



EESC Info

European Economic and Social Committee

A bridge between Europe and organised civil society

January 2020 | EN

[The Grassroots View - Episode 2: Has the European Citizens' Initiative been an instrument of democracy?](#)

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As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Lisbon Treaty, we debate the question: Has the ECI been a democratic success? With us **Pablo Sanchez**, one of the champions of the first successful ECI *Right2Water*; EESC member **Antonio Longo**, who explains what the EESC has done over the years to help make the ECI simpler and more transparent, and prof. **Alberto Alemanno**, outlining the ECI's sticking points and proposing a radical overhaul of citizen participation in the EU. (dm)

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EDITORIAL



The EU Green Deal can turn the tide on climate action and lead the way, after the failure of the COP25

Dear readers,

A resounding failure. The COP25 missed an important opportunity to advance the rule book for the Paris Agreement on cutting emissions - showing mediocre determination on migration, adaptation and finance to tackle the climate crisis.

The negotiations in Madrid were expected to send a clear signal that governments were willing to double down on tackling the climate emergency. Yet, despite the sound of alarm bells coming from science and weekly strikes by millions of young people worldwide, major emitters of greenhouse gases blocked progress at UN talks.

The voices of our children calling for urgent climate action were not heard. The disappointment is significant, but we must not give up: Europe must take the lead and be the frontrunner on climate action and sustainable development.

The EESC has spoken out vociferously in favour of effective and efficient implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement, where economic, social and environmental challenges are jointly addressed. Our contribution to the Sibiu Summit and our most recent one to the work programme of the next Commission are both very clear: sustainable development must be the EU's top priority for the next decade.

An EESC delegation led by Peter Schmidt, chair of the Sustainable Development Observatory, has taken part in COP25 to demonstrate, once again, the commitment of European civil society to the

sustainable agenda.

The European Union is headed unswervingly for climate neutrality. The European Green Deal is indicative of a clear change in the political and institutional mood, and we can see a united front pushing for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We now need to translate our ambitions into action.

At the EESC, we believe that solidarity should be at the heart of the European Green Deal. Our new strategy for sustainable growth should therefore be a Green and Social Deal, putting people's wellbeing at the heart of it and ensuring that no one is left behind. The Commission's ambition to create a proper **Just Transition Fund** to mobilise €100 billion over the next seven years is crucial to making the Green Deal a success.

All the European institutions - the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission - are committed to this goal, as are the social partners (ETUC and BusinessEurope) and civil society organisations.

The Eurobarometer survey and the last European elections showed public support for bold climate action: 93% of Europeans believe that climate change is a 'serious problem'. Compared with the last Eurobarometer survey in 2017, climate change has overtaken international terrorism and is now considered to be the second most serious threat facing the world today, after poverty, hunger and lack of drinking water.

Clearly, this is a pivotal moment. A coherent and clear vision of how to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 must steer our decisions and policies.

The 2030 Agenda is the way to go because it's a win/win agenda for everybody: for employers, whose competitiveness will depend on their capacity to be sustainability leaders in their sectors, for trade unions as the 2030 Agenda is the best firewall against social inequality, and for civil society, provided it is properly involved in the governance mechanisms of the new Green Deal.

Europe is moving in the right direction, as it sets the EU's growth strategy that will enable the economy to function without harming our planet and for the benefit of Europeans.

However, we have a very long way to go before we reach the ultimate goal of making Europe carbon neutral by 2050 and by doing so, become a global leader in sustainable development.

Our time is running out. We have all the means, the technology, the science and the capital to make climate neutrality a reality, so we have to get going: there is no time to lose.

The EESC wants to see an EU-wide, overarching, long-term Sustainable Development Strategy accompanied by a comprehensive implementation plan to achieve the SDGs by 2030 developed and delivered with all speed.

We will continue striving for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda because this is the only way forward: for us and for future generations!

Luca Jahier,

EESC President

DIARY DATES

29 January 2020, Brussels

[Mainstream Biodiversity – the way to go!](#)

5 February 2020, Brussels

[The effects of campaigns on participation in European political decision-making: opportunities and threats](#)

12 February 2020, Brussels

[SOER 2020: Civil society's role for a just \(and fast\) transition towards sustainability](#)

19-20 February 2020, Brussels

EESC plenary session



[CROATIAN EU PRESIDENCY: THE START OF MANY NEW BEGINNINGS AND A VOW TO MAKE EUROPE STRONGER](#)

On 1 January 2020, Croatia will take the reins of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first time since it joined the EU in 2013.

Croatia's debut on the European stage comes at a time that could hardly be more exciting.

Not only does it coincide with the beginning of the EU's new institutional cycle and the start of the new Commission led by Ursula von der Leyen, but the country will also be at the helm of the EU during the very final stage of Brexit, with the UK set to leave the Union at the end of the first 30 days of its Presidency.

It also comes at a time when Europe is facing many pressing challenges, ranging from rude awakenings regarding the increasingly adverse effects of climate change and the demons of populism unleashed, all the way to the widening economic and social disparities between Member States, which threaten to shake the very foundations of the European project.

Croatia has therefore announced it will strive to work on strengthening the Union. The motto it has chosen for its Presidency is "**A strong Europe in a world of challenges**". Its programme will rest on four pillars promoting a strong and prosperous Europe based on common values:

- a Europe that develops
- a Europe that connects
- a Europe that protects
- an influential Europe.

The EESC is determined to contribute to the work of Europe's youngest Member State and to ensure that the voice of Europe's civil society is heard during its reign. In particular, the EESC will share the views of civil society on the following topics, through opinions it is preparing at the request of the Croatian presidency:

- Financing the transition to a low-carbon economy and the challenges in financing climate change adaptation
- Demographic challenges in the EU in light of economic and development inequalities
- Sustainable funding for lifelong learning and development of skills, in the context of a shortage of skilled labour
- The effects of campaigns on participation in political decision-making
- A single market for all.

You can read more about the EESC's activities during the Croatian presidency in our [brochure](#). Available in HR, EN, FR, DE (II)



"AU REVOIR, NOT ADIEU"

Interview with Jane Morrice

Member of the Diversity Europe Group from the UK, former journalist, EESC member 2006-2020, former EEC vice-president responsible for communication (2013-2015).

As you are about to leave the EESC because of Brexit, could you please tell us what is the most important skill that you learned as an EESC member?

As I leave the EESC after 14 years serving Northern Ireland in Europe and Europe in Northern Ireland, I am sad to go but happy to have spent so much time learning so much from so many wise and wonderful people. EESC members and staff from the four corners of the EU have taught me everything I need to know about the art of compromise, consensus, understanding, tolerance and mutual respect between people from different walks of life at European level. This is what built the EU and brought the peoples of 28 Member States together.

What message would you like to send to the EESC members and staff?

Whatever happens, after Brexit, this 'togetherness' of people living at the grassroots and coalface of civil society must continue to drive the EU forward. My only advice to those now in control of the levers of EU power is to turn the tables with absolute focus on the needs of the citizens of Europe. The European Union is one of the greatest achievements in modern history, it must find ways to better engage its citizens and convince them that their voice will always be heard.

What do you wish Europe for 2020?

My hope for the future is to see the EU proudly held high on the shoulders of its people. As a British/Irish citizen from Northern Ireland, I am fortunate, thanks to the Good Friday Peace Agreement, to be able to remain a European citizen after Brexit and will continue to work to achieve that goal. (mp)



YEYS 2020 – EESC WILL HOST A YOUTH SUMMIT ON CLIMATE

Students from 33 schools all over Europe will gather in Brussels on 19 and 20 March 2020 to take part in a new edition of Your Europe, Your Say! (YEYS), the EESC's flagship event for young people. This time, the event will follow the model of a United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP).

Students will be asked to represent a sector, industry or bloc of countries and negotiate with each other, in order to come up with recommendations for combatting climate change.

The 33 selected schools were chosen from among 789 applicants using an electronic name selection tool, in a draw that took place on 27 November. One school was selected from each of the 28 EU Member States and five candidate countries (Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey). Three 16-18-year-old students, accompanied by a teacher, will represent each school.

The aim of the event is to listen to the students' ideas for dealing with the current climate crisis and achieving our goal of becoming climate neutral by 2050.

Between 14 January and 1 March 2020, all the schools will be visited by an EESC member so that they can prepare for the discussion and understand more about the structure of the debates. During the event, the students will meet representatives from international youth organisations, who will help them translate their proposals into specific recommendations that will later be submitted by the EESC to international environmental policy-makers and discussed at conferences around Europe throughout the year. (dgf)



EESC IS ON INSTAGRAM!

We decided to give the younger audiences of Instagram a view of the EESC from a different angle. We bring you "behind-the-scenes" stories of our members, their dreams and passions and our work.

Follow @eu_civilsociety for a look #InsideEESC!

www.eesc.europa.eu/instagram/

EESC NEWS



Andrew Caruana Galizia: "We need to work together to make sure that European values are upheld"

The son of Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, who was killed in 2017 while reporting on government corruption, addressed the EESC's December plenary session and said that a European rule of law monitoring mechanism could help defend journalism against all forms of pressure.

"The European Parliament is working to introduce a rule of law monitoring mechanism and the new Commission seems amenable to it. We need to really work together to make sure that it has teeth and is fit for purpose and that the values that make up the European Union are just as enforceable as the values that underpin our single market," he said.

The EESC president, **Luca Jahier**, stressed how vital free journalism was for the proper and balanced functioning of our society: "Media freedom is at the core of the values we hold dear. If journalists are silenced, so is democracy. The revelations of the past few weeks have confirmed what Daphne had long warned about before her murder: that the rule of law in the European Union's smallest Member State had been compromised by those very people whose duty it was to protect the citizens of Malta. Since then, other journalists have died while working on investigative stories. All stood up for democracy and the rule of law. All died because nothing could silence them."

The assembly paid tribute to Daphne's invaluable work, unanimously reaffirming the importance of a free press and highlighting the essential role played by journalists in defending our fundamental freedoms every day, which, together with democracy and the rule of law, contribute to peace and stability in Europe. (mp)



Luca Jahier: "The future of Africa is the future of Europe"

The EESC hosted a debate on development cooperation policy at its December plenary session, stressing that it is essential to improve relations between the EU and African civil society in order to progress from help to development to partnership.

Relations between European and African civil society must be at the heart of the EU-ACP Partnership Agreement, in which continued – and even increased – engagement by the EESC and its bodies should be acknowledged as a central element. Only in this way can EU civil society help African civil society become a reliable and trustworthy partner for investors.

EESC president **Luca Jahier** expressed his hope that current negotiations will provide a stronger role for organised civil society and for the EESC. "The future of Africa is the future of Europe. We need a new African Renaissance", said Jahier.

Jutta Urpilainen, European Commissioner for International Partnerships, highlighted the important work carried out by civil society organisations, and maintained that "The European development model must evolve with global realities. We all need to be involved in and committed to the Green Deal". **Isabelle A. J. Durant**, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), mentioned that multilateral agreements could help countries that had difficulties with international trade and that they were the only way to achieve a win-win situation for all actors involved. (dgf)



We need an EU strategy on social and affordable housing

The EESC calls for more robust EU housing policies and, at a public conference held in Brussels on 4 December 2019, asked the EU to adopt urgent common measures in this field. The real danger of excessive housing costs no longer affects only the most disadvantaged, but also an ever-growing part of the rest of the population. Therefore, housing policies at European level must not be restricted to assisting vulnerable individuals and people in need, but must be broadened with the aim of providing affordable homes for all Europeans.

Pierre Jean Coulon, president of the TEN section, underlined that the energy transition could only be successful if the social dimension of housing was reaffirmed. "There is no fight against climate change without

the social dimension of housing. Better social housing is the guarantee of success in taking climate action: quality housing means a better life for citizens and this will bring about a successful climate transition," he stated.

Echoing his words, **Raymond Hencks**, president of the Temporary Study Group on Services of General Interest, pointed to the challenge of definitively including these issues on the political agenda of the new European Commission in order to resolve the housing crisis that has continued to grow since 2008. "The right to housing is an international obligation of the Member States which the EU is bound to respect and is stated in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and in the Lisbon Treaty," he said. (mp)



EESC concerned over outcome of COP25

As in previous years, the EESC attended the COP25, the annual Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which this year took place in Madrid, Spain, ending on 15 December 2019. Unfortunately, countries failed to agree on many of the expected outcomes, including rules for setting up a global carbon trading scheme and a system for channelling new finance to countries affected by climate change.

The EESC is deeply concerned about the growing disconnect between the climate emergency and the political response to the climate crisis at COP25. Without any clear signs of increased ambition on the part of the major polluters, despite the continuous rise in emissions, the EESC expects the EU to take the lead and deliver on its promise of growth that gives back more than it takes away.

During the second week of the COP25, the European Commission came forward with its [European Green Deal](#) – a top priority and a new growth strategy for the EU. A commitment to climate neutrality by 2050 and clear ambition in the EU's contribution to the COP26 in Glasgow are necessary if we are serious about dealing with the climate crisis.

The EESC stresses that the transition to a climate-neutral society must be implemented through a competitive, socially fair and multilateral approach, and that appropriate tools must be put in place to achieve full involvement of and acceptance by civil society, including all citizens, businesses and organisations.

At the COP25, the EESC co-organised two side events: on [Combining Circular Economy Principles with GHG-reduction strategies](#) and [Leaving no-one behind in the transition to climate neutrality](#). It also took an active part in several other high-level events, in particular presenting the role of the [European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform](#) co-hosted by the EESC. (sbe)



Sustainable development: EESC proposes measures to boost private sector contribution

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires more than political commitment. Increased investment, especially by the private sector, is needed to address current societal challenges.

In a recently adopted [opinion](#), the EESC underlines the **importance of private business in achieving the SDGs** and advises the EU and its Member States to adjust their investment and tax policies to enhance growth prospects and thereby private sector contributions to accomplishing the SDGs.

Rapporteur **Krister Andersson** explained: "*Taxation policies determine the economic environment in which investment, employment and innovation in businesses take place and they provide governments with revenues for financing public spending. These policies are hence fundamental for achieving the SDGs and they must be made fit for purpose*".

The EESC proposes that taxation be used as an instrument for environmental protection and to govern the digitalised and informal economies.

Environmental tax policies could promote affordable and clean energy and a responsible use of common natural resources. Appropriately designed tax systems, using broad tax bases and non-distorting tax rates, and an institutional framework which allows for the integration of the informal sector into the formal economy, would also have a positive effect on several SDGs. Moreover, a global solution must be found for the corporate taxation of new business models in the **digitalised economy** that promotes economic growth and cross-border trade and investment.

Finally, the EESC recommends that the EU join the [Platform for Collaboration on Tax](#) to further engage in global tax debates. (jk)

EESC urges the Commission to make the new strategy for disability rights far more ambitious



The European Economic and Social Committee has adopted an own-initiative opinion in which it sets out its recommendations for the EU's Disability Rights Agenda for the next decade. It urges the European Commission to take them on board when drawing up a

strategy that is bound to affect the lives of more than one hundred million people with disabilities living in Europe.

The rapporteur for the opinion, **Ioannis Vardakastanis**, said: "The Disability Rights Agenda for the next decade must be far more ambitious than the strategy currently in place, particularly as regards monitoring and implementation, which must be substantially improved".

With the EU and all Member States having signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the EESC is calling upon the Commission to ensure that the CRPD in its entirety is addressed in the 2020-2030 Disability Agenda.

The new strategy should also contain measures to fully implement the related UN Sustainable Development Goals and the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights - something that has been lacking in the Disability Strategy in force since 2010.

The EESC places considerable emphasis on ensuring that implementation of both the CRPD and the Agenda is monitored at EU level. It recommends that the Commission establish "disability focal points" within all its directorates-general, agencies and EU institutions. A strong focus on disability in the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers to support the new Equality Commissioner is also warranted.

The EESC is calling for the mainstreaming of disability in all EU policies and legislation affecting the lives of people with disabilities. The Agenda should promote a society where diversity is a key value and where the principles of non-discrimination, accessibility, participation and inclusion are fully upheld. (II)



Digitalisation – a key challenge for SMEs in the Mediterranean region

In an information report adopted at its December plenary session, the EESC stressed the need to support the digital transformation of SMEs with measures adapted to the specific needs of different types

of company.

The document analyses the current state of play of digitalisation in northern, southern and eastern Mediterranean countries and highlights specific challenges. One of the main conclusions of the report is the need to establish a "broad policy agenda aimed at strengthening the decisive role of SMEs in the socioeconomic development of the Euro-Mediterranean countries and, most importantly, in the fight against unemployment".

The EESC emphasises how important it is to raise awareness of this issue. One of the proposals put forward in the report is to prioritise investment in digital infrastructure, but also in the educational reforms needed to mainstream digital skills among teachers and students when revising the European Neighbourhood Policy and bilateral association agreements in the future. The EESC also recommends investing in awareness-raising campaigns to inform SMEs about the costs of non-digitalisation: "We have to make SMEs aware that non-

digitalisation is not an option", said the rapporteur, **María Helena De Felipe**. (dgf)



The social economy can be the economic model to tackle both climate and social crisis

Such was the message to the European institutions from the social economy actors meeting in **Strasbourg - European capital of the social economy 2019**, for the **4th European Day of Social Economy Enterprises**, just as the European Parliament gave the green light to Ursula von der Leyen's new team.

The **EESC**, in cooperation with the **French Ministry for Ecological and Inclusive Transition** and the **city and Eurometropole area of Strasbourg**, held the 4th European Day of Social Economy Enterprises on the theme of ***The Social Economy: mobilising cities, regions and civil society. Pact for Impact for the European Union.***

All speakers emphasised that the social economy may be the only **viable alternative** to a model of production and consumption that threatens the survival of the planet and exacerbates social inequalities, by putting the values of **equality, social justice** and **sustainable development** at the core of the economic model. Faced with globalisation and relocation, it offers a model deeply **rooted in our cities and regions**.

A **joint declaration** was adopted, setting out the measures to take the social economy to a higher level in Europe, in particular, a **comprehensive, coherent policy initiative** with **specific measures** to:

- Build a suitable financial ecosystem, promoting **strategic investment** in innovative and sustainable social economy projects throughout their life cycles, and prioritising the social economy in EU financing programmes;
- Make sure that social economy enterprises **can take full advantage of the digital transition**;
- Raise the **profile** and boosting **recognition** of the social economy across Europe;
- Help the public authorities in their work to **bring social entrepreneurship into all levels of education**;
- Ensure that all public institutions at local, regional national and European level implement **socially and ecologically responsible public procurement** award procedures.

The declaration has been forwarded to the European Parliament and the European Commission in order to feed into their work from the beginning of their terms. (dm)



It is time to reinforce environmental criminal law

The EESC believes that the Environmental Crime Directive must be implemented more effectively in order to ensure the best possible environmental protection in the EU.

The most important reason behind the adoption of the Environmental Crime Directive (ECD) in 2008 was to **ensure effective, proportionate and dissuasive criminal penalties in all EU countries.**

Based on the data collected during its five fact-finding missions, the EESC identified a number of flaws in the ECD implementation that appear to be common to all Member States.

The low conviction rate suggests that environmental crimes are not taken sufficiently seriously. Administrative sanctions are also considered ineffective.

Training for prosecutors and judges has been highlighted as a real and urgent need. The EESC believes it would be useful to have a specialised police force and courts. The lack of a centralised environmental crime unit is also seen as an obstacle for investigating cross-border environmental crimes.

"We lack human and financial resources!", says EESC rapporteur **Arnaud Schwartz**.

The EESC also maintains that Member States should improve the conditions under which the victims of environmental damage may take **collective legal action**.

Finally, the EESC recommends that the ECD should be revised, based on:

- the most recent EU treaties that allow the application of sanctions;
 - new types of criminal conduct;
 - a scale of minimum sanctions for natural and legal persons. (mr)
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A strong European brand of products and services to enhance European competitiveness

The coming years will see new prospects and challenges for European products and services, according to the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). Providing innovative, highly specialised products and services with well-recognised and certified key characteristics can boost European competitiveness, says the

EESC.

Unanimously adopted at its plenary session on 11 December, the EESC's own-initiative opinion ["Use-value" is back: new prospects and challenges for European products and services](#) aims to raise awareness of the branding of European products and services that cater to customers' needs, as well as to social and environmental sustainability requirements.

Addressing the plenary, the rapporteur for the opinion, **Dimitris Dimitriadis**, said: *"Thirty years ago, 'made in Europe' was a guarantee for a product; now we are behind China, India and the United States; we have lost the European commercial brand name and want to get it back on track"*. **Mr Dimitriadis** mentioned the position of advantage of European small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the benefits of this.

Not surprisingly, the latest technological upgrades aim to expand productivity, not only in terms of producing quantities on a mass scale, but more importantly in terms of producing differentiated quality. European small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have an advantage here and could benefit most.

The opinion is part of a series of EESC own-initiative opinions and recommendations focused on rebooting and boosting the European economy through European SMEs in accordance with social and environmental sustainability principles. (ks)

NEWS FROM THE GROUPS



The future of Europe: Challenges ahead

By the EESC Employers' Group

Future challenges relating to globalisation, digitalisation, climate change, Brexit and other matters were the topic of the seminar on the *Future of Europe - challenges ahead*, which took place in Malta

on 3 December. The conference was organised by the EESC Employers' Group together with the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry.

"Europe can still be a global and political leader. To achieve that we need to focus on global competition", said **David Xuereb**, President of the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry, in his opening speech. **Jacek Krawczyk**, President of the Employers' Group, added that in the current complicated global situation, the EU must have the internal strength to turn the new European Commission's plans into reality.

The first panel – on "Harnessing globalisation – more Europe for our citizens?" – came to the conclusion that continuing efforts in cohesion policy, further encouraging economic growth and deepening the internal market were all needed to keep Europe competitive. The second panel found that in order to turn new trends into an opportunity it was especially important to enable education systems and small companies to adopt new technologies and new working methods.

"We must make sure that the New Green Deal is implemented and does not end up as just a slogan. It not only protects the environment but creates opportunities for the business sector", said **Miriam Dalli**, Member of the European Parliament and Vice-President of the S&D Group, in her keynote speech. She underlined that binding targets and a clear way ahead were the conditions for success.

"Business needs to know where this transformation is heading and what is expected. We need to act together and use each opportunity to communicate to policy makers what we need to deliver results", said **Stefano Mallia**, Vice-President of the Employers' Group, concluding the conference. (lj)



Delivering on the Social Pillar: Minimum standards for unemployment insurance

By the EESC Workers' Group

There will be major repercussions for European labour markets in the near future, notably as a result of the transition to a climate-neutral, globalised and digital economy. The European response could include minimum standards for national unemployment insurance schemes, which could be an effective and pragmatic tool for achieving social convergence in the EU. The core of this proposal entails ensuring a fair amount of

financial support, coupled with a sufficient entitlement period for as many workers as possible in the EU.

Since unemployment is a risk that concerns every worker throughout the EU, the European Pillar of Social Rights rightly mentions "*access to adequate unemployment benefits of reasonable duration*" as one of its key principles. However, minimum standards for unemployment insurance schemes would not only provide financial support: they would also enable access to adequate training, skills development and activation.

The EESC has for a long time been calling for a more social Europe. Minimum standards for unemployment insurance schemes could obviously not be realised overnight: Developing and implementing them would take some time, and a binding directive would only be the last resort in this process of convergence. Nevertheless, real efforts are necessary to make this project a reality. We need to deliver on the European Pillar of Social Rights in order to combat poverty across Europe! (at)



Diversity Europe Group discusses Agenda for Europe: towards 2025

By the EESC's Diversity Europe Group

On 6 December 2019, the Diversity Europe Group held a thematic debate with high-level speakers from the European Commission on the topic of *Agenda for Europe: towards 2025*. With the new European Commission taking up office on 1 December, the event provided an opportunity for a timely insight into its five-year agenda and for its representatives to comment on the EESC resolution on the Commission's 2020 work programme, which was adopted by the Committee at its October plenary.

Following introductory remarks by **Arno Metzler**, president of the Diversity Europe Group, the floor was taken by **Lutz Ribbe**, rapporteur for the resolution on [*The EESC's contribution to the Commission's 2020 work programme and beyond*](#). The rapporteur highlighted the key elements of the resolution, calling on the European Commission to focus on **climate change, digitalisation, the rule of law and globalisation**, within a **new system of EU governance, which strengthens participation by organised civil society**.

Speakers from the Commission at the debate included representatives of the Secretariat-General, DG Environment, DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship & SMEs, DG Trade, the European External Action Service, DG Justice & Consumers, as well as DG Agriculture & Rural Development.

Of particular interest was the reaction to the EESC resolution of the representative of the Commission's Secretariat-General, who commented that the Committee's document largely matched forthcoming Commission priorities. He added that the Diversity Europe Group was a powerful group, given its diversity and key role in defending European values and communicating Europe.

The discussions with the representatives of individual Commission Directorates-General were very stimulating and enriching. Overall, they demonstrated that the EESC has repeatedly been at the forefront of EU policy,

through its valuable contributions to fundamental and topical EU themes such as the circular economy, EU-Africa relations, consumer policy, trade relations, agriculture and rural development, and SMEs. (ih)

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