



European Economic
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Civil Society Organisations' Bulletin



**WHERE DO EU-US RELATIONS
GO FROM HERE?**

FOREWORD

A new chapter in EU-Transatlantic relations

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Séamus Boland © EESC

The United States of **America has elected its next president.** Donald Trump is set to return to the White House as the 47th president, after a clear victory over incumbent

US vice-president Kamala Harris and with a Republican Senate majority behind him. Many in Europe feared such an election result, as transatlantic relations and multilateralism risk deteriorating after Trump's formal return on 20 January 2025.

During his **election campaign**, Trump promised not only important shifts in America's foreign and trade policy, but also in its environmental and migration policy. **Trump's promises** for the economy, taxation and tariffs included new tariffs of at least 10% on most foreign goods, reaching up to 60% for some Chinese goods. Moreover, the president-elect pledged the largest mass deportation of undocumented migrants in US history, and the completion of the wall at the US border with Mexico, the construction of which began during his first presidency. The proposals to cut climate regulations and increase fossil fuel production, opening areas to drill even in the Arctic, would be a clear setback for global climate commitments. Another setback that is expected concerns women's reproductive rights. Trump repeatedly said that States should be free to make their own laws on abortion.

And what can Ukrainians expect from a negotiated deal to end the Russian invasion 'within 24 hours'? What would it mean for American democracy and the rule of law if the new president pardoned some of those convicted of offences during the 6 January 2021 riot in Washington DC? The role of truth and media in his election campaign could have long-lasting effects on liberal democracy in the US and beyond. But not only this, the election result might also boost the extreme right in Europe and hence increase the pressure on democracies in the EU.

Trump's politics will have an impact on European economies, but experts say some of his promises could have serious legal, logistical and social challenges, so it remains to be seen whether he can deliver on them. Nevertheless, **the US and the EU traditionally share many values.** Bilateral talks may become less fluid, but will and must continue. Their outcome will also depend on Europe's unity, to which all Member States must actively contribute, especially in this time of crises.

Transatlantic relations were also a topic during my **meetings** with government and civil society representatives in **Warsaw and Copenhagen**, as part of the preparation for the upcoming Polish and Danish Presidencies of the Council of the European Union in 2025¹. Poland and Denmark will have the task of steering transatlantic debates and negotiations in the interest of the Union. It is therefore not surprising that the **central theme of the Polish Presidency will be 'security'**, especially in light of the political guidelines for the next European Commission (2024-2029).

With a recent conference², the Civil Society Organisations' Group addressed several issues related to the theme of security, discussing **ways to make housing in Europe more sustainable, affordable, inclusive and accessible.** Participants called for a pan-European policy in response to the current housing crisis. The event also saw the launch of a new study³ entitled '**Affordable sustainable housing in the EU**' that was commissioned by the European Economic and Social Committee at the request of the Civil Society Organisation' Group, which I recommend you read. The study examines innovative initiatives for affordable and sustainable housing focusing on digitalisation and the integration of social economy actors into housing provision. The research determines the potential of these initiatives in the European context and offers medium and long-term policy recommendations.

The holiday season is just around the corner and this could be an opportunity for you to do some reading, not only of this new study but

also of the **conclusions and recommendation** of our conference on intergenerational solidarity⁴, which called for dialogue with and between all generations, as a way to counter political disillusionment.

Let me close by wishing you and your loved ones **peaceful holidays and a Happy New Year**, which brings us closer to eradicating poverty in our communities, a goal that is very close to my heart.

Séamus Boland

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1. Council of the EU, The presidency, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/presidency-council-eu/>

2. EESC, conference on 'Protecting Europe's most vulnerable through sustainable and affordable housing', <https://europa.eu/lyFmMN7>

3. EESC, study on 'Affordable sustainable housing in the EU', <https://europa.eu/lypcWtN>

4. EESC, conclusions and recommendations, conference on 'Promoting intergenerational solidarity in the EU', <https://europa.eu/!JifMpG>

WHERE DO EU-US RELATIONS GO FROM HERE?

While the world's eyes are on America, Europe is also looking to Germany



Christian Moos © EESC

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There is evidence to suggest that 5 November will prove to be the day the liberal world order ended. The USA, like any other democracy, was not perfect. However, the ideas that emanated from the 'city upon a hill'¹ were strong ones. It was not only the USA's projection of sheer power, but also the attractiveness of its ideal of freedom, that enabled **liberal democracy** to be implemented in the free world after 1945. The Franco-German reconciliation, the European integration and, finally, the reunification of Europe would not have been possible without this America.

Now, with Donald Trump set to return to the White House, the 47th US president is identical to the 45th. The eyes of the world are on the USA and the European Union cannot afford to sit back and wait to see how things play out. It urgently needs to be able to take action on

foreign and security policy issues, and to speak with one voice. There can no longer be any place for national vetoes. At the same time, **all EU countries that are also members of NATO² must fulfil their obligations under the alliance.** What Trump is now saying in the form of threats was also said by Biden, and by Obama before him, albeit in a friendly tone. In practice, the message is the same. The Americans' desire to see their burden eased by having Europe shoulder a greater share of the responsibility is not only understandable, but legitimate.

As the largest European economy, **Germany**, in particular, must recognise the role it must play. It has **for decades neglected its defence capabilities and thus relied fully on the shield provided by the USA.** The fact that Germany will not have a fully legitimate government this winter and spring puts Europe – and especially Ukraine – in a dangerous position. Russian and arguably now North Korean troops threaten to overrun Ukraine's lines of defence if American and European assistance, in particular German aid in the form of military equipment, is lost. At this time, Europe really needs a Germany that is ready and willing to take decisions based on a clear sense of direction; a Germany that assumes its responsibilities not only for the European project but also for the European security order.

However, the fact that European populists will potentially gain momentum as a result of **Trump's victory is also a critical factor for liberal democracy in Europe.** For a long time, spaces for democratic civil society have also been shrinking in EU countries that have long been viewed as consolidated Western democracies. This includes Germany, where, especially in parts of the east of the country, far-right extremists dominate public spaces. **Those who wish to defend European values must oppose the siren calls of autocrats. They now need to stick together, cooperate like never before, and make a stand.** The 'city upon the hill' can also survive a second Trump term; meanwhile, in this era of global upheaval, the project of European unity can strive for new peaks, spurred on by far-sighted politics and courageous civic engagement.



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1. Political dictionary, City on a Hill, <https://politicaldictionary.com/words/city-on-a-hill/>
2. North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), <https://www.nato.int/>

The stakes couldn't be higher: US elections and the global balance of power



Malgorzata Anna Bogusz

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I have been following US politics for years, but no election has raised my heart rate like the 2024 race. For those of us in central and eastern Europe, the stakes felt especially high this time as we closely watched developments on the Ukrainian frontlines.

Now we know that Donald Trump is the person who will lead the US administration for the next term. He is who the people chose.

I have worked long enough in the communications and public affairs industry to

understand that, quite often, things are not as black and white as they are portrayed by the media. Politics is about balancing interests – something that Donald Trump, as someone used to making deals for a living, is accustomed to. But I also know that politics is more than just dealmaking. My hope is that the team the new President brings on board will understand the complexity of the modern world and the **interconnected challenges facing Europe, the US and the globe.**

Thus, I hope that the newly elected President will carry forward the universal strategic commitments of past leaders, transcending party lines to focus on unity, shared values and American interests across the world. Saying something for the purpose of the elections is one thing; making unpopular moves that endanger US global interests, especially the corporate interests of US global companies, is another.

From a central and eastern European perspective, **the war in Ukraine is one of the most urgent tests of the upcoming administration.** I have supported Ukraine's struggle for freedom from the outset, visiting the country several times since the full-scale



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invasion began and witnessing first-hand the resilience, motivation and dedication of the Ukrainian people in their fight. In Poland and across the region, we understand too well that the **outcome of this conflict could reshape not only Ukraine's future but also the global balance of power.**

Donald Trump's administration might have a different approach to this war than the outgoing administration, but ultimately, not allowing Ukraine to lose is in the US's best interest as well. This is why I believe that the United States will stand with Europe and the Western world in supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and independence.

Implications of Trump's victory for EU farmers and agri-cooperatives



Lennart Nilsson © COGECA

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The outcome of the recent US presidential election, as well as the fact that the Republicans have flipped the Senate, brings a wave of uncertainty and potential challenges but also opportunities for the EU and its farmers and agri-cooperatives. While Donald Trump's return to power signals a potential revival of more protectionist trade policies, which will undoubtedly impact our sector in various ways, we must be prepared but not discouraged.

Basing our analysis on previous experiences and campaign promises, President Trump's approach to agriculture will most likely be characterised by **deregulation, tariffs and a focus on prioritising American farmers' interests**. While this might benefit US farmers in the short term, it poses significant long-term threats to global relationships and certainly to EU agriculture. Trump's proposal to impose tariffs of 10% to 20% on virtually all imports and up to 60% or more on goods from China signals a troubling future for global trade relations. For EU farmers and agri-cooperatives, **this means potential retaliatory tariffs and trade barriers that could hinder our access to the US market, our second biggest trading partner**.

Furthermore, Donald Trump's commitment to **deregulation, particularly in environmental but also in labour standards, would likely put EU farmers at a disadvantage**. The EU has long championed sustainable agricultural practices and high labour standards and we have invested in building understanding with our US colleagues on this matter. Should the new administration embark on a road of less stringent production standards and a deregulated US market, this could lead to an uneven playing field, undermining our sustainability efforts. Energy policies under Trump, most likely aimed at significantly

lowering energy bills and **expanding fossil fuel production**, could also have indirect repercussions for EU farmers. The focus on biofuels and ethanol, particularly from corn, might lead to shifts in global crop prices and trade flows, impacting EU crop producers.

While in the US the decision on the new Farm Bill² has been blocked for a while, the new administration will most likely provide the momentum to get it over the line. **The funding would most likely also enable US farmers to be more competitive**, manage risks and promote their products in third countries. While EU farmers struggle with rising production costs, stringent regulations and cuts in the budget for promoting agricultural products, their US counterparts may receive substantial financial support, exacerbating the competitive imbalance. This must play a prominent role in the debate on the EU's next multiannual financial framework (MFF)³ and Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)⁴.

For agri-cooperatives, the potential disruptions in trade relations and market access are particularly concerning. Cooperatives, which thrive on collaborative efforts and stable market conditions, could face significant operational challenges. The uncertainty surrounding trade policies and tariffs could disrupt supply chains, affect export opportunities and increase operational costs, ultimately impacting the livelihoods of millions of EU farmers reliant on cooperative structures.

With many ifs and questions remaining as to the direction of the new US administration, **Europe must also see this change as an opportunity to strengthen its strategic autonomy, especially in food production**. By focusing on empowering our agricultural sector and making our farmers more



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competitive and resilient, we can turn these potential challenges into opportunities for growth. Investing in innovation, enhancing balanced economic, environmental and social sustainability and strengthening the internal market while improving market access in third countries can fortify our agri-sector against external shocks.

Considering current geopolitical instabilities and tensions, it is crucial for the EU to stand united and be proactive. **The European Commission must prepare contingency plans and robust trade defence mechanisms to counteract any adverse effects**. For our sector, a coherent trade policy is key, as recently outlined in an [open letter](#)⁵ signed by more than 50 of our members from the 27 Member States. The EU's future trade policy needs to consider the strategic nature of our sector.

Nevertheless, we should also keep talking with our US counterparts. No matter the government we farm under, our shared dedication to our work, to feeding our people and to providing for our families doesn't change and, with the many shared challenges we face, our close cooperation remains key.

As President of Cogeca, I urge our policymakers and fellow farmers to remain vigilant and be adaptive and more proactive. Working together, we can navigate any turbulent times and ensure a resilient and sustainable future for EU agriculture.

1. COGECA, <https://coga-cogeca.eu/about-cogeca>

2. Farm Service Agency, USA Farm Bill, President Trump signed the Farm Bill into law on December 20, 2018, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) promptly began implementing key programs to finance and protect American farmers. The Bill expired on 30 September 2024, <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/tools/informational/farm-bill>

3. European Parliament, Multiannual Financial Framework, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/29/multiannual-financial-framework>

4. European Commission, Common Agricultural Policy, <https://europa.eu/!jhhWqj>

5. Coga-Cogeca, Open letter signed on 11 November 2024, A coherent trade policy that delivers for farmers and agri-cooperatives, <https://coga-cogeca.eu/press-releases>

Europe's role when climate action is challenged



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As our planet grapples with the existential threat of climate change, the US has elected a president who famously ran his campaign with the slogan 'Drill, baby, drill'. With Donald Trump now steering one of the world's largest economies, the **global race for climate neutrality is at risk**. If even half of his campaign promises materialise, global climate goals could be in peril, putting decades of progress at stake.

This year's European Climate Risk Assessment (EUCRA)² by the European Environment Agency underscored a sobering fact: **Europe is warming at twice the rate of the rest of the world**. To safeguard our future, we must cut emissions by half this decade while also strengthening our resilience against the mounting impacts of climate disasters. This isn't merely a policy target – it's a matter of survival. We must commit to climate adaptation and sustainability, regardless of the temptations of short-term populist gains.

The transatlantic alliance has long served as a cornerstone of global democracy, bound by shared values: respect for democracy, the rule of law, human dignity and a rules-based international order. Yet, these values cannot stand strong amid environmental chaos and eroding economies caused by climate change.

In the face of the US's potential retreat from climate commitments, Europe must play the role of the 'wiser sibling'. Our response cannot be a reactionary race to the bottom. Should President Trump heed calls from his party to roll back the [Inflation Reduction Act](#)³, the worst thing Europe could do would be to follow suit. Instead, **ramping up green energy and climate-resilient investment is our pathway to competitiveness and stability**. This may be a challenging stance, but short-term thinking is a poisoned apple which serves only the privileged few.

Europe's commitment to a green future is not just about meeting targets; it's about leading by example, proving that sustainability and economic strength are intertwined.

1. Euronews, 'Drill, baby, drill' What Trump's victory could mean for the future according to climate experts, <https://www.euronews.com/green/2024/11/06/drill-baby-drill-what-trumps-victory-could-mean-for-the-future-according-to-climate-expert>

2. European Environment Agency, EUCRA, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/european-climate-risk-assessment>

3. The White House, Inflation Reduction Act, signed into law by President Joe Biden on 16 August 2022, which aims to invest in domestic energy production while promoting clean energy, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/cleanenergy/inflation-reduction-act-guidebook/>

Women's rights and equal opportunities



Juliane Marie Neiiendam © EESC

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Donald Trump campaigned on an authoritarian agenda. He is now targeting political opponents through purges in the administration and justice system, impacting policy shifts, particularly in reproductive rights, workplace equality and protections against gender-based violence that could extend beyond US borders.

Reproductive Rights and Healthcare Access

During Trump's first term, he appointed three Supreme Court Justices who were instrumental in overturning *Roe v. Wade* in 2022¹ and tried to dismantle the [Affordable Care Act](#)², which ensures essential services like birth control and maternity care.

Now further restrictions on reproductive rights are likely, including reduced funding

for reproductive health clinics and [Medicaid](#)³, which many low-income women depend on for maternal and childcare-related health needs. With the US setting a conservative example, stricter abortion laws may gain traction in the EU, especially in countries with existing conservative views on abortion.

Workplace Equality

Trump's previous administration stopped the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's collection of gender pay data, which was crucial for addressing pay disparities.

Renewed deregulation would weaken federal protections against employment discrimination, leaving pay equity to states or private employers, widening gaps. This shift in US policy would weaken global advocacy for gender equality, potentially encouraging conservative EU countries to resist mandates on gender and LGBTQ⁵ rights.

Gender-Based Violence and Survivor Protections

While Trump's administration did support anti-trafficking efforts, the Violence Against Women

Act⁶, a critical piece of legislation supporting survivors of domestic and gender-based violence, faced reauthorisation struggles.

Trump is likely to cut funding for shelters, survivor resources and prevention programmes for violence and sexual assault.

Women's Empowerment Programmes

Trump's previous administration launched the Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative⁷ for global women's empowerment.

However, his tax reduction campaign could mean reduced funding for US-EU programmes supporting gender equality, especially in developing countries, prompting the EU to fill funding gaps.

Diverging stances on reproductive rights, workplace equality and protection against gender-based violence could strain US-EU collaboration on global human rights. It is crucial that the EU remain vigilant and support democratic institutions and civil society. The EU has an even larger role in promoting equality now.

1. Britannica, *Roe v. Wade*, legal case in which the U.S. Supreme Court on 22 January 1973, ruled that unduly restrictive state regulation of abortion was unconstitutional. On 24 June 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court officially reversed *Roe v. Wade*, declaring that the constitutional right to abortion, upheld for nearly a half century, no longer existed, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Roe-v-Wade>

2. HealthCare.gov, Affordable Care Act (ACA), signed into law by President Barack Obama on 23 March 2010. The ACA requires employers to cover their workers and provides tax credits to certain small businesses that cover specified costs of health insurance for their employees, <https://www.healthcare.gov/glossary/affordable-care-act/>

3. National Center for Health Statistics, Medicaid, state-federal partnership jointly funded by the states and federal government and administered by the states according to federal requirements to assist states in providing medical care to eligible people (low-income people, children, people with disabilities and older people), <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/hs/sources-definitions/medicaid.htm>

4. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, responsible for enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person's race, colour, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability or genetic information, <https://www.eeoc.gov/>

5. Britannica, LGBTQ, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-and-queer-community>

6. Britannica, Violence Against Women Act, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Violence-Against-Women-Act>

7. WGDGP, Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative seeks to reach 50 million women in the developing world by 2025 through U.S. government activities, private-public partnerships, and a new, innovative W-GDP Fund. <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wgdgp/>

No time for despair: the European Union's role in a second Trump Presidency world



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Beatriz Abellán Merelo

Trump's second term of office is expected to have far-reaching effects on the global order, including the European Union. Despite his unpredictability, one thing is clear: his re-election will embolden far-right movements worldwide. Those who are in favour of a rules-based order and of upholding human rights in the world must brace themselves. Yet, as the American writer Toni Morrison said, in a malevolent world that is bruised and bleeding, 'there is no time for despair'. The EU must unite and act decisively.

First, the **EU needs to launch a strong strategy to counter the spread of the far right**, which includes maintaining a cordon sanitaire around far-right parties, combating disinformation and reconnecting with parts of society that have felt disregarded by the current political system. It is crucial not

to buy into claims that defending sexual and reproductive rights and the LGBTQ community is a political liability. The EU needs to stand firm in its values and continue pushing for a society based on equality and social justice.

Second, the **EU needs to redouble its efforts to advance gender equality and climate action worldwide**, two agendas that will be severely impacted by the change of government in Washington. To achieve these objectives, the EU must strengthen relations with like-minded partners in the Global South, working hand in hand with them and rejecting any remnants of colonialist approaches. These partnerships must be built on fairness and mutual exchange, with more sharing of technological and financial resources, which could also facilitate the EU's access to essential raw materials for its green transition.

As a new multipolar world emerges, the EU also needs to reaffirm its identity and find a place of its own in the international arena. **The bloc must return to its original mission as a project for peace**, resisting the pull towards militarism and detaching



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itself from US foreign policy. The EU should invest in robust peace diplomacy and conflict prevention, advocating lasting solutions to global conflicts. This includes leading efforts to secure a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine, supporting Ukraine's reconstruction and continuing humanitarian efforts in conflict zones and areas affected by natural hazards and climate change.

Given the new composition of the European Parliament and European Commission, the approaches outlined here may currently seem challenging. However, this should not deter the EU from standing firm for what is right, strengthening alliances and working towards a peaceful and fair, yet prosperous, world.

1. FEPS, <https://feps-europe.eu/>

UPCOMING EVENTS

Photo exhibition 'Powerful Encounters: picturing an end to energy poverty'

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) presents the photo exhibition '[Powerful Encounters: Picturing an end to energy poverty](#)'¹ on the initiative of its Civil Society Organisations' Group and in cooperation with [Friends of the Earth Europe](#)². The work of photographer [Miriam Strong](#)³ will be exhibited from **4 to 16 December 2024** at the EESC's premises (JDE Foyer 6) in **Brussels**.

With around 50 million people currently living in energy poverty in Europe, **Powerful Encounters** explores how people are facing energy poverty and how they are fighting for the right to decent, climate-resilient homes powered by affordable, clean energy. The exhibition tells inspiring stories of activism, collectivism and empowerment through a set of powerful photographs of people from five countries – Belgium, Bulgaria, Poland, Portugal and Spain – which are accompanied by [audio-visual recordings](#)⁴.

The exhibition complements and supports the Group's and the EESC's work on **eradicating poverty**, promoting affordable energy, fostering systemic change and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. The exhibition provides insights into people's needs and demands in terms of housing and energy supply. In times of increasing energy and housing prices and poverty levels across the EU, it is a creative way to raise awareness about these issues. This is particularly important as the new European Commission, with a portfolio for housing and energy, and the new European Parliament start their 2024-2029 term of office. The first-ever **EU Anti-Poverty Strategy** and the **Clean Industrial Deal**, announced by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in her political guidelines for the new European Commission, must provide sustainable solutions to the realities on the ground.

For more information on the photo exhibition, click [here](#).

Photo exhibition
POWERFUL ENCOUNTERS
Picturing an end to energy poverty

[Culture]

This exhibition is presented at the EESC on the initiative of its Civil Society Organisations' Group and in cooperation with Friends of the Earth Europe

4 – 16/12/2024 | room FOYER 6
EESC, Rue Belliard 99, 1040 BRUSSELS

European Economic and Social Committee | Friends of the Earth Europe | European Economic and Social Committee Civil Society Organisations' Group

1. EESC, Photo exhibition 'Powerful Encounters: Picturing an end to energy poverty. An initiative of the Civil Society Organisations' Group in cooperation with Friends of the Earth Europe, <https://europa.eu/!dvmD3v>

2. Friends of the Earth Europe, <https://friendsoftheearth.eu/>

3. Miriam Strong, <https://www.miriamstrong.com/>

4. Friends of the Earth Europe, Powerful Encounters, <https://friendsoftheearth.eu/powerful-encounters/>

COMMENT ON CURRENT AFFAIRS

Biodiversity: Tell me what your problem is, and I will tell you who you are

Arnaud SCHWARTZ (FR)

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Vice-President, France Nature Environment

200 billion dollars a year.

That – according to the United Nations – is the amount of money that would be needed (including all types of funding – public, private, national and international) to meet our international biodiversity targets. So what is this about? It is about nothing more than putting a stop to the collapse of the world of living organisms, currently disappearing at an ever-faster rate, and it is about restoring nature and giving it a chance of survival in a 'liveable' world, rather than allowing it to be devastated by greed and stupidity.

What is the future after the failure of COP16'?

Each and every one of us should ask ourselves this question and raise it with those around us, especially since it is known that in France alone,



UN Convention on Biological Diversity – COP16, Arnaud Schwartz (on the left), @EESC

every year, more than a quarter of this sum is being used to prepare for, or wage, war ... For, yes indeed, globally speaking the Cali meeting (Colombia) was an opportunity missed, due to a lack of political will and a lack of economic solidarity.

However, not everything is lost.

There is a feeble light at the end of the tunnel: the recognition this COP gave, for their role as guardians of biodiversity, to indigenous peoples and local communities – after

about 30 years of prevarication – as well as to those of African origin; there was also the creation of a new UN fund, known as the Cali Fund. That fund is, in the long run, to be used to raise voluntary contributions from private companies, half of which will go to the groups of

people mentioned above. Whew!

You are ... you are ... well ...

You are part of us; we are a part of you. And in order to continue along our common path, it might make sense to start by putting our economy back on track to benefit the common good. So ... in order to stop pulling the rug out from under our own feet, what are we waiting for before we revisit international finance and trade rules?

INFO: The EESC took part in the United Nations sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 16), – which took place, as mentioned above, in Cali, Colombia, from 21 October to 1 November 2024, with a delegation made up of one member: Arnaud Schwartz. As a member of the EU Delegation, he engaged in meaningful conversations, bilateral meetings and side events to call for greater synergies between the processes of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the phasing out of environmentally harmful subsidies as a means to free up more financial resources, and a more active role for organised civil society in implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). For further information, take a look at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/eesc-un-convention-biological-diversity-cop16>

1. United Nations Biodiversity Conference, COP16, <https://www.cbd.int/conferences/2024>

REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF CSOs IN THE EU

Beyond tokenism: Ensuring genuine public participation in climate policy



Francesca CARLSSON

Policy Manager for Environmental Law and Justice, European Environmental Bureau (EEB)

With the reality of the climate emergency intensifying each day, it is vital for authorities to meaningfully incorporate public input into environmental decisions. But doing so will require more than just good will.

Public participation in environmental decision-making is a cornerstone of democratic governance and a critical factor in tackling the climate crisis. Europeans want to live in and pass on a cleaner, greener world, with more affordable energy, smarter transport, sustainable jobs and a better quality of life. 94 % of Europeans say that protecting the environment is important to them personally² and almost 80 % agree that environmental issues have a direct effect on their daily lives and health³.

The EEB has been working with partners through [the REAL DEAL project⁴](#) to explore deliberative methods and to build a new,

sustainable model of environmental citizenship for Europe. When people have a genuine voice in decisions affecting their environment, they are more likely to support and uphold those measures, creating a strong foundation for sustainable change. This is because their engagement fosters trust and accountability between governments and communities. Authentic engagement can also bring local knowledge and diverse perspectives into the policy process, leading to decisions that are better tailored to real-world conditions and are thus more likely to succeed.

Unfortunately, “citizenwashing⁵” poses a constant risk to this process. Citizenwashing

occurs when authorities create the illusion of public involvement but fail to genuinely consider or integrate public feedback. This can take various forms, from overly short consultation periods and inaccessible information to disregarding or cherry-picking feedback that aligns with a predetermined outcome. Such practices can turn public engagement into a mere box-ticking exercise, eroding trust and weakening the public's belief in its own influence over environmental policy.

The **consequences of citizenwashing** are significant. When authorities fail to act on public input or misrepresent consultation outcomes, communities may become disillusioned and disengaged. This disillusionment can lead to public resistance or backlash, ultimately stalling or derailing much-needed environmental initiatives. Citizenwashing also

jeopardises policy effectiveness; ignoring local insights and concerns can lead to decisions that lack the community support necessary for successful implementation.

To avoid citizenwashing and its damaging effects, public authorities must **prioritise transparent, meaningful and accessible participation**. This means allowing adequate time for consultations, providing clear and unbiased information, and ensuring that public feedback genuinely influences outcomes. Only by treating public input as essential – not merely procedural – can governments build the trust required to drive transformative environmental action.

The EEB's "[Do's and Don'ts of Public Participation](#)"⁶ is a set of **guidelines** aiming to help authorities foster authentic engagement



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and avoid the pitfalls of citizenwashing. By adhering to these principles, policymakers can create an environment of trust, accountability, and true collaboration, where public voices are respected and reflected in decision-making. Genuine public participation is not just a democratic ideal – it is a vital ingredient in the fight for a liveable planet.

1. EEB, <https://eeb.org/>

2. European Union, Eurobarometer survey, Attitudes of Europeans towards the Environment, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2257>

3. European Union, Eurobarometer survey, Key findings, Perceived impact of environmental matters and how to tackle them, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2257>

4. European Union, Real deal project, Reshaping citizens' deliberation for the European Green Deal, <https://www.realdeal.eu/>

5. European Environmental Bureau, Citizenwashing, <https://meta.eeb.org/2022/07/13/citizenwashing-what-it-is-and-how-to-spot-it/>

6. European Environmental Bureau, The do's and don'ts of public participation, <https://eeb.org/library/avoid-the-citizenwashing-trap-the-dos-and-donts-of-public-participation/>

NEWS FROM THE GROUP

The EU needs a pan-European policy response to its housing crisis

Greater use of digitalisation in the construction and housing industry and the involvement of social economy actors in housing provision can bring opportunities to address current challenges in the area of



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housing affordability and sustainability in Europe. Since housing is not just a need but a human right, a pan-European response to the various challenges is needed, according to a conference organised by the Civil Society Organisations' Group of the European Economic and Social Committee

(EESC) on 21 November, at which a new EESC study on the subject was presented.

Many Europeans struggle to find affordable housing. In the EU in 2023, housing costs exceeded 40% of the disposable income for 10.6% of urban and 7% of rural households ([Eurostat figures](#))¹. According to a [Eurobarometer survey from July 2024](#)², rising prices and the cost of living (42%) and the economic situation (41%) were the main issues motivating people to vote in the European elections.

This prompted the Civil Society Organisations' Group to organise a [conference](#)³ to discuss how the EU and its Member States can make housing conditions across Europe more inclusive, affordable and sustainable, in line with the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#)⁴. The event was attended by civil society representatives from the national and the European level as well as institutional stakeholders.

Séamus Boland, President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, opened the conference by stressing that access to adequate housing constitutes a human right that requires a pan-European approach. He highlighted the link between increasing housing prices and poverty levels. 'The provision of affordable and sustainable housing is central to poverty eradication', he said.

Mr Boland furthermore underlined that 'the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and European Affordable Housing Plan proposed by the European

Commission President-elect must be part of a cross-sectoral policy approach to end poverty. This approach must involve civil society organisations in the entire process of designing, implementing and monitoring solutions. Sustainable housing must be examined from a broader perspective, encompassing resource efficiency and circularity, resilience and adaptation, and economic accessibility.'

In fact, residential housing is responsible for 17% of all global green-house gas emissions. This demonstrates the links between housing and sustainability. In addition, the housing cost overburden rate¹ is significantly higher among people at risk of poverty and low-income households.

Marcos Ros Sempere, Member of the European Parliament (S&D Group), said 'The housing problem is a major concern for all Europeans and prevents young people from starting an independent life. For the very first time, we will have a Commissioner for Energy and Housing, and the Parliament will create a special committee on Housing. We will work on a European Affordable Housing Strategy. This EU legislature will be key to advance on proposals to solve the housing crisis.'

The event featured the presentation of a [new EESC study](#)⁵ entitled 'Affordable sustainable housing in the EU' that was commissioned by the EESC at the request of the Civil Society Organisations' Group.

Agnieszka Maj, co-author of the study and

economist at the Center for Social and Economic Research (CASE), said: 'A New European Deal for Affordable Sustainable Housing is essential and should prioritise digitalisation, the social economy and innovative policies to ensure accessible housing for all.'

The **new EESC study** explores policy solutions for affordable and sustainable housing in the EU. It investigates two emerging trends: digitalisation and the integration of social economy actors into housing provision. The study examines innovative initiatives in six Member States – Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland and Spain – and determines their potential in the European context.

The research offers medium and long-term **policy recommendations** including:

- An **EU Housing Directive** for a coordinated and cohesive approach to housing challenges, leveraging best practices and providing a framework for Member States to follow, while housing remains a national competence;
- Enhancing the **digitalisation of the**

building permit process, e.g. through investment in interoperable digital platform that can facilitate seamless communication and data exchange;

- Actively facilitating the growth of the **limited-profit housing model and cooperatives** through the public administration, including land provision on long-term leases.

Conference participants called for solutions, particularly to address the housing problems faced by the most vulnerable groups in European societies, including people with disabilities, the Roma community and certain types of families. It was suggested that affordable social housing could be achieved through better financing,

capping rents and combating speculation. Moreover, the EU should put accessibility at the heart of its housing policies, adopt a families-sensitive approach to ensure a better match between supply and demand, and address segregation and discrimination in the sector. The latter also required adequate infrastructure. The participants also urged support for community driven and local solutions for sustainable and affordable housing.



Conference on Housing © EESC

1. European Commission, Eurostat, <https://europa.eu/ljyGcdW>
2. European Parliament, Press Release, <https://europa.eu/IP4nvPB>
3. EESC, conference on 'Protecting Europe's most vulnerable through sustainable and affordable housing', <https://europa.eu/lyFmMN7>
4. European Commission, European Pillar of Social Rights, <https://europa.eu/!MC96Vn>
5. EESC, study on 'Affordable sustainable housing in the EU', <https://europa.eu/lypcWrN>
6. Eurostat, The housing cost overburden rate is the percentage of the population living in households where the total housing costs ('net' of housing allowances) represent more than 40 % of disposable income ('net' of housing allowances). More: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Housing_cost_overburden_rate#:~:text=The%20housing%20cost%20overburden%20rate,to%20live%20in%20a%20dwelling.

The Letta and Draghi reports in the spotlight

During the Civil Society Organisations Group meeting on 23 October, a debate on the Letta and Draghi reports¹ took place among the Group Members with a view to feeding into the upcoming opinion INT/1070 on the [Assessment of the Letta and Draghi reports on the functioning and competitiveness of the EU's Single Market](#)², which is due to be put to the vote before the EESC plenary in February 2025.

Group President **Séamus Boland** introduced the debate, saying that the reports were important for the new European Commission and the current and future work of the EESC, and emphasising the need to ensure a sustained follow-up to the reports' recommendations and to contribute to the new cross-cutting strategy for a modernised single market.



Giuseppe Guerini © EESC

Giuseppe Guerini, one of the rapporteurs of the upcoming opinion INT/1070, stressed that the **single market** was still a key aspect of the EU project, even though it had been introduced in the early 1990s. The global situation was now very

different from when the Treaties had been signed and from when the single market had been established in 1993 (a fragmented world, geopolitical concerns, climate change), and this was provoking heated discussions about **competitiveness**. Enrico Letta and Mario Draghi pointed out that Europe and that it had to play a stronger role on the world stage, and recommended very ambitious initiatives for the new Commission. The question was: would the EU be able to implement these recommendations?

The forthcoming EESC opinion would identify twelve main topics considered key to addressing all of the concerns for the future of the single market: the single market and its future; EU global leadership; EU industrial policy; the EU regulatory framework; Banking and Capital Markets Union; Energy union; union of knowledge; the role of artificial intelligence; the role of investments; a Union capable of delivering European public goods; Defence union; and the need to maintain a central role in economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Several Members participated in the debate.

Ágnes Cser stated that, as was clear from the two reports, 'growth must go on hand in hand

with social integration, social benefits and the involvement of the social sphere', and that, as was stated in the Draghi report, there was a need for a specific foreign trade policy for the EU, making sure that our European values like workers' rights were respected and integrated.

Elena Calistru raised two issues: firstly, the importance of the Group positioning itself with creative ideas and influencing the course of this opinion and, secondly, the question of who would pay for the recommendations set out in these two reports to become a reality. It was necessary to have transparency and a place at the table when decisions were being made on how to raise the funds for this, as both private and public funding would be needed, and it was also necessary to pay attention so that competitiveness did not mean austerity.

Cillian Lohan stated that competitiveness should not be a race to the bottom or result in lower standards. The Civil Society Organisations' Group needed to stand its ground, as the Group's voice needed to be stronger in these critical times.

Kęstutis Kupšys pointed out that the major shortcoming of the Draghi report was that the recommendations were presented as if there were five planet Earths to draw on and took a

traditional neo-liberal stance, supporting only growth and favouring large companies.

Zsolt Kükedi draw attention to the fact that the Draghi report only mentioned the [European Green Deal](#)³ once, and that decarbonisation had been left out.

Juraj Sipko stated that, in order to make a real change and have a chance of competing with the USA and China, it was necessary to invest in innovation, R&D, and quality education, and to complete the EU's financial Union, which encompasses the Capital Markets Union and the Banking Union, in order to achieve quality growth.

Arnaud Schwartz said that it was necessary to highlight the interests of the Civil Society Organisations' Group. He stressed that humanity was facing three crises, namely pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss, and that that could not be forgotten.

Jaume Bernis Castells expressed concern that no reference had been made to the agriculture sector, that the common agricultural policy (CAP)⁴ budget was being constantly reduced, and that it did not feature among the 12 topics either. On competitiveness, he argued that it was possible to improve things, but that the EU was also losing out because there was no level playing-field. The EU put constraints on itself and fell short in many areas.

Luca Jahier stressed that several debates were already taking place about the reports, but that many of those participating in the discussions had not read the reports in full. For instance, some people were talking about lowering prices, but the report referred to something much more diverse: it talked about the competitiveness of Europe as a whole, including aspects such as education and health.

Andris Gobiņš argued that the Draghi and Letta reports were worrying, as they ran counter to current environmental and social practices. He asked how certain it was possible to be that this opinion would have an impact in the implementation of the policies.

Jan Andersson stated that it was important to discuss competition, but that it was not possible to view this in isolation from other aspects, namely social model and demographic development, which affected competition and climate change. It was necessary to see it as a whole and to stress the importance of education and investment in R&D.

Mr Guerini thanked the Group for its contributions and stated that he would try and take into account the main issues raised (sustainability, consumption, decarbonisation) as the most urgent aspects to be addressed from a Civil Society Organisations' Group point of view.

1. In April 2024, **Enrico Letta** presented a comprehensive analysis of the future of the European single market. His report sets out a roadmap for the new European political and institutional cycle, addresses the challenges and opportunities in the changing global context, and proposes concrete measures to strengthen the resilience and relevance of the single market, <https://europa.eu/!MRJFqt>. On 9 September 2024, **Mario Draghi** presented a report aimed at defining the future of European competitiveness. The report examines the challenges facing industry and business in our single market, <https://europa.eu/!nbMfnp>.
2. EESC opinion INT/1070 on the Assessment of the Letta and Draghi reports on the functioning and competitiveness of the EU's Single Market, <https://europa.eu/!Hv6F7b>.
3. European Commission, The European Green Deal, <https://europa.eu/!8bB4bR>
4. European Commission, CAP, <https://europa.eu/!xcCxFN>

Farmers' Category discusses animal-sourced food sustainability and the future of the agricultural sector

On 15 November, the [Farmers' Category](#)¹ of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) held its third meeting in 2024. It was co-chaired by spokespersons **Arnold Puech d'Alissac** and **John Comer**.

The meeting began with a debate on animal-sourced food as part of an ethical, sustainable and healthy diet. **Prof. Frédéric Leroy**, from the Research Group of Industrial Microbiology and Food Biotechnology (IMDO) at the Department of Bioengineering Sciences of Vrije Universiteit Brussels, presented his work. He spoke about the [Dublin Declaration](#)¹, which was co-signed by 1200 scientists, and said that livestock agriculture was a valuable component of food systems and should be acknowledged in policy making. The Declaration calls for the recognition of system complexities and



Farmers' Category meeting © EESC

a shift towards a more informed approach by the media when dealing with this issue. The Members agreed with these points and discussed the matter.

A discussion subsequently took place on the strategic dialogue on the future of EU agriculture and the new European Commission, with the participation of **Elli Tsiforou**,

Secretary-General of Copa Cogeca².

She spoke about the opportunities and challenges facing the new Commission, and said that it was a positive sign that the portfolio of Commissioner-designate Christophe Hansen included food, a major component of the agricultural sector. However, she feared that scattering topics between different portfolios resulted in a lack of clarity. The agricultural sector needed to be better understood at EU level.

Members raised concerns about the handling of the EU budget in connection with the green transition. They discussed trade issues involving opening up to the Chinese market, uncertainties stemming from the war in Ukraine, and the envisaged trade agreement with Mercosur³.

1. EESC, Farmers' Category, <https://europa.eu/!qY64Wf>
2. The Dublin declaration, <https://www.dublin-declaration.org/>
2. Copa Cogeca, <https://copa-cogeca.eu/>
3. European Commission, EU trade relations with Mercosur, <https://europa.eu/!6ft78K>

Associational Life Category discusses way forward for participation and civil dialogue after EU elections

On 8 November, the European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) [Associational Life Category](#)¹ held its third meeting of the year. It was chaired by co-spokespersons **Andris Gobiņš** and **Juliane Marie Neiiendam**.

In the morning, a debate about [Participation and civil dialogue after the European elections](#)² took place in cooperation with Civil Society Europe. The panel was opened by **Mr Gobiņš**, who stressed that, with the European election behind us, it was crucial to send clear signals to

civil society and ensure that it played a pivotal role in the future of the European Union. **Heléne Fritzton**, Member of the European Parliament and vice-chair of the S&D Group in charge of relations with the EESC and civil society, **Séamus Boland**, President of the

EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group, and **Gabriella Civico**, president of Civil Society Europe, participated in the discussion.

Ms Fritzon said that a politician's duty was to 'lead, listen and learn' in order to improve the decision-making process. She stressed the need to create public platforms to allow everyone to participate in debates and share their opinions, and to improve social unity by providing good conditions for civil society.

Mr Boland pointed to the unique role that civil society organisations (CSOs) played in responding to crises – those connected to recent climate

catastrophes in particular. Being connected to the grassroots levels, CSOs were a source of expertise and played a crucial role in voicing the interests of underrepresented groups. It was of utmost importance to include civil dialogue in the EU's decision-making to strengthen governance and enhance public trust.

Ms Civico acknowledged the positive action undertaken by the European Commission by announcing a **Civil Society Platform**³, creating hope for the new term of office. Nevertheless, she stressed the importance of involving civil society in the EU institutions in a structured way. As an example, she proposed introducing



Associational Life Category meeting © EESC

contact persons for CSOs, including in the EU Council presidencies.

The panel was public and interactive, with various representatives of CSOs and networks participating in the discussion.

1. EESC, Associational Life Category, <https://europa.eu/!VD38XB>

2. EESC, conference on 8 November 2024, <https://europa.eu/!BGRBpk>

3. European Union, Mission letter to the Commissioner-designate for Democracy, Justice and the Rule of Law Michael McGrath, page 5, <https://europa.eu/!QrpJxX>

17th Connecting EU Seminar - A bastion of democracy: helping journalism survive and thrive

The European Economic and Social Committee hosted the **2024 Connecting EU seminar** on **17-18 October 2024**.

The seminar addressed the urgent need to preserve independent and impartial journalism in the context of mounting political pressures and the rapid rise of generative Artificial Intelligence. It focused on the ways of **ensuring that journalism remains a cornerstone of democracy**. Experts shared insights into the growing threats to press freedom and explored how civil society can help uphold media pluralism across Europe.

The Civil Society Organisations' Group participated in the event with a delegation

of 10 Members and had the opportunity to invite 19 communication professionals representing the national/partner organisations of its Members, as well as European/sectoral network. The seminar was an excellent opportunity to debate current affairs and common interests and provided a networking platform for communication professionals from civil society organisations,



Family photo of the Connecting EU Seminar 2024, @EESC

journalists, researchers and EESC Members.

For more information on the seminar, click [here](#).

Consumers and Environment Category: Future directions and sectoral overviews

On 16 October, the **Consumers and Environment Category**¹ of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) held its third meeting of the year. It was chaired by co-spokespersons **Thierry Libaert** and **Bernardo Hernández Bataller**.

The Category discussed its current work.

The **INT/1053** opinion on **Final evaluation of the Consumer Programme (2014-2020)**² was presented, setting out recommendations for the current Consumer Programme and future work on the subject. Members then spoke about the ongoing work on opinions related to environment-related consumption. The **TEN/842** opinion on **Radioactive waste management: a civil society perspective**³ was discussed in detail by its rapporteur, **Lutz Ribbe**, and other Members.

Monique Goyens, former director-general of BEUC (the European Consumer Organisation), spoke about her achievements during her 17 years at this organisation as well as her concerns for the future of consumer rights in the EU. She was proud of BEUC's engagement in the green transition, but was very worried about the impact of the European Commission's prioritisation of competitiveness. The priority given to industries that might reverse consumer rights was also a matter for concern.

Séamus Boland, President of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group, thanked her for her contribution to consumer rights across the EU. He pointed out the excellent cooperation between BEUC and the EESC and specially with the Consumers' Category.



Consumers and Environment Category meeting © EESC

Many Members took the floor in a discussion with Ms Goyens which covered the place of electric cars in the European market, cybersecurity and ways to reconcile consumer interests with the green transition agenda.

1. EESC, Consumers and Environment Category, <https://europa.eu/!Nf36rW>

2. EESC opinion, INT/1053, Final evaluation of the Consumer Programme (2014-2020), <https://europa.eu/!r3Nd8B>

3. EESC opinion, TEN/842, Radioactive waste management: a civil society perspective, <https://europa.eu/!RpJJV6>

MEMBERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Civil dialogue as a key to democratic resilience



Rudolf Kolbe © EESC

Rudolf KOLBE (AT)
Vice-President, Civil Society Organisations' Group
President, Austrian Federal Conference of the Liberal Professions

On 12 November 2024, Rudolf Kolbe took part in a high-level workshop on **'Civil Dialogue for Greater Democratic Resilience'**¹. This event was held at the dbb forum in Berlin-Mitte and organised by the Europa-Union Deutschland (EUD), the Federal Network for Civic Engagement (BBE) and the dbb (German Civil Service Association) as part of the 34th European Evening.

In his opening remarks, Rudolf Kolbe emphasised the crucial role of active civil dialogue in fostering a resilient democracy and referred to Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union². This article stipulates that EU institutions should maintain **open and regular dialogue with citizens and representative associations in order to enhance participation and transparency in decision-making processes**. Mr Kolbe

referred to the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) as the 'House of Civil Society' and mentioned the EESC opinion on Strengthening civil dialogue and participatory democracy in the EU: a path forward³ and the #EUCivilDialogueNow open letter⁴ that was initiated by the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group and Civil Society Europe. He stressed the need for clearly defined frameworks in order to ensure effective collaboration between the state and civil society, safeguarding the independence and operational capacity of each party.

'A stronger civil dialogue restores citizens' trust and is the right response to the wave of populism,' said Mr Kolbe.

The workshop addressed various key topics, including challenges in shaping participation processes and the role of alternative funding models. It focused on the

importance of education and raising awareness with a view to bolstering democratic resilience. The discussions also explored how to better engage citizens in structurally weak regions in dialogue. There was a consensus that enhancing civil society involvement is crucial for rebuilding trust in democratic processes. The event brought together representatives from a broad spectrum of institutions and organisations, including the European Commission, the German Bundestag, the German Adult Education Association and several civil society actors. The lively debate demonstrated just how valuable such collaboration is for strengthening democracy.



Workshop Civil Dialogue for Greater Democratic Resilience (Rudolf Kolbe on the right) © BBE

1. BBE, Workshop "Civil Dialogue for Greater Democratic Resilience", <https://www.b-b-e.de/bbe-newsletter/newsletter-nr-22-vom-7112024/#aktuelles6>

2. Treaty of the European Union TEU, Art. 11, <https://europa.eu/!tqBrmv>

3. EESC opinion SOC/782, <https://europa.eu/!7P7qXw>

4. EESC, Open letter: European Institutions must recognise, involve and support Civil society as part of a structured Civil Dialogue, <https://europa.eu/!yG8b6t>

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LAST PLENARY SESSION

European Economic and Social Committee calls for bold steps towards a European Health Union and enhanced support for rare disease patients

At its plenary session on 23 October, the EESC discussed the state of health services in the EU during a debate involving two opinions: *Devising a European flagship initiative for health and Leaving no one behind: European Commitment to Tackling Rare Diseases*.

EESC President **Oliver Röpke** stressed that we need a quality healthcare system for all in the European Union, while investing in innovative and sustainable health.

Simona Bellagambi, Vice-President of EURORDIS-Rare Diseases Europe, participated in the debate and praised the EESC's engagement in the subject. **Maya Matthews**, from the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety, spoke about the efforts made by the European Commission through the European Health Union¹.



Alain Coheur © EESC

The rapporteur of the opinion on Devising a European flagship initiative for health² and Member of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, **Alain Coheur**, stressed

that: 'Health is a cross-cutting issue. We need more consistency, more solidarity and more inclusion.'

The rapporteur of the opinion on a European commitment to tackling rare diseases³ and Member of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, **Ágnes Cser**, said that: 'Ursula von der Leyen's political guidelines for 2024-2029⁴ do not mention rare diseases. The Commission



Ágnes Cser © EESC

is actually focusing on reducing health expenditure in 2025.'

Several Civil Society Organisations' Group Members took the floor to discuss the matter.

Séamus Boland, President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, argued that 'The new architecture for health that we need to build within the EU must place patients at the centre of healthcare in a more predictable,



Séamus Boland © EESC



Danko Relić © EESC

preventative and personalised way. The European institutions should embark on a more ambitious, holistic and inclusive approach which recognises interlinkages.’

Danko Relić pointed out: ‘COVID-19 reminded us of how susceptible we were. Learning from



Arnaud Schwartz © EESC

this experience, we need to invest strategically – only that will make us more resistant for future crises.’

the health of our ecosystems and in the health of human beings,’ said **Arnaud Schwartz**.



Martin Schaffenrath © EESC

Martin Schaffenrath stated: ‘In a world of great inequalities and various health crises, we really have an obligation to take a leading role in health in Europe in the future.’

1. European Commission, European Health Union, <https://europa.eu/17Kb3BR>
2. EESC opinion SOC/801, <https://europa.eu/!mWPd4F>
3. EESC opinion SOC/806, <https://europa.eu/!W3hXdj>
4. European Commission, Political Guidelines 2024-2029, <https://europa.eu/!wywg4P>

Making EU enlargement work for all

At its plenary session on 24 October, the EESC held a high-level forum on EU enlargement. Over three sessions, Member State and candidate country representatives discussed EU accession, sharing views on the need for a vibrant civil society and exchanging good practices in fostering a competitive, green and digital transition and other necessary reforms.

In the opening session, **Oliver Röpke**, President of the EESC, stressed that ‘we have all worked hard to make the EESC the leading advocate for the involvement of civil society in the enlargement’, adding that ‘we stand for gradual, predictable and merit-based integration’.

Séamus Boland, President of the Civil Society Organisations’ Group, moderated the first session and started by emphasising that civil society organisations are an indicator of the health of a democracy: ‘CSOs are everywhere. They’re more flexible, they’re more able, they



Séamus Boland © EESC

don’t have to live with a whole range of regulations, they just get in there, help people caught up by flooding, help people who are starving, help people who need assistance.’

Two enlargement candidate members¹ appointed by the Civil Society Organisations’ Group took part in the discussion.

Ayşe Yürekli, senior policy advisor for European affairs at the Women Entrepreneurs Association (KAGIDER) of Turkey, stated: ‘Ultimately, we must recognise that enlargement is not merely a political, economic or technical process. It is fundamentally a democratic and a social one, grounded in the active participation of a vibrant civil society.’

Biljana Spasovska, executive director of the Balkan Civil Society Development Network of North Macedonia, pointed out the growing hostility towards civil society organisation activities, both in the Balkans and the EU: ‘EU enlargement will only be a success if it ensures that the voice of civil society is included and given more importance. The fundamental values and basic freedoms are not up for debate.’



Lidija Pavić-Rogošić © EESC

Lidija Pavić-Rogošić, Vice-President of the Civil Society Organisations’ Group, also took the floor to advise that civil society organise itself into platforms and forums in order to synergistically influence negotiation processes.

1. EESC, Enlargement Candidate Members: Civil society representative from an EU accession country who is involved in the EESC’s daily advisory work in an honorary capacity, <https://europa.eu/!J9MjPm>



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OVERVIEW OF RECENT WORK

The last EESC plenary session took place on 23 and 24 October 2024. The EESC plenary adopted 21 opinions of which 17 were drafted by Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group. A list of the recent work can be found below.

Ágnes CSER (HU), rapporteur, [SOC/806](#)¹ Leaving No One Behind: European Commitment to Tackling Rare Diseases

Anastasis YIAPANIS (CY), rapporteur, [CCMI/228](#)² From waste plants to resource plants

Alain COHEUR (BE), rapporteur, [SOC/801](#)³ Devising a European Flagship Initiative for health

Alain COHEUR (BE), co-rapporteur, [INT/1056](#)⁴ The potential of Public procurement for Social economy enterprises

Cillian LOHAN (IE), rapporteur, [NAT/928](#)⁵ Aligning the circular economy and the bioeconomy at EU and national level

Elena-Alexandra CALISTRU (RO-III), rapporteur, [ECO/643](#)⁶ Enhancing Fiscal Transparency through Participatory Budgeting in the EU

Elena-Alexandra CALISTRU (RO), rapporteur, [ECO/649](#)⁷ Additional considerations on the Annual Sustainable Growth Survey 2024

Giovanni MARCANTONIO (IT), co-rapporteur, [SOC/790](#)⁸ Fostering opportunities and managing risks from new technologies for public services, the organisation of work and more equal and inclusive societies

Giovanni MARCANTONIO (IT), rapporteur, [SOC/811](#)⁹ Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States

Giuseppe GUERINI (IT), rapporteur, [INT/1066](#)¹⁰ Report on Competition Policy 2023

Giuseppe GUERINI (IT), rapporteur, [CCMI/230](#)¹¹ Industry 5.0 – how to make it happen

Ionuț SIBIAN (RO), rapporteur, [REX/582](#)¹² Revision of the EU Visa suspension mechanism

João Diogo DE CASTRO NABAIS DOS SANTOS (PT), rapporteur, [INT/1053](#)¹³ Final evaluation of the Consumer Programme (2014-2020)

Joe HEALY (IE), rapporteur, [NAT/935](#)¹⁴ Fostering sustainable and resilient food systems at times of growing crises

Juraj SIPKO (SK), rapporteur, [ECO/645](#)¹⁵ Climate change and its impact on the economy

Kinga JOÓ (HU), rapporteur, [SOC/808](#)¹⁶ Ensuring a needs-based work-life balance for all: How adequate flexible working conditions can support intergenerational solidarity and the empowerment of women

Zsolt KÜKEDI (HU), rapporteur, [TEN/843](#)¹⁷ The potential of geothermal energy for the green transition

The **complete texts** of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee's [website](#)¹⁸

The **next EESC plenary session** will take place on 22 and 23 January 2025. For more information on the upcoming plenary session please visit our [website](#)¹⁹.

A list including all new **work appointments** of Civil Society Organisations' Group Members is available on the Committee's [website](#)²⁰.

1. EESC opinion SOC/806, <https://europa.eu/!W3hXdj>

2. EESC opinion CCMI/228, <https://europa.eu/!F4CmPJ>

3. EESC opinion SOC/801, <https://europa.eu/!mWPd4F>

4. EESC opinion INT/1056, <https://europa.eu/!PTJfMM>

5. EESC opinion NAT/928, <https://europa.eu/!J7YFhf>

6. EESC opinion ECO/643, <https://europa.eu/!Yz7hHY>

7. EESC opinion ECO/649, <https://europa.eu/!hrYqNx>

8. EESC opinion SOC/790, <https://europa.eu/!CC4thr>

9. EESC opinion SOC/811, <https://europa.eu/!x7TDJI>

10. EESC opinion INT/1066, <https://europa.eu/!yNFgHN>

11. EESC opinion CCMI/230, <https://europa.eu/!V8cybm>

12. EESC opinion REX/582, <https://europa.eu/!nn6FWj>

13. EESC opinion INT/1053, <https://europa.eu/!r3Nd8B>

14. EESC opinion NAT/935, <https://europa.eu/!4y4TQg>

15. EESC opinion ECO/645, <https://europa.eu/!67KHGW>

16. EESC opinion SOC/808, <https://europa.eu/!Jd9R4R>

17. EESC opinion TEN/843, <https://europa.eu/!W7fR8g>

18. EESC opinions, <https://europa.eu/!wf86wY>

19. EESC plenary sessions, <https://europa.eu/!Dg84qG>

20. EESC, New work appointments, <https://europa.eu/!x9WYD7>

21. EESC opinion CCMI/227, <https://europa.eu/!VcbQCG>

WHAT IS EESC OPINION CCMI/227 ALL ABOUT?

An interview with Anastasis Yiapanis, rapporteur for the European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) opinion [CCMI/227](#) on Advanced materials for industrial leadership¹



Anastasis Yiapanis © EESC

The opinion was presented and adopted at the July plenary session in 2024.

Anastasis YIAPANIS (CY)

Member, Civil Society Organisations' Group

Secretary-General, Panagrotikos Farmers' Union of Cyprus

What are the main findings of this opinion and how could these be addressed?

Firstly, we found that the current EU approach to [advanced materials](#)¹ lacks specific targets, timelines and key performance indicators. We therefore advocate a comprehensive strategy that incorporates substantial funding, incentives and high-level political support to effectively develop an advanced materials ecosystem in Europe.

Secondly, we believe that there is a critical need

to further integrate research and development across the entire materials lifecycle – from conception to commercialisation. This includes adopting digital technologies, promoting cross-border R&D collaboration and accelerating the commercialisation of innovation, particularly by reducing bureaucratic barriers and by supporting SMEs.

Finally, we believe that the EU's reliance on

external sources for critical raw materials poses significant vulnerabilities, especially given global competition. We call for concrete, immediate policies to strengthen the EU's capacity to extract and process raw materials, diversify supply sources and promote sustainable sourcing practices, all within Europe, in order to safeguard the EU's strategic autonomy and the resilience of its supply chains.

What are the main recommendations or proposals of the opinion?

The main recommendations from our opinion CCMI/227 can be summarised as follows.

1. The EU's advanced materials strategy should include quantifiable targets, timelines and key performance indicators. A comprehensive strategy with robust funding, political backing and high-level goals is needed to build an advanced materials ecosystem.
2. The EESC supports the EU-Japan partnership on advanced materials, and suggests extending similar partnerships to other countries like South Korea and the United States. These collaborations should facilitate shared research, innovation and policy development.
3. A holistic approach is needed to reduce material consumption and promote

circularity in manufacturing and end-of-life processes. Digital product passports should be integrated to enhance transparency and recycling while minimising bureaucracy.

4. It is essential to bridge the gap between innovation in the labs and the practical application of innovation in the market. Incentives and streamlined permitting processes should support commercialisation, particularly in refining and processing strategic materials.
5. Given the demand for highly skilled labour, the EESC advocates investment in vocational education, STEM²-focused career guidance, up-skilling and re-skilling programmes to prepare the workforce for digital and advanced materials industries.
6. We recommend a value-chain approach,

with social and environmental conditionalities for EU funding, a focus on WTO³ reform, and stronger EU market surveillance to promote compliance and support fair competition.

7. Healthcare is suggested as a strategic area due to its emissions intensity and its overlaps with other sectors, which would benefit from advanced materials innovation.
8. Finally, intellectual property rights need to be protected, regulations harmonised and early warning systems developed to detect supply chain risks. We recommend that a European technology council be established for advanced materials, with EESC participation to strengthen governance.

Following the adoption of this opinion, what did/will you do to promote it?

This opinion is extremely important for the future of the European Union. Since its adoption in July 2024, we have actively worked to raise awareness among EU institutions, Member States and stakeholders about the main findings and recommendations proposed by the Committee.

The opinion has been promoted on social media, where it received notable appreciation

for its concrete approach and direct recommendations. I believe it is essential to continue promoting this opinion in the coming months, including through specific bilateral meetings with the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council. The co-rapporteur, Mr Arroyo Herranz, and I, as Rapporteur, would be very pleased to participate in these meetings.

It is crucial that this opinion be promoted both at national and local levels. I have already begun this effort in Cyprus, and other Members have also promoted it in their respective regions and Member States.

Read the EESC opinion on Advanced materials for industrial leadership at: <https://europa.eu/!VcbQCG>

1. European Commission, Chemicals and advanced materials, <https://europa.eu/!6p6MmX>

2. STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics)

3. World Trade Organisation, <https://www.wto.org/>



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