uncertainty" will always serve as a reason for Russia to continue attacking Ukraine.

People in Ukraine expect concrete results from the NATO summit on 11-12 July 2023 in Vilnius. The time for assurances that the door to NATO is open has passed. Now it's time to make the decisions that will start the process of Ukraine's accession to NATO.

Russia has always been proactive. Russia has used wars and occupation of foreign territories to put the international community before a fait accompli and force it to reckon with the new reality. The democratic countries that participate in NATO should finally take the initiative to start managing this process. We have taken security for granted for too long. It is necessary to take responsibility for our common future.

EESC NEWS



EESC favours European Sovereignty Fund over national subsidies

In an exploratory opinion on the 30th anniversary of the single market, the EESC has backed the Commission's idea of an EU fund pooling resources to invest in key green tech projects rather than

relaxing competition rules.

Loosening state aid rules to shield European industries from US competition following the Inflation Reduction Act could create asymmetries between wealthier Member States, such as Germany, which can subsidise their industries, and Member States with less fiscal space which cannot afford to, the EESC stressed in a [new report](#) that takes stock of 30 years of the single market and looks towards its future.

"A European Sovereignty Fund is the best way to provide new momentum to European industrial policy and investment in green technologies," said rapporteur **Felipe Medina Martín** from the EESC Employers' Group, who also stressed the need to review and reform current state aid rules.

"There must be a reflection on the criteria for allocating state aid, their effects and their utility," said the rapporteur. "We know that some sectors have been able to benefit from state aid, and from state aid derogations and exemptions, but others haven't. Add to this the imbalances between Member States and you get huge differences in competitiveness within the EU."

The EESC report stresses that the single market has unquestionably been one of the EU's greatest political, economic and social achievements, but must remain an ever-evolving project that keeps adapting to changing realities and rising to the challenges ahead.

Among these, **open strategic autonomy** should come first: supply and trade, energy and critical raw materials should be top priorities, and agreements with countries that share the same principles and values are one path worth following in this regard.

Within the internal market, the EESC flags up the worrying fact that **most of the regulatory burden continues to be generated at Member State level**, with national rules sometimes entering into force before EU initiatives are put forward, preventing harmonisation and potentially causing distortions in the single market. To pre-empt this, the EESC suggests that the EU should come up with legislation more proactively and swiftly.

From the workers' perspective, the EESC would like to see measures to promote business competitiveness and sustainability being matched by measures to protect the quality of work and ensure citizens' rights, consumer protection and fair conditions for smaller businesses.

"The world is changing and the paradigm that's been used for the single market over the last 30 years is also going to have to change, probably radically, if we are to overcome the new geopolitical challenges," stressed the co-rapporteur **Angelo Pagliara**, from the EESC Workers' Group. "If we are to guarantee genuine competitiveness, we need to fight all forms of dumping – social dumping, fiscal dumping, all kinds of dumping. Because dumping is a tool that undermines competition."

This umbrella report will be followed up by opinions addressing specific issues concerning the single market.
(dm)



[EESC calls for EU legislation on preventing work-related psychosocial risks](#)

On the World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2023, the European Economic and Social Committee called upon the European Union to adopt binding legislation to prevent psychosocial risks in the workplace. There is mounting evidence pointing to the fact that precarious work is taking a significant toll on workers' mental health.

On 27 April, the EESC presented its opinion [Precarious work and mental health](#) during a debate with the Spanish Secretary of State for Labour and Social Economy, **Joaquín Pérez Rey**.

The rapporteur for the opinion, **José Antonio Moreno Díaz**, reiterated there was clear evidence that precarious work increases the chances of workers' mental health deteriorating, making this a public health issue.

Precarious work – which covers aspects such as job insecurity, exploitative temporary contracts, long working hours and the inability to plan working time – violates workers' fundamental rights and has to be eradicated and combated in all its forms. This is why the EESC called for the adoption of binding legislation at EU level as well as for the developing and modernising the Directive on Occupational Safety and Health (89/391/EEC).

"We need to have a high-quality working environment which does not lead to either physical or psychological suffering. We need a specific EU directive on psychosocial risks," Mr **Moreno Díaz** said.

EESC president **Oliver Röpke** stated: "This Committee has been committed to contributing to the advancement of the EU's social agenda and to build a sustainable and competitive Europe fit for 21st century. This means, among others, decent labour market conditions, supporting workers' involvement and fighting precarious work." (II)



[European Disability Card to guarantee freedom of movement for persons with disabilities](#)

One of the top priorities of the disability movement, the European Disability Card will enable people with disabilities to exercise their fundamental right to freedom of movement in the EU on the same footing as people without disabilities.

The EESC has welcomed the initiative to introduce a European Disability Card, which has been launched by the European Commission to help people with disabilities move and reside freely within the European Union.

In an [opinion](#) adopted at its plenary session in April, the EESC, however, warned that the success of the card will depend on mutual recognition of disability status between EU countries, which is currently not the case and which deprives persons with disabilities of support measures when travelling to other countries. This is a fundamental violation of their freedom of movement, which is a core EU value.

The rapporteur for the opinion, **Ioannis Vardakastanis**, said: "We now have first- and second-class European citizens, the first class being those who can move from one Member State to another for travel, work, or study, or to set up residence, and the second class being those who cannot. The European Disability Card will break down these barriers."

The EESC noted in the opinion that the European Disability Card had been a high priority of the disability movement and something that they had long called for. It recommended that the card be established through a regulation, as this is a more appropriate instrument that would ensure its consistent and universal application and avoid differences in implementation at national level.

Complementary measures should also be taken to ensure that transport, services and buildings are accessible to all, while the personal data contained in the card should be protected by the data protection regulations. In this way, the card will function as a European Disability Passport.

In the EESC's view, the card will compel Member States to improve current systems which are primarily based on a medical approach to disability and align them with models that abide by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

To ensure the success of the card, the EESC called for the full involvement of persons with disabilities and their organisations in all phases of its roll-out and during the monitoring process.

Another demand is for the physical separation of the EU Disability Card and EU Parking Card. This would make it easier for persons with disabilities to navigate transport systems and access public services. (II)



An effective social dialogue requires political will and commitment

The EESC describes the Commission's proposals for strengthening social dialogue in Member States and the EU as both timely and necessary, but calls for additional steps. Action is needed to improve national consultations with the social partners, national and European collective bargaining coverage and the implementation of social partner agreements.

The European Economic and Social Committee has welcomed the recent European Commission initiative to strengthen and promote social dialogue in the EU. However, it has flagged up issues that need to be addressed to ensure that social dialogue is meaningful and effective at national and European level.

In the [opinion](#) adopted at its plenary session in April, the EESC analysed the Commission's recent Communication on strengthening social dialogue and the proposal for a Council recommendation on the same topic.

The EESC warned against taking a positive outcome of social dialogue for granted and recommended that the Commission should look at successful national, regional and sectoral models and see why they became successful.

"In its ambition to strengthen social dialogue, the Commission's initiative is to be welcomed. At the same time, our opinion recommends further steps, for instance when it comes to improving tripartite social dialogue at

national level, improving collective bargaining coverage, and using Council directives to develop clear rules for the implementation of social partner agreements" said the rapporteur of the opinion, **Pekka Ristolä**.

In the EESC's view, effective social dialogue must include representative and legitimate social partners with knowledge, technical capacity and timely access to information. It also requires the political will and commitment to engage in it. Respect for social partners' autonomy and rights, such as the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, is required, as is an enabling legal and institutional framework.

"We believe that the proposed Recommendation is an appropriate instrument to support the process if it stipulates clear and effective monitoring provisions initially proposed by the Commission. We understand from the discussion between Member States that this appears to be a problem from the outset. The final text of the Recommendation will be a litmus test for the genuine political will to truly strengthen the process," said the co-rapporteur, **Maryia Mincheva**.

To counter the fact that in some Member States tripartite social dialogues are more a matter of form than substance, the EESC proposes establishing a common effective framework for involving the social partners at national level. If the social partners are not meaningfully involved, the EESC recommends that the Commission take action.

The EESC noted that civil dialogue, which involves a broader range of stakeholders and topics, is a separate process. This distinction should also be made in capacity-building support for the social partners and civil society. (II)



EESC calls for an ethical and safe metaverse for business and society

At its April plenary, the European Economic and Social Committee adopted an opinion on the impact of the metaverse on society. The opinion emphasises the need for the EU to swiftly address the opportunities and risks associated with the metaverse to ensure an inclusive and secure virtual environment.

The metaverse has already demonstrated its potential to offer cost-effective solutions, faster production, enhanced quality, risk reduction and improved efficiency. It also holds promise in terms of mitigating environmental impacts by enabling remote work and reducing the need for physical travel and carbon emissions.

The EESC rapporteur for the opinion, **Martin Böhme**, stressed that "the metaverse and virtual worlds are going to have substantial effect on our lives. There are opportunities that come with it, as well as potential pitfalls to anticipate."

Virtual worlds pose several risks, especially for children and vulnerable groups. The Committee calls on platform operators to put in place strict control mechanisms to filter and remove harmful content and safeguards to prevent harassment, abuse and exploitative behaviour. Concerns such as addiction, privacy and mental health issues are also noted among users.

Existing legislation may also not be sufficient to regulate virtual worlds. The EESC urges the EU institutions to ensure the metaverse respects real-world legislation and taxation, and that it addresses its specific needs through new measures.

The opinion points out that the industrial metaverse holds significant potential for European companies looking to optimise their operations, gather data and improve performance. Industrial challenges include the need for increased acceptance of these new technologies, reskilling the workforce and ensuring ethical and safe experiences.

"Building metaverses for business requires particular kinds of competencies, and Europe must strive to become once again a welcoming community for researchers to stay ahead of the curve" said EESC co-rapporteur **Hervé Jeannin**.

A second opinion on the metaverse is currently being prepared by the EESC for adoption in the second half of the year. (gb)



Green transport must be financially acceptable and socially feasible

Long-term sustainable transport is possible, but only if people, industry and the transport sector buy into two objectives: a 90% emission reduction in the transport sector by 2050 and a commitment to using the agreed ways and means to get to the final result.

This was the message sent by the [EESC opinion](#) drafted by **Stefan Back** and **Mateusz Szymański** and adopted at the plenary session on 27 April 2023.

To achieve the objective of long-term green transport, "the transition must be attractive and realistic, and thus acceptable to citizens and businesses from three points of view: financial, social and practical," said **Mr Back**.

"That is the only way the transition can be actively supported by our society, otherwise the risk is not only failure, but at worst social unrest," added **Mr Szymański**.

More specifically, the EESC says that in order for the transition to succeed, certain conditions must be fulfilled.

First of all, businesses must feel that they are not overburdened with costs and that they will retain competitiveness, not only within but also outside the EU.

Secondly, employees must experience the transition as acceptable and be given the possibility to adapt to new working conditions in a socially acceptable manner.

Thirdly, citizens both in agglomerations and rural areas must benefit from accessibility and mobility at a reasonable cost and under good general conditions. (mp)



European semester: broad consultation of organised civil society highlights need for solid reform

The EESC has renewed its request for an overhaul of the European semester, calling for an EU regulation to make civil society involvement in the cycle mandatory.

In an opinion debated and adopted at its April plenary session, the EESC stressed that economic reforms should be based on social factors and no longer solely on economic indicators. It also stressed that the process of country-specific recommendations must also be reviewed to encourage Member States to take the lead in implementing them.

The European semester is the annual six-month cycle of economic, social and fiscal policy coordination between the Member States, and also monitors the national recovery and resilience plans (RRPs). While it has played an important role since its introduction in 2011, the semester has also shown significant weaknesses.

In this opinion, the EESC renews its call for reform of the European semester in order to strengthen its transparency and democracy, the involvement of organised civil society and the effectiveness of its operation. The EESC recommends:

- reviewing and complementing existing systems of indicators, and making them consistent with each other so as to help improve evaluation procedures;
- having country-specific recommendations, one of the main instruments of the semester, cover a period of three years, with annual evaluations and reviews, and linking their implementation and funding to the EU budget, as the most appropriate incentive to ensure compliance;
- involving the social partners and civil society organisations through a structured formal consultation procedure and a specific body legally entrusted with this task. Existing national economic and social councils should also play a relevant role in this process;
- setting out the principles and general characteristics of structured and permanent involvement of organised civil society in the various stages of the European semester in an EU regulation.

[Full opinion](#) (tk)



Russia's actions in Ukraine should be treated as ecocide under EU law

The war in Ukraine has caused significant cross-border environmental damage, raising major concerns. The EESC urges making Russia's actions a crime under EU law and emphasises the need for environmental protection to safeguard fundamental rights.

Ukraine's ecosystems have been severely affected, with widespread destruction of forests and pollution of air and water. This poses a threat to its rich biodiversity, ecosystems, human health and agricultural production. The EESC, along with the European Parliament, advocates recognising ecocide as a criminal offence under EU law in order to hold Russia accountable and prevent future environmental disasters.

Rapporteur **Ozlem Yildirim** said: "The EESC stresses the urgent need to improve environmental protection from the perspective of safeguarding fundamental rights in the European Union and beyond, and that this need is exacerbated by the severe environmental damage caused by the war in Ukraine".

The Committee also calls for action to document and measure these impacts, ensuring legal protection, accountability and a just post-war recovery aligned with international standards.

The right to a healthy environment is crucial for social and economic well-being, as many jobs rely on a healthy climate. The EESC urges EU Member States and institutions to strengthen existing legal tools and efforts in order to protect the right to a healthy environment, especially considering the fragile state of ecosystems highlighted by the conflict in Ukraine. (ks)



EESC visits model sustainable energy village in Southern Germany

Members saw from close up a sophisticated ecosystem which protects the environment, promotes economic success, encourages circular economy practices in agriculture and fosters social cohesion.

On 5 May, a delegation of members of the European Economic and Social Committee visited Wildpoldsried, a sustainable energy village in the German Allgäu region.

The village is renowned for its successful implementation of locally produced, renewable energy and strong public participation.

EESC members were impressed by the village's infrastructure, which included wind turbines, a biogas plant, a cogeneration plant with a local heating network, and a photovoltaic system with a battery.

Wildpoldsrieders' innovative and sustainable approach serves as a prime example of a sophisticated ecosystem that protects the environment, promotes economic success, encourages circular economy practices in agriculture and fosters social cohesion through citizen participation.

This visit was of particular interest to the EESC, as it advises the EU institutions on civil society matters and seeks to bridge the gap between societal engagement and EU policies. (ks)

NEWS FROM THE GROUPS



[Thirty years of the single market: a critical review by the EESC](#)

By Felipe Medina, member of the EESC Employers' Group

The European Union is celebrating 30 years of the single market, which allows its citizens to study, live, shop and work in any EU

Member State by ensuring the free movement of goods, services, capital and people. It is not an overstatement to say that the single market is the essence of the European Union, the great instrument that has enabled the removal of political, social and economic borders in order to move towards European citizenship and identity.

The events to which the European Union – and the whole world – have been exposed in recent years invite us to reflect on how to create a single market that is more resilient and less dependent on the outside world. The European Economic and Social Committee addresses this very subject in its opinion [INT/1011 on Thirty Years of the Single Market: how to improve the functioning of the Single Market](#), which was adopted in its April plenary session.

Across the pages of the opinion, one key word for the future of the European Union stands out: competitiveness. The opinion stresses the need to create a level playing field for all businesses by "promoting growth and fair competitiveness, and creating a business-friendly and socially friendly environment". The main concern for the EESC are the problems relating to the shortcomings of the single market that affect the competitiveness and sustainability of businesses.

All those involved in building the European Union have a duty to raise awareness among younger generations of the importance of the steps that have already been taken to build what we have today, as well as the obligation to warn of the risks facing the single market and to try to set some guidelines in order to overcome them and make further progress towards a stronger and more consolidated shared future.



Fifty years fighting for working people

By the EESC Workers' Group

A large number of members of the EESC Workers' Group participated in the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the European Trade

Union Confederation (ETUC).

The celebrations took place from 23-26 May 2023 in Berlin, Germany, as part of the ETUC Congress.

The majority of trade union organisations represented within the EESC Workers' Group are affiliates of ETUC. The Workers' Group will continue to build on the cooperation with ETUC in the coming years as one of its priorities, since both are long standing natural allies in the promotion and defence of workers' interests.

Members of the Workers' Group and its new president **Lucie Studničná** took part in crucial talks during the Congress on issues such as trade union renewal, the future of work and the future of Europe. The issue of the upcoming EU elections was high on the agenda: trade union coordination and coordination between the Workers' Group and ETUC will be important to mobilise people to vote for progressive democrats across the EU.

Other key issues discussed included regulating artificial intelligence in the workplace, the full implementation of the Equal Pay Directive, ensuring a twin transition that is fair for all workers and increasing trade union membership as a bulwark against the rise of the far right.

The Congress elected the new ETUC leadership team. It also adopted its manifesto and the ETUC Action Programme for 2023-2027. (mg)



How to build resilient and sustainable European health and care systems: learning from the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic

By the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

Healthcare must be people-centred and valued as a social investment, not a 'cost', concluded a conference organised by the Civil Society Organisations' Group of the European Economic and Social Committee at the House of Europe in Stockholm on 25 May 2023.

For this to happen it is necessary to change mindsets socially, economically and politically. Building on cooperation during the COVID-19 pandemic, EU Member States need to join forces to build resilient and sustainable health and care systems that leave no one behind and value the work of care workers, civil society organisations and volunteers.

The conference was attended by some 90 civil society and institutional representatives from the national and the European level.

Opening the conference, **Séamus Boland**, president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, recalled that access to affordable and quality healthcare is a right for EU citizens. It was agreed upon by all EU Member States with the adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights in 2017, stated Mr Boland and added that it was reiterated by citizens in 2021, when they called for the 'Right to Health' in the Conference on the Future of Europe. Mr Boland also stressed that in order to provide qualitative healthcare for the most vulnerable - be it the elderly, the young, or persons with a disability - it was necessary to build resilient and qualitative health and care systems.

Lena Hallengren, Member of Parliament and former Swedish Minister for Health and Social Policy (2019-2022), reflected in her speech on the measures taken by the Swedish government in response to the pandemic. She said: Regarding our chosen measures, Sweden was often described in the international media as odd. But we saw that the measures we took had a sufficient effect when people kept distance and refrained from visiting public places. And when other countries closed their schools, ours were open. Because we knew how important school is for children and young people in their upbringing, especially for those coming from the smallest means."

To continue reading, visit our [website](#).

SOON IN THE EESC/CULTURAL EVENTS



[EU Open Doors Day 2023: a warm welcome back to visitors](#)

The house of organised civil society in Europe reopened its doors to visitors in the year of its 65th anniversary.

Following 3 years of online celebrations of Europe Day, the EESC once again welcomed visitors to its premises on Saturday 6 May for the annual Inter-institutional Open Day.

As the house of organised civil society in Europe and with 2023 being the EESC's 65th anniversary, the reopening of our doors was even more of a celebratory occasion.

Among the many things for visitors to enjoy from 10am-6pm were live music, digital quizzes, a wheel of fortune, a duck fishing activity, a caricaturist, a kids animation corner, a simulation speed voting activity with members, a speed chat with members and even the new EESC President who met and engaged with citizens and volunteers, and much more.

These activities, entertainment and warm hospitality of the members and more than 60 EESC staff who volunteered on the day saw almost 2,300 visitors come through the Committee's doors.

Click on the [link](#) to see some pictures from the day. (sp)



The EESC takes part in the European Youth Event in Strasbourg

The EESC hosted a workshop at the European Youth Event (EYE) in Strasbourg on 9 June 2023.

The EESC's workshop was the occasion to present the recommendations put forward by the students who took part in the EESC's flagship annual youth event, [Your Europe Your Say!](#) (YEYS) which took place on 23-24 March 2023.

Two students who had attended YEYS, with the support of an EESC member, presented the youth assembly's winning suggestions and further explored their potential for implementation in an open debate with the audience.

The EYE event, which is focused on youth policies and initiatives for youth outreach, provided another opportunity to demonstrate to YEYS participants, and youth in general, that their voices are taken into consideration at EU level.

Click [here](#) to read more about YEYS and the recommendations from the 2023 event. (sp)



[Navpaky Theatre's live performance at the EESC now available on video](#)

The highlights of the music show "There, out of sight", which paid tribute to Ukrainians' fight for democracy and freedom, were captured on video and are now available to watch on the EESC's website.

The show, which was performed by the Polish acting company Theatre Navpaky, celebrated the heroism of ordinary Ukrainians through songs telling their stories. The performance featured a compilation of nine songs about young people facing different life experiences in a setting that mirrored events in war-torn Ukraine.

The idea behind the performance was to show that people who bravely fight for their freedom are not majestic bronze statues, but ordinary people made of flesh and blood, with their own lives, joys and dilemmas.

The show was performed during the closing session of this year's "Your Europe, Your Say!", the EESC's annual youth event, on 24 March. The songs were sung in Ukrainian with English subtitles.

Through this initiative, the EESC wished to emphasise how important it is to listen to young people and also to express the Committee's support and solidarity towards the people of Ukraine in these harrowing times.

[Watch the video](#) (dm)



[Brussels 20 km 2023: EESC joins EU team running to raise funds for human rights](#)

On Sunday 28 May 2023 the Committee teamed up with the other EU institutions running for charity in one of the Belgian capital's most popular sporting event, which was being held for the 43rd time.

The event, a celebration of grassroots sport, brought together more than 40 000 runners and walkers from 89 different countries.

The EU team raised funds for human-rights advocate Amnesty International.

EESC Vice-President for Communication **Laurențiu Plosceanu** gave the start for the fourth block of the race, together with European Parliament President **Roberta Metsola** and European Commission representative **Stefaan De Rynck**.

Mr Plosceanu underlined the dynamic presence of the EU institutions in the event standing for democracy and human rights and described the crowd as "a tsunami of 40 000 citizens, running for peace, democracy, human rights and EU values".

The 60-strong EESC Trainees Association took part in the race to raise funds for veterans of the war in Ukraine in collaboration with the NGO Promote Ukraine and the National Council for Sports Rehabilitation. The funds will go into financing rehabilitation programmes.

The event was organised by the Syndicat d'Initiative - Bruxelles Promotion 1886 and saw the participation of Belgian Prime Minister **Alexander De Croo**, who ran for the Belgian Red Cross. (at)

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