



EDITORIAL Dear readers,

A decade-long, inward-looking period of institutional haggling is over. A new era begins. 'New' is the word of the day. There is a new treaty in force, new posts that it created have been filled, a new European Parliament has

recently been elected, a new European Commission is taking shape, a new policy round has been opened and new priorities are being identified.

Over the last five years, Margot Wallström, the outgoing EU commissioner, has changed the way the European institutions communicate. She introduced two-way communication, which is all about listening and responding and moving closer to people.

If everything goes as Commission President Barroso wants, Ms Viviane Reding will be taking over communication and citizenship in the new European Commission. I welcome this choice and look forward to working with Ms Reding, and I also wholeheartedly welcome the European Parliament's choice of Ms Kratsa as Vice-Chair of the Interinstitutional Group on Information. We are pleased to see that communication and citizenship are becoming interlinked at institutional level, since the two are interdependent. They are both aimed at involving people, making their opinions heard and their concerns felt.

It is trite to say that one cannot separate communication from good policies. In the EU we have good policies, we saw and can still see them at work during the crisis, but it is so difficult to communicate them.

I am currently finalising a new communication strategy for the Committee. I want to move from information to genuine communication.

The EESC is in a very privileged position. Being a consultative body, it enjoys considerable freedom to speak and reflect. Members — the EESC's most valued asset — are rooted in national, local and regional communities, from different parts of society, giving them unrivalled knowledge and expertise. Those two factors are a formidable asset for flexible and reactive communication, enabling the EESC to respond to current events. However, it can only work when we all take ownership of communication.

In our proposal for a new strategy, I also call for the strengthening of synergies between the European institutions in communicating our Europe!

We are all in the same boat and should row in the same direction. This is why partnership is the key to communication. It has proved its added value and usefulness on many occasions, not least in the run-up to the climate summit in Copenhagen.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau once identified the imagination as the driving force in all political activity. In the years to come, we must prove our imagination and courage in delivering results to our citizens and building up a stronger Europe. But we can only truly succeed if our achievements are matched by our communication.

Irini Pari
EESC Vice-President
Responsible for communication

Spanish Presidency — Europe is back

Spain is the first country to have taken the EU presidency, on 1 January 2010, under the provisions of the new Lisbon Treaty that entered into force in the previous month. It will thus be a presidency of transition, marking the transfer from the Nice Treaty to the new era of the Lisbon Treaty. 'If anything defines our presidency, it will be the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon,' said Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero at a meeting with MEPs. This is why Spain is largely expected to set precedents that will determine the way in which new possibilities and structures introduced by the treaty will work in practice.

The programme of the Spanish Presidency has been prepared by Spain, along with the Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies that will follow.



Economy tops the agenda

The first priority will be to boost economic recovery and job creation. The 2008 crisis hit European economies hard, including Spain where the unemployment rate is hovering around 20%. As underlined by Mr Zapatero, if Europe has learnt anything from the crisis, it is the need for coordination when responding to the challenges of a globalised economy. 'If within the Union we

have a common market and a common currency, we must also have common economic governance,' he said. The declaration comes at the right time, as the Lisbon Treaty allows for greater coordination of economic policies, which will speed up economic recovery.

As excesses in the financial sector are partly responsible for the crisis, the presidency calls for better regulation and oversight of the financial markets, and in particular the prompt establishment of the European Systemic Risk Board and new European supervisory authorities.

According to the programme unveiled by the Spanish Presidency, the revision of the Lisbon strategy is the key priority. The current crisis, coupled with a rapidly ageing population, makes a comprehensive economic reform programme even more crucial and urgent. In general, the aim is to find a new economic model that is sustainable, innovation-driven, green, based on ideals of solidarity and globally competitive. In particular, the new strategy will play a role in soothing the negative effects of the financial and economic crisis; it should be better linked to cohesion policy in order to help poorer regions and groups catch up; it will foster innovation as a way to achieve growth and jobs. As 2010 is the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion,

the presidency will pay particular heed to the unemployed and the worst off. The new strategy is to have an improved governance system, with realistic targets set for the next 10 years, a renewed implementation scheme and stronger involvement of relevant stakeholders, not least at local and regional level. Spain and the two subsequent countries holding the EU presidency will not only strive to ensure that the single market functions properly but also try to achieve 'a fully integrated internal market'.

Let's green the economy

Making EU policies as environmentally friendly as possible is the upcoming presidencies' overarching priority. The protection of the environment is no longer an end in itself but a means of increasing growth and employment. Green jobs, eco-innovation and electric cars will be developed and promoted as a way to boost economic recovery. Actions to advance renewable energy and energy-efficient buildings and to encourage eco-friendly means of transport will be stepped up. Fiscal instruments will be examined to ensure they promote energy-efficient products. Even though the 'green' revolution will surely reduce Europe's dependence on fossil fuels, energy security will remain a key

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The European citizens' initiative: get Europe to act!

The Lisbon Treaty gives European citizens a new way to make their voice heard. A citizens' initiative, signed by one million citizens, can ask the Commission to take legal action to tackle a problem that they feel has been overlooked. Former EESC President Anne-Marie Sigmund is working on the details.

EESC info: What are the changes that the new treaty brings for civil society organisations and citizens in general?

Anne-Marie Sigmund: For the first time, a European treaty clearly spells out the principle that European politics is not only based on citizens voting every couple of years and then leaving business to politicians. Now, the treaty introduces a new article on participatory democracy and dialogue with citizens, to accompany representative democracy. For example, the concept of



Anne-Marie Sigmund

civil dialogue, among civil society organisations themselves, but also between civil society organisations and EU institutions, is now part of the treaty. Each institution will have to step up its efforts and enter into a structured, permanent dialogue with civil society organisations and

citizens. This goes beyond the usual consultations on a specific Commission proposal. This is a big success for me, as I made the theme of participatory democracy one of the main topics of my term as president of the EESC during 2004–06.

EESC info: You were an EESC observer at the European Convention, which initially came up with the idea of a European citizens' initiative in the Constitutional Treaty. You are known to be an ardent supporter. What is the state of play?

AMS: The Lisbon Treaty took over this idea from the Constitutional Treaty and sets the basic principles of the citizens' initiative. However, the EU still needs to stamp out the details: How many Member States

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DIARY DATES

28 January 2010 — EESC:
Public hearing 'Access to credit: traps and risks'

17 and 18 February 2010:
EESC plenary session

15 March 2010:
European Consumer Day

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The EESC at COP 15

The formal title of the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, which took place from 7 to 18 December, was the 15th Conference of the Parties under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The summit is normally referred to as COP 15 however, or the Copenhagen Conference. In June each year a meeting is held in Bonn, and every December a meeting is arranged in a different location: the 2007 December meeting was held in Bali, in 2008 it was in Poznan, and in 2009 we were in Copenhagen.

In recent years, the Committee has worked hard on the climate change issue, and has constantly urged the Commission to go further in its attempts to reduce CO₂ emissions which are responsible for global warming. Events have been organised and a number of opinions drawn up. This work culminated in the resolution 'No turning back', which was adopted in plenary by a large majority in November 2009. The document spells out the Committee's approach to climate change and states that it is essential to maintain the target of reducing the EU's CO₂ emissions by 30 % by 2020.

The first week of the Copenhagen Conference involved a significant amount of technical and preparatory work; after the official opening in plenary, officials from the negotiating parties (the EU and individual countries) met in various groups and sub-groups to prepare the decisions to



be taken by politicians during the second week of the event. These negotiations are not open to the public, and they concern only a small number of the 15 000 people who participated in the conference. The other participants were mostly observers from UN Member States — nearly 200 were represented at the conference — along with NGOs and other interest groups who used COP 15 to further their cause, influence decision-makers and enhance their visibility.

A glance at the programme of a typical day at the COP showed one plenary meeting, two meetings of ad hoc working groups, five meetings of informal groups, 16 meetings of groups of countries, eight meetings of observer organisations, 39 press briefings, 22 side events, seven science presentations and, on top of this, individual countries or groups of countries organising presentations and discussions (nine from the EU, nine from Brazil, three from China, and seven from the Netherlands for example). All of these events were held in the conference centre (comparable to the Heysel World Exhibition Centre), but due to lack of space other events ended up spilling out into the city of Copenhagen itself.

An EESC delegation of three members took part in the second

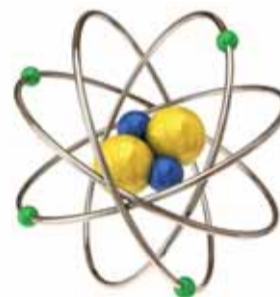
week of the COP 15, from 13 to 18 December. The EESC had no formal negotiating role at the event, but was there for two reasons: to present the Committee's work to date — summarised in the 'No turning back resolution' — to a larger audience, and to organise a side event. A side event usually involves a mini-conference of 1.5 to 2 hours: a number of speakers give presentations, and then a debate is held with the public.

The EESC side event on Friday 18 December was on GDP and alternative measurements of prosperity. At first sight this may not seem very important for climate change, but the whole way in which growth and well-being is measured has a profound impact on the political choices made. Making a side event a success involves creating an interesting and attractive programme, and then selling it well. The line-up of speakers was impressive, including high-level academics and policy-makers who all had excellent presentation skills, and so the next step was to attract a large and lively audience. Flyers were distributed, posters were hung up, all available contacts were used, and food and drink was provided. At an event where competition for attention is so intense, nothing can be taken for granted. (ja) ●

Civil society's view on nuclear energy: opportunities and risks

With the Copenhagen Summit behind us, now is the right time to discuss how nuclear energy can potentially help to meet the targets agreed by the international community. The Committee has always considered that as nuclear energy is one of the low-carbon forms of energy currently available, it cannot simply be disregarded outright. However, nuclear energy is an issue that should be debated at length and in depth with all concerned, including companies, workers, associations and, last but not least, the European people. The aim is to develop a high level of awareness across the population of the EU, as this will ensure that balanced, forward-looking and fair decisions are taken by policy-makers.

The conference held on 30 November 2009 by the TEN Section, entitled 'Nuclear energy: opportunities and risks — views of European civil society and stakeholders', was first and foremost the continuation of past, regular efforts made by the Committee to make the nuclear debate more transparent.



The conference was part of the European Nuclear Energy Forum (ENEF) which was launched by the Commission in 2007. Mr Tóth chairs the working group on transparency, and several EESC members participate in the ENEF working groups on risks and opportunities.

A large number of people from a wide range of organisations took part in the event and discussed the competitiveness of nuclear energy, its influence on electricity prices and concerns on the management of nuclear waste. Mr Dominique Ristori, Deputy Director-General of the Energy and Transport DG, and Ms Edit Herczog and Mr Ivailo Kalfin, MEPs, were just some of the keynote speakers. The panel discussions were chaired by EESC members Mr Ioazia, Ms Sirkeinen, Mr Wolf and Mr Ehnmark, who all play an active role in the field of energy and sustainable development.

Mr Tóth stressed that the debate was in keeping both with the EESC's priority to raise awareness among Europeans on different energy options, and with the ENEF's broader mission to encourage stakeholder dialogue and raise the profile of the nuclear debate across the whole of society.

The conclusions of the debates are clear: there is still much to be done to improve the transparency in the nuclear field! Conferences at the EU level are important; however the next steps should be to 'go local' and to support the development of national and local forums on nuclear energy.

The participants could find some points of compromise but many questions remain pending, such as the issue of waste management or the question of cost competitiveness (given in particular the unexpectedly high costs of new nuclear plants in the EU). On electricity prices, nuclear energy does not always mean lower prices, especially because of the inappropriate implementation of the liberalisation of the EU energy market. (ak) ●

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issue. In this context, the Spanish Presidency urges solidarity between Member States in the event of an emergency and promotes the development of gas and electricity inter-connectors within the EU.

Given that more than half of the EU's energy is imported and the lion's share of hydrocarbons is located in Europe's neighbourhood, addressing energy issues requires strong external action by the EU.

This is why the Spanish Presidency calls for the EU to 'speak with one voice' with supplier, transit and consumer countries.

The EU as a global player — now or never

We are currently witnessing important shifts on the international stage. The USA remains the main actor, while China and other rising powers grow in importance. Some fret that the G2, US-China group will shape tomorrow's world order. As for the EU, 'today we are still less than the sum of our parts,' concedes Spain's Prime Minister.

Admittedly, the Lisbon Treaty reinforces the Union's potential for global influence, as institutional changes concerning the EU's exter-

nal dimension are one of the biggest innovations of the new treaty. It created the posts of President of the European Council and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security, as well as the European External Action Service, the nascent European diplomacy service. Given the potential of the treaty and the stated willingness of the Spanish Presidency to strive towards authentic 'effective multilateralism' and make the EU a 'world leader', important developments are expected in this area.

Spain's prime minister, José Zapatero recently said: 'Europe has been and continues to be a successful project [...]. But we are not satisfied; we want more [...] Europe is back.' The presidency's programme testifies to this thirst for action. (mb) ●

and the EESC, which was held in Sofia on 27 November 2009. At the meeting, the participants adopted a declaration entitled 'The European labour market: anti-crisis measures'. (jr)

Tomasz Jasiński at the head of European youth trade unions



Tomasz Jasiński

Congratulations to Tomasz Jasiński (Employees Group, Poland) who has just been elected President of the Youth Committee of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). The Youth Committee develops action programmes and influences the work of the ETUC, ensuring that its strategies, policies and positions take due account of young people's views and needs. (mb)

MEMBERS' NEWS

Sepi decorated with honorary award of the Bulgarian Council



Mario Sepi

Mario Sepi, EESC President, received an honorary award from Mr Lalko Dulevski, President of the Bulgarian Economic and Social Council, for his contribution to the development of organised civil society. This is the highest decoration awarded in Bulgaria to public officials who have made an active contribution to promoting the values of civil dialogue. The ceremony took place alongside the annual meeting of the Presidents and Secretaries-General of the Economic and Social Councils of the Member States

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are 'significant'? How to organise the collection of signatures? Who will verify them? A lot of tricky questions! And we need to be extremely careful not to put up additional hurdles that will prevent an initiative from succeeding. So last November the Commission launched a wide consultation process running until the end of January, so I urge everyone to participate! I am currently working on a Committee opinion on both the provisions of participatory democracy and the citizens' initiative; we recently had a very interesting hearing on the subject with European civil society organisations. I am also thinking of organising a stakeholder conference on this, possibly later this year.

EESC info: And when will all this be up and running, when can we expect the first initiatives?

AMS: The Commission will probably present its proposal for a regulation this spring. Then Parliament and the Council need to agree, but I hope we will have this operational by the end of 2010. I am really excited about

this new way for citizens to make their voice heard and get Europe to act! This will undoubtedly be a unique chance for citizens to voice their concerns, get together across borders and push the Commission to get active. It can also, in the long run, contribute to a real European debate among citizens and a European public sphere.

In order to participate in the consultation, visit http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat-general/citizens_initiative/index_en.htm (cw)



EESC info

European Economic
and Social Committee

a bridge between Europe and organised civil society



EDITORIAL

Dear reader,

This special issue of *EESC info* appears at the start of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. These two issues are of particular concern to the European Economic and Social Committee. In 2009, our Committee produced a number of important opinions on these topics, focusing on the challenge of

'in-work poverty' and the goals of the renewed social agenda. On behalf of civil society, we welcomed the decision to make 2010 a year of action. The European Union provides the framework of rights that form the basis for concrete actions aimed at combating poverty. The link between human dignity and individuals' economic and social conditions is enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, as well as in many Member State constitutions. What we urgently need is a firm political will, able to push for the necessary social measures to be implemented at all tiers of government, in order to fight against social exclusion and poverty.

We face a dramatic situation: there are now more than 79 million people living in poverty in the EU, including 19 million children. Basically, one European citizen out of five is living in unacceptable social conditions.

Although the EU, compared with national governments, has limited powers in policy areas related to social protection, we have to bear in mind that the European Year 2010 can be an important opportunity to push this issue up the political agenda and demand a concrete response.

On several occasions in 2009, the European Economic and Social Committee began to stress the importance of a renewed and substantial EU social agenda. We even adopted a declaration, jointly with Notre Europe, through which we called on individuals and civil society organisations to sign a petition for a new social action programme where social rights are as important as economic freedoms. Real access to rights, and in particular social rights, is the first step in making the fight against social exclusion a concrete and achievable objective within the EU.

Social exclusion and poverty (where the former can be the cause or the consequence of the latter) need to be tackled together, especially in a context of economic crisis.

Dealing with the problems of poor workers means, both at European and national levels, intervening in several fields: employment policy, welfare and social security, and measures in favour of families.

In addition, the most vulnerable groups must be taken into account, such as ethnic minorities, migrant workers, homeless people, single-parent families and so on.

This is especially important in the current economic situation. As Europe takes tentative steps towards recovery, many citizens are still suffering the impact of unemployment, debt and falling living standards. We must ensure that the less well-off are not paying the price for a crisis that was never of their making. The year 2010 is the time for EU leaders and national governments to move from rhetoric to action. And to do so, the EU must speed up its action on the basis of a few principles and assets: reinforcing the European social model; improving the effectiveness of the open method of coordination; promoting fundamental rights at work and the principle of 'decent work'; and incorporating the issue of poor workers into the framework of European-level social dialogue.

Mario Sepi
EESC President

DIARY DATES

21 January 2010 — Madrid, Spain:

Conference opening the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion

17–30 May 2010 — Brussels, Belgium:

Spring Focus Weeks

10–24 October 2010 — Brussels, Belgium:

Autumn Focus Weeks

Can Europe ever rid itself of poverty?

British film director Ken Loach is known around Europe for his hard-hitting dramas depicting the impact of social injustice. In December 2009, the Cannes Palme d'Or winner added another prize to his collection when he received the European Film Academy Lifetime Achievement Award. He talked exclusively to *EESC info*.



Ken Loach

EESC info: Would you say that highlighting the misery of poverty is one of the main themes of your films?

Ken Loach: It's been an element in them, but I hate reducing themes to one or two sound bites. You try to do something quite complex. But one of the things the writers I work with have tried to do is relate personal experience to the social context. We don't grow up in a vacuum. Everything is determined by the social and political context in which we live. The disregarded part is the people who are poor and... I don't like the word 'excluded'. They have an economic function even though they are unemployed, which is to drive down the value of labour. The idea that unemployment and social exclusion — to use the vogue phrase — is somehow an aberration is wrong. It's implicit in their system: the system of the people who own and control and provide a political framework for — dreaded word — capitalism.

EESC info: Do you think that a European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion can make a difference?

KL: I think you have to look at it critically. As I understand it there are EU directives that insist that public services have to be open to private tender and the state cannot

play a part in investing in industries and production. That means that it's the private companies and big corporations that determine economic activity. Profit has to be fought over so hard that there isn't space for long-term employment, even. It's agency work, casual work, and short-term contracts in place of the long-term careers that people used to have.

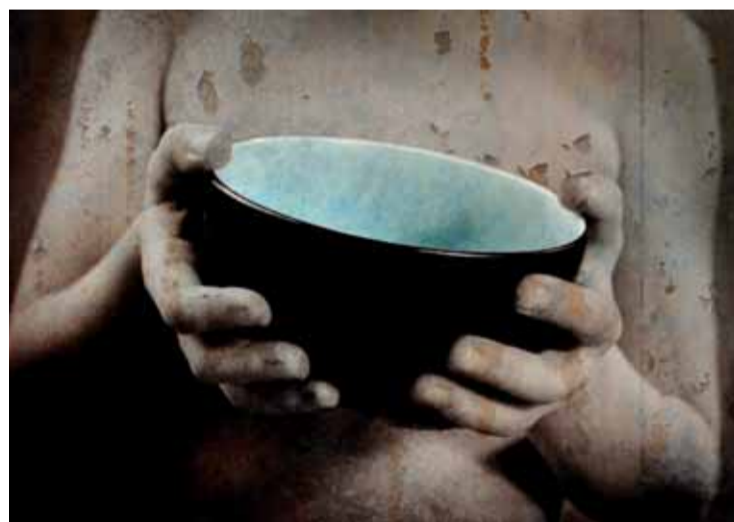
My father worked in the same factory for 43 years. Nobody's going to do that now. He was an apprentice. There are no apprenticeships now. There is 20% unemployment amongst the kids in our country. If the economic system cannot provide the work, and we cannot do it collectively, how will it happen?

EESC info: With 80 million people at risk of poverty across the EU, what can civil society do to confront the problem?

KL: Short of a radical change of direction by those people in power, nothing really. I would argue that change of direction has to be towards common ownership, democratic control,

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How do Europeans feel about poverty?



Less than one in five shared the policy-makers' official definition.

Statistics show that 16% of the EU population live below the official poverty line. And according to the survey of August–September 2009, most people feel the problem is getting worse: 84% of Europeans believe poverty has grown in their country over the last three years — particularly in Hungary, Latvia and Greece. However, surprisingly, far fewer (53%) say poverty has increased in the specific area where they live, and only 12% of respondents claim they have difficulty making ends meet each month.

Is feeling poor the same as being poor? 'People are expert judges as regards knowing whether they are suffering poverty,' insists Robert Manchin, Managing Director of the Gallup Organisation in Europe, which carried out the other survey — a telephone poll — in July. However, residents in some countries tend to be more optimistic than others. For example, a smaller proportion of people in Cyprus than in any other country apart from Denmark regard poverty as widespread. And

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The very need for a special year to combat poverty and social exclusion underlines the fact that poverty levels in the European Union are unacceptably — some would say shockingly — high. Yet overall, Europe is one of the wealthiest regions in the world.

These facts raise a more fundamental question: what is poverty, and what causes it? Officially, it means living on less than 60% of a country's median income. But does this abstract definition reflect people's own experi-

ence? Two Eurobarometer surveys in 2009 offer some answers.

The findings revealed that three quarters of Europeans believe poverty to be a widespread problem in their countries, and 9 out of 10 want urgent action to tackle it. But there was no consensus on what it is. Respondents were split between identifying poverty as lacking the resources to participate fully in society (24%), being unable to afford basic goods (22%), or depending on charity or public subsidies (21%).

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A 'year' can make a difference

Members of the European Economic and Social Committee were quick to welcome the decision to earmark 2010 as the year for fighting poverty across the EU. The Committee's May 2008 opinion foresees the European Year as 'a valuable initiative to raise public awareness of persistent pockets of poverty and marginalisation in Europe and to build support for effective ways of tackling these problems.' Unfortunately, these 'pockets' are far from insignificant. Recent figures show that nearly 80 million people in the EU are living in poverty — some 16 % of the population; a situation the EESC describes as 'intolerable.'



Krzysztof Pater

'Reduction of poverty and social exclusion is in the interest of every citizen and that is why everyone should contribute to the achievement of this objective,' says the opinion, a point underlined by rapporteur Krzysztof Pater (EESC, Various Interests Group), Vice-Chair of the Warsaw Scouting Association. 'Rich people cannot just make the assumption that once they pay taxes they are free of responsibility,' he explains. All kinds of activities can make a difference: even a weekly stint of voluntary work. 'It's a question of society's mentality.'

Mr Pater believes Europe needs new indicators that reveal the scale of actual deprivation, and individuals' ability to purchase goods and services for themselves and their families, rather than just relative income inequalities. 'We know the Commission is working on this,' he says. 'The primary responsibility is ultimately in the hands of political decision-makers.'

The EESC identifies five issues for special attention during the year:

- undeclared work,
- active measures to get people into employment,
- investment in industries and services that generate jobs,
- the impact of policies on future economic growth,
- vulnerable communities' access to food and energy.

Eradicating poverty will need the involvement of many different policy areas, and it is policy-makers who must take the lead. 'The fair distribution of prosperity must be given much greater political priority than hitherto, also at EU level,' declares the opinion.

Employment is widely regarded as the best path out of poverty. In 2007, almost 10 % of adults of working age in the EU lived in jobless households. Migrants suffer higher unemployment than the local population — as much as 16 % higher in a country like Denmark — and are therefore more vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion.



Nicole Prud'homme

But a job does not guarantee protection. The EU's 2008 social protection and social inclusion survey found 8 % of citizens in work in the EU-25 were living below the poverty line. This is due to low pay, low skills, insecure working conditions and often involuntary part-time employment. The EESC's September 2009 opinion on 'Work and poverty: towards the necessary holistic approach' highlights the plight of the 'working poor'. It calls for quality jobs, better training and lifelong learning, and new mechanisms to combine social protection and work so as to ensure all families get an adequate income. With an estimated 48.1 million workers without stable contracts in Europe, job insecurity is growing, and contributes to in-work poverty.

'There are people in the sectors I represent — metalworking, construction, services — who cannot live decently on their salary, especially



Antonello Pezzini

in urban centres. For us, this idea is unacceptable,' explains Employers' Group member Nicole Prud'homme, of the French Federation of Christian Workers, who drafted the opinion. 'Work should give people dignity, as well as guaranteeing the welfare of their families.' A public hearing formed part of the consultation process that fed into the opinion. 'The text corresponds to the reality in Europe and to people's experience. I hope it will be a resource for the Commission during the coming year.'

She emphasises that the initiative was launched before the economic crisis took hold. 'I wanted to focus on the fact that work is not always a bastion against poverty, even full-time work. It's a structural problem: the crisis has just aggravated it — and we're not out of it yet! The European year is an opportunity to move forward, and avoid going back to the situation that existed before.'

The absence of a Europe-wide definition of poverty has tended to mean the problem has been underestimated in the past. As the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) points out, getting a clear picture of social inequality means studying wealth as well — understanding who has it, where it comes from, and how it is redistributed. There are also massive inequalities between the 27 EU Member States. People on the poverty line in the UK, Denmark or Ireland may nonetheless have an income nine times greater than poor people in Bulgaria, Romania and Latvia, and these differences have grown since EU enlargement. 'This highlights the importance of effective action towards socioeconomic cohesion and reduction of current economic disparities across the EU, to diminish the areas of deprivation,' says the EESC.

Employers' Group member Antonello Pezzini was co-rapporteur of the January 2009 opinion on the renewed social agenda. 'If we use the year well it can make a real difference,' he says, recalling the European Year for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in 1982. 'We launched a whole series of initiatives, and the benefits lasted long afterwards. That's the value of the special year: it concentrates attention and leads to lasting change.' Poverty and social exclusion damage the European economy, he points out, emphasising the role of civil dialogue in raising mutual awareness and diminishing inequalities in society.

As the opinion makes clear, 'particularly in the light of the current crisis, we must not lose sight of the fact that the whole of society shares responsibility for the welfare of the individual.'

'European years' and what they say

by Iriani Pari
EESC Vice-President,
responsible for communication



Iriani Pari

I often hear people ask what European years are really about. European years give thrust to an important issue for Europe and our society, bringing ongoing activities into the limelight, fuelling public debate, winning well-deserved respect for committed voluntary organisations and initiatives, and so increasing the chances of government action.

The last two 'European years', the European Year of Creativity and Innovation (2009) and the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008) were so 'hands-on' that they were close to the heart and work of our Committee.

Now, in 2010, it is the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. This provides a special communication challenge since attitudes towards poverty and social exclusion vary. It creates actions and even embarrassment. It is not a 'pretty' subject and one we may find painful to discuss. However, we are talking about the everyday lives of women, men and children that live through difficult circumstances not being sure that tomorrow they will have a warm home to stay in and a warm plate of food to eat. So we need to talk about it sensitively and respectfully. This issue gives you an idea of the practical steps the EESC has taken to keep this important societal issue high on our agenda.

Continued from page 3 — How do Europeans feel about poverty?

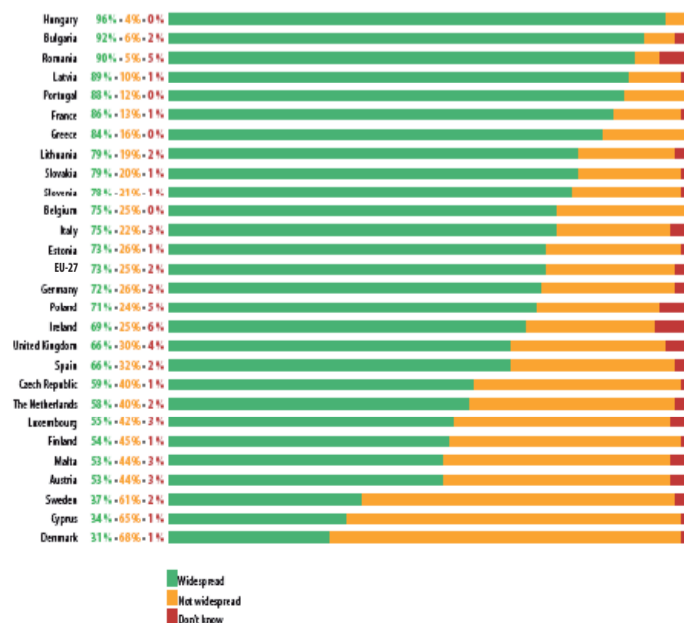
yet statistically, Cyprus is one of the six countries with the highest levels of deprivation in the EU: a telling indication of the complexity of the problem, which suggests social solidarity and perceptions of relative wealth have a big impact on people's thinking.

Unemployment is regarded as the main social cause of poverty in the EU, with lack of education and training chiefly to blame for individual poverty. In southern Europe, family background and support have a stronger influence than in northern countries. But whereas 56 % of Europeans identify unemployed people as most at risk, only one in five thinks children and lone parents are vulnerable, whereas data show they are among the higher-risk groups (19 % and 32 % of them respectively suffer poverty).

Unemployed people themselves are twice as likely to worry about poverty and homelessness. The 'fear factor' can turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy of people's well-being, points out Robert Manchin. In the current crisis, 26 % of Europeans expect things to get tougher over the next year, compared with 16 % predicting an improvement.

Who do Europeans hold responsible? The majority say that national governments must take action to reduce poverty through providing work and training, promoting growth and building affordable housing. But the findings show they are also looking to the EU. 'Europeans are strongly aware of the problems of poverty and social exclusion in today's society,' concludes EU Employment Commissioner Vladimir Spidla. 'Three quarters expect the EU to play an important role.'

How widespread do you think poverty is in your country?



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providing for need and not for profit, and protection of the environment.

What's bizarre is that [politicians] are in charge, and they hold up their hands as though it's an act of god, but it isn't. It's a function of this way of organising economic activity. What do they expect? It's like the devil complaining about sin.

EESC info: Your film *It's a free world was a harsh exposé of the exploitation of migrant workers in Europe. But do you think free movement and easier travel within the EU can help people to escape from poverty?*

KL: How can they travel when they are unemployed? They haven't got a bean. It's just such hypocrisy. They should go round some of the poor areas — every country has got them — and say 'you're all free to travel'. OK, where's the money? It's

like saying to a tramp you are free to dine at the Ritz. Great!

EESC info: *Is there one of your works above others that has changed perceptions of poverty? Cathy come home, for example?*

KL: It only made an impact because of the state of television at the time. I think we have done better work, but it fitted the moment. There was *Kes*, but at least the boy in *Kes* had a job to go to. In *Sweet 16* it was a lad a bit older, who had nothing: no community, no work, nothing. That was the difference in the 30-year gap between them. *Sweet 16* was shot in Greenock on the Clyde, which had been a shipbuilding town and now has massive unemployment. The biggest industry was drugs. The bright kids left and the rest just stayed there and rotted.

Towards eradicating child poverty in the EU



Jillian van Turnhout

The 20th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a sobering reminder that in Europe nearly one in five children lives in poverty. This figure has not improved since 2003. In some Member States, it is one in four.

Inadequate housing, poor health and greater exposure to risk behaviour are some of the constraints poverty imposes on Europe's most vulnerable — and consequently on Europe's future.

Children in lone-parent households are at greater risk of living in poverty. In the wake of the financial crisis, several Member States made budget cuts in education, healthcare

and social benefits. Such measures could potentially increase the risk of perpetuating the so-called 'inter-generational transmission of poverty'.

An integrated strategy, with policies backed by targeted and quantifiable objectives, is needed to break this transmission. Yet so far there is no official EU-wide target to reduce child poverty. The European Parliament proposed a 50% reduction by 2012 but the European Commission is silent on the matter.

'The idea of cutting child poverty in the EU by 50% is a good one, and one that I wholly support, but I can see the difficulties in achieving it, particularly when the Commission

does not have the authority to issue sanctions against those countries that do not reach their targets,' says Group III member Jillian van Turnhout, Chief Executive of Children's Rights Alliance. 'The Commission is aware of these problems, and so I would say that is why they have been silent.'

In March 2006, the European Council asked Member States to take action to reduce child poverty. A year later, the Commission and national governments made it a priority. Alle-

viating child poverty requires more than just easier access to the jobs market. It also calls for a holistic approach that addresses a child's emotional and social development.

Through a coordinated joint analysis of national data, the Commission and the Council are able to pass on recommendations. According to a 2008 report, Member States need to improve monitoring and assess the impact of policies on child poverty and social exclusion.

Eradicating child poverty may be a priority concern in most if not all Member States. But the reality is that many have yet to implement the recommendations they agreed upon in their 2008–10 national action plans. The lack of investment and commitment on the national and local levels means initiatives fall short of obtaining concrete results. As a result, child poverty levels remain high: unfair though it might be, 19% of children live in poverty.



Poverty is gender specific

Single mothers in Europe struggle to meet their children's basic needs. A steady job is only part of the solution. Single mothers have to manage multiple tasks, from caring for their family to finding the working hours that will accommodate household duties. But the lack of job flexibility and mobility means single mothers are at a greater risk of poverty. And, consequently, so are their children. In Europe, poverty is a reality for 34% of households headed by a single parent.

'More than half of all single households are living in poverty. In the UK, it's 53%', says Brenda King, former Commissioner for Women's National Commission. 'Single mothers regularly have no flexibility in the terms of the hours they work. Where you work can also be restrictive as many single parents can't work far away from the childcare, assuming you can afford childcare.'

Throughout most of the EU, the at-risk-of-poverty rate is higher for



Brenda King



women. Fall-out from the financial crisis has compounded the problem. Unemployment will rise in the next year and reach 'levels not seen for over a decade'. That was the stark assessment in an October 2009 report by the European Commission's Director-General for Economic and Financial Affairs. Those with weaker contracts and who are less qualified have and will continue to struggle from the current recession.

Female employment rates, adds the report, were initially less affected by the crisis because many work in social sectors. 'They may have retained their jobs but their hours were cut,' explains King.

More than three quarters of part-time workers are women. That corresponds to one in three, whereas just 1 in 10 men work part-time. And the gender pay gap has remained unchanged at 15% since 2003. In

some Member States, the difference is far greater.

Thirty-five years after the 1974 directive on equal pay, women in the EU are still segregated in the labour force. Despite having an overall higher education, women find themselves in relatively few decision-making positions. Seventy-one per cent of all corporate managers in Europe are male, while women dominate in the customer service sector.

The European Commission is looking at how to narrow the divide and get rid of the stereotypes that predetermine roles and enforce prejudices. Last year it spent over EUR 100 million on employment, social cohesion and gender equality programmes.

But concrete EU targets to reduce poverty among women are missing. Reducing such poverty would

provide their children with a far better chance of success. 'I can't see how you can eradicate child poverty

without having a concrete target to reduce poverty among women,' concludes King.

Engage the people

'Without communication, the worst thing could happen — which is absolutely nothing,' says Claus Sørensen, Director-General for Communication at the European Commission. Addressing participants at the European conference on 'Poverty between reality and perceptions: the communication challenge', in October 2009, Mr Sørensen said in order to convey the message about the need to tackle poverty and social exclusion, the main priority is to connect with the public.

The plight of the poor and the socially excluded is an issue that has

been largely marginalised. Bringing greater attention and passing on knowledge about the conditions of Europe's vulnerable people means engaging the public on a more personal level. Specifically, this involves getting information into people's homes and onto their online social networks.

'We need to prepare the public and make them understand that something needs to be done about social exclusion,' he said. Mr Sørensen acknowledged that his DG has not so far been as effective as he would have liked.



Claus Sørensen

© European Commission

Ethnic minorities still struggle to find their place in Europe



Madi Sharma

Discrimination on ethnic grounds is viewed as Europe's most common form of discrimination. The 2009 Eurobarometer survey on discrimination states that over half of Europeans believe ethnicity is a barrier to the jobs market. Such findings do not bode well for immigrants and the integration of minorities throughout the bloc.

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso wants to create a common immigration policy that emphasises the respect for fundamental rights and human dignity. Education and training are key to integration says the President.

But discrimination and social stigmas continue to marginalise ethnic minorities and immigrants. Many seeking asylum for legitimate reasons are forcibly returned or detained in prison-like conditions. Others often have nowhere to live while they wait for their applications to be processed in lengthy administrative procedures.

The plight of the Roma, Europe's largest ethnic group, continues to pose major challenges. The 2008 Eurobarometer survey on discrimination revealed that almost a quarter of all Europeans would feel uncomfortable having a Roma as a neighbour. The percentage drops to six if the neighbour is of an ethnic minority other than Roma. As a result, some Roma go to great lengths to hide their ethnicity.

In 2006, Communications Commissioner Margot Wallström asked the EESC to issue an exploratory opinion on how to fight discrimination and promote the integration of minorities, notably the Roma. Poor housing and education, lack of access to healthcare, and segregation are some of the daily realities they face, according to the opinion. Some 60% live in extreme poverty and Roma children are often segregated in schools at an early age.

'The objective of the opinion is to highlight to the EU institutions the issues facing Roma communities and identify recommendations which could be adopted. Lip service is not an option if we are to make changes, definitive actions have to be taken. To date, nothing concrete has happened,' says Madi Sharma who co-wrote the EESC opinion with Anne-Marie Sigmund.

The successful integration of minorities relies on a functioning network of cooperation between all the players. This includes the Roma,

who remain grossly under-represented at the policy decision-making level. The EESC opinion calls on the Commission to explore how EU legislation can address their situation, possibly through a desegregation directive.

The EU anti-discrimination and race equality directives are powerful tools. But it is up to the Member States to implement and enforce the law. Some are better than others. In Italy, the Council of State approved the fingerprinting of all Roma and would require those leaving their camps to wear badges. In Northern Ireland, Roma have sought sanctuary from mobs. Cases of alleged forced sterilisation of Roma women in the Czech Republic continued to surface as late as 2005. In November 2009, the Czech Prime Minister Jan Fischer issued an official apology and promised to adopt measures that will bring a definitive end to such violations.

'The European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion is an excellent initiative; however, as far as the Roma are concerned, will they be overshadowed by the financial crisis and the now huge numbers of European people falling into poverty?' queries Madi Sharma. 'If the European year does not identify clear, concrete measures to address the poverty and social exclusion of Roma communities, it will risk being a Commission tick-box exercise.'



Together for a new social action programme

'We call upon the European Commission to propose a social action programme which guarantees that fundamental social rights are treated on an equal footing with the rules on competition and economic freedom.' At the conference on 30 November marking the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Community Charter of Funda-

mental Social Rights, the EESC and Notre Europe stressed the need for a new social action programme which is geared to the current situation in the EU. As Bruno Vever, a former member of the Employers' Group said, the current crisis in the EU is making it neglect its citizens. In this situation the EESC must be cheeky. The conference was

attended by Jacques Delors, former Commission president, and over 200 participants. The declaration adopted at the end of the conference is available (in 22 languages) for civil society organisations and the European public to sign online (<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/social-rights>). (jr)

Combating poverty means fighting climate change

Climate change was top of the political agenda in December as the COP 15 conference got under way in Copenhagen. EESC info asked Dr Rajendra Pachauri, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, about the connection between climate change and poverty both in Europe and the developing world.

In the case of the Mediterranean region it is projected that water scarcity would increase as a result of climate change, which again would seriously affect small farmers and the poorer sections of society. Europe would also be affected in another manner. Several parts of the developing world would suffer negative impacts of climate change with a decline in agricultural yields and extreme water stress. Those living in the small island states and low-lying coastal areas would be threatened with sea level rise. These impacts could cause many people to flee their own countries, and Europe would have to deal with many poor refugees, which would only increase the population living in poverty.

Dr Rajendra Pachauri: There are various ways in which climate change would impact on poverty in Europe. Firstly, with an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme events, it is the poor who would be the largest sufferers. The poor even in the most prosperous nations are the worst victims of climate change, as was the case with Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.



Dr Rajendra Pachauri

© European Parliament

EESC to raise awareness and engage citizens about poverty

During 2010, hundreds of activities are expected to take place throughout the EU. Key events are the opening conference (21 January, Madrid), the closing conference (17 December, Brussels) and a European-wide art exhibition and journalist competition. Two **European Focus Weeks** focusing on the themes of poverty and social exclusion will also be held in Brussels. They aim to generate momentum by concentrating activities in two specific periods: 17-30 May and 10-24 October 2010. In the same way, the **focus weeks** of Member

States are spread over the year, from February to November.

At the EESC, the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC) has proposed a **cross-sectional standing study group** to mobilise resources and ensure the Committee's participation in the major events both in Brussels and throughout the Member States. This group will prepare a report on the EESC's awareness-raising role during the year and its main messages for after 2010. (mjb)



Moving together towards a new culture for urban mobility

Urban mobility is a growing concern for the people of Europe. The choices people make in how they travel will not only affect their own well-being and health but, increasingly, that of others and the environment as well. In this connection, on 7 December 2009, the EESC Section for Transport, Energy and the Information Society (TEN) jointly hosted the final conference of the 'Move together' project in Brussels, funded under the EU seventh research framework programme, in order to discuss new ways of creating a better and more inclusive urban mobility culture in Europe.

Eighteen months after the project's launch conference — also held at the EESC — the event brought together EESC members, representatives from the 14 cities involved in the consortium and other local authorities (including Rome, Madrid, Kaliningrad and Stockholm), EU level policy-makers and a randomly selected panel of EU citizens. All called for greater EU-level involvement and for further action to improve the implementation of sustainable mobility projects. Mr Edgardo Iozia (Group II, Italy), Vice-President of the TEN Section, stressed that 'the EESC must get more involved in taking concrete action to help make sustainable mobility happen in European cities'.

Speaking at the conference, Brian Simpson MEP, Chairman of the



Pupils with Claude Leloup during the study trip

European Parliament's Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN), welcomed the initiative's open and participative approach and emphasised how important the European Parliament believed it was to cooperate further with the EESC during the subsequent development of urban mobility policy. Closing the event, Mr Stéphane Buffetaut (Group I, France) stressed that 'our Committee believes that the citizens must be the key focus of any initiative taken to promote sustainable mobility'.

Following the Move Together Day, on 8 December, EESC TEN Section President Mr János Tóth opened an exhibition showcasing what both

the public and civil society can do to help their governments support a range of good practices to improve mobility in our cities. Hosted by the EESC, and on show until 18 December, the exhibition was also visited by 114 pupils aged 10–12 from five language sections (English, French, German, Lithuanian and Finnish) of the European School at Woluwé, as part of a study trip introducing students to the issue of sustainable mobility.

For more information
[http://www.eesc.europa.eu/sections/ten/index_en.asp?id=2300011tenen\(acc\)](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/sections/ten/index_en.asp?id=2300011tenen(acc))

Small Business Act: a birthday marked by mixed feelings

Support for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) is essential to resolving not only the financial crisis, but also social and environmental problems. Our SMEs are at the core of innovation and creativity and deserve more support from the European Union. Such was the message sent to European decision-makers by the EESC Employers' Group, Eurochambres, UEAPME and Business Europe at a joint conference on 2 December 2009, the anniversary of the Small Business Act (SBA). This package of measures launched by the European Commission to 'think small first' did not remove the obstacles

that stand in the way of growth, job creation and innovation. Many entrepreneurs often doubt their own abilities or do not understand how Europe can really help them to start and manage their businesses. Henri Malosse, President of the EESC Employers' Group, wants the European Union to show stronger commitment to SMEs: 'Undoubtedly, Europe can count on SMEs to create growth and jobs but can SMEs and entrepreneurs count on Europe?', he wonders. Participants also committed to carry out a new assessment and feedback exercise on the implementation of the SBA next year. (jr)



Henri Malosse

PLENARY SESSION IN A NUTSHELL

Addressing cancer prevalence and disparities in the EU



The EESC presented its opinion on actions to reduce prevalence of cancer in the EU and eliminate the variations of incidences and mortality rates of the illness across Member States. After circulatory diseases, cancer was the most common cause of death in 2006, with about 3.2 million EU citizens being diagnosed each year. The EESC welcomes and supports the continuation of the European Commission's proposal on 'European partnership for action against cancer', which supports Member States in creating integrated cancer plans.

The EESC advocated for an educational approach by informing young people about the lifestyle, occupational and environmental factors that contribute to cancer development. In addition to early education, research initiatives should be strengthened in order to gain further knowledge about the prevention of cancer. To add to prevention schemes, proposals to set new targets for screenings are supported by the EESC. (al)

Stronger action needed to boost the real economy

A second, more ambitious European support plan, new rules for international finance and a more political Europe are necessary to coordinate action and ensure economic and social recovery. This is the key message of the opinion on 'The financial crisis and its impact on the real economy' tabled by rapporteur Carmelo Cedrone (Employees' Group, Italy) and adopted by at the EESC plenary session on 16 December.

The opinion spells out the need to introduce supervision rules and penalties in order to prevent any recurrence of an uncontrolled system. An agreement on a common approach to European banks is also required. 'Faced with a crisis like the current one, strong action must be taken in order to identify measures and proposals for both the short and long term', said Mr Cedrone in his opening speech.

The EESC also urges the Commission to propose concrete measures to build a political Europe from the bottom up by, for example, drawing up a White Paper on political governance. 'It is important to ensure in the future that the public does not continue to pay the price of non-Europe,' stated Mr Cedrone. (ds)



Radical change needed to ensure a sustainable future for transport

Reacting to a request from the European Commission and the Swedish Presidency, the EESC adopted an opinion on a sus-



tainable post-2010 transport policy for Europe at its December plenary session.

'The current transport system is unsustainable. A radical change of direction is needed,' said rapporteur Lutz Ribbe (Various Interests Group, Germany). Satisfying and increasing demand for transport is not enough. 'We must look at how transport is generated to determine whether some transport activities make sense,' added Mr Ribbe.

The EESC stresses the need to analyse carefully the impact of policies on transport patterns before political decisions are taken.

The EESC calls for EU lawmakers to look at the sustainability of transport as a whole, and not just in terms of environmental goals. Transport will not be truly sustainable until transport workers have better social conditions and everyone — including the disabled and the elderly — has proper access to public transport.

The EESC calls for action on long-agreed but never implemented transport policy goals. The internalisation of external costs is just one example. (mb)

IN SHORT

Discover the sustainable architecture of tomorrow

Global Overshoot Day is the day of the year when the global population starts living beyond its ecological means by using more resources than the earth is capable of producing in a year. In 2009, it fell on 25 September. The EESC organised its energy efficiency



days around this date and produced a clip which illustrates that recycling is bound to become the watchword in the architecture of tomorrow. Everyone who attended the EESC's Energy-Efficiency Days saw what sustainable housing means in practice. To discover the house that consumes 10 times less energy than an average town building in Europe, go to: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/activities/press/media/AV/index_en.asp

Watch the winners of the EESC prize for organised civil society

At its November plenary session, the EESC awarded six pioneers of civil society in Europe who — through their innovative achievements and creative initiatives — influenced in a positive manner the public perception of Europe and the integration process. The EESC held interviews with all of the winners. If you were unable to attend the prize-

giving ceremony and are curious to know what Italian organisations combating organised crime, an environmental NGO, an economic chamber and European associations promoting history and volunteering throughout the continent can possibly have in common, go to: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/activities/press/media/AV/index_en.asp and watch the interviews. (mb)

Economic and social councils met in Moscow



Filip Hamro-Drotz and Martin Westlake

The Board of Directors of the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (AICESIS) met for the first time in Moscow on 3 and 4 December 2009 at the invitation of the Russian Civic Chamber, chaired by Mr Velikhov.

The event was attended by five economic and social councils from Europe, five from Africa, two from Asia and one from Latin America, the EESC, the UCESA (Union of Economic and Social Councils of Africa), the UN's Ecosoc and the ILO.

The EESC's delegation was led by Mr Hamro-Drotz who was accompanied by Mr Tóth and Mr Westlake. Under the presidency of Mr Marzano, President of the AICESIS, the Board

adopted the AICESIS medium-term development plan.

The next board meeting and general meeting will be held in New York at the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations on 5 and 6 July 2010.

Sign the petition calling for a social action programme!

On 30 November, the EESC organised a ceremony to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the EU's Charter of Fundamental Social Rights. The event's guest of honour was Jacques Delors, who in 1989 was the first to envisage a social Europe with fundamental social rights; rights which have since been incorporated into the Lisbon Treaty through the Charter of Fundamental Rights. By a remarkable coincidence, 1 December also marked the day on which Europe celebrated the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty — all of which means that the timing of the ceremony could not have been better!

We also adopted a joint declaration calling on the European institutions to adopt a social action programme to ensure that fundamental social rights are accorded the same importance as competition rules and economic freedoms. All civil society organisations and members of the general public are invited to sign this petition (<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/social-rights>).

EU-Turkey: civil society and the accession process

The EESC organised the 27th meeting of the EU-Turkey Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) in Stockholm on

1 and 2 December 2009. The meeting was honoured by the presence of Ms Cecilia Malmström, Minister of EU Affairs of Sweden, and Mr Egemen Bağış, Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator of Turkey.

Discussions were held on the role of civil society in the accession process, the impact of the economic and financial crisis, the informal economy, and the rights and role of women in the EU and Turkey. A seminar was also organised alongside the meeting, involving representatives from Swedish civil society organisations and the media, which aimed to launch a debate on how civil society organisations and other platforms could help spread information about Turkey's accession negotiations within the EU Member States.

A joint declaration was adopted at the end of the meeting with recommendations to the authorities in both the EU and Turkey.

For more information please see: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/sections/rex/europe/areaactivities/turkey/index_en.asp?id=507327rexen (lw)



Sandy Boyle and Tuğrul Kudatgobilik

Soon in the EESC

Artists and scientists unite to explore the complex dimensions of climate change

In recent years, awareness and understanding of climate change in Europe has increased considerably. Despite this, there is still a gap between scientific knowledge and understanding by society. The same disparity prevails in the cultural and artistic world. To address this, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the British Council, the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) and TippingPoint are organising a major European gathering of individuals from across the cultural sector, including artists and scientists involved in climate science. The event will take place at the EESC on 25 and 26 January 2010. The aim is to explore the complex and subtle cultural dimensions of climate change, and to identify areas for further action involving joint projects by artists and scientists. (ds)



European Consumer Day 2010

Since 1999 the EESC has been organising European Consumer Day, which has become an important EU-level event because of its focus on topics of vital interest to European consumers.

In 2010 it will be held on 15 March in Madrid and organised jointly by the EESC, the Spanish Presidency and the European Commission. The main theme of European Consumer Day 2010 will be 'Enforcing consumer rights.' (mjl)



Conference on human resources in the maritime sector — 11 March 2010

In a bid to boost jobs and make the maritime sector more competitive, the EESC is organising a conference to raise awareness among young people about job opportunities in the industry. The EESC conference will bring together young people hoping to embark on a maritime career and key professionals from the maritime sector — including the social partners, shipowners, trade unions, training colleges and the International Maritime Organisation. (so)



Designers awarded for their creative vision of a sustainable future

An exhibition displaying the most creative projects that simultaneously demonstrate the concept of sustainability from the EESC Design ZeroNine competition, including the prize-winning entries, has been unveiled for showing in December. The multimedia exhibition will also include a prototype of the winning concept, the 'Bee House', which is a window box containing flowers, and was recognised based on its ability to 'encompass plant, animal and human life in a message that emphasises simple and essential ecological values in modern life', as stated by the international selection jury.

The opening night, which took place on 9 December, included a prize-



Irimi Pari with James Ennis, winner of the first prize

giving ceremony for the four winning designers performed by Vice-President Irimi Pari and Secretary-General Martin Westlake. In addition to the 'Bee House', other winners included 'Dynamic', a mobile phone charger powered by human stress, 'USELESS', a small reminder object to encourage the ecological use of resources and,

by honourable mention, 'Sabbide', a collection of objects created by natural elements and contributing to waste reduction.

'The Design ZeroNine competition award for a sustainable present is underpinned by a clear and very appealing aim: that of giving,' was the conclusion of curator, Giovanna Massoni. The award also reinforces the mission of the EESC, to bridge social initiatives of civil society with European institutions to influence and support social policy.

The exhibition will be ongoing until 31 January 2010 and visitors are invited to come and view it. (al)

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