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and Social Committee

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Diversity Europe Newsletter



**CIVIL SOCIETY REACHING
OUT TO EUROPEAN CITIZENS
DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC**

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Foreword

Arno METZLER

President of the Diversity Europe Group



There are big challenges ahead

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,

This Newsletter is the first edition in challenging times. It wants to underline that the voice of organized civil society is active and requests to be heard. I would like to begin this editorial by thanking all of you and our Group III Secretariat, for your creativity in keeping up the work and for your efforts to assist and support.

In Member States, civil society and their organisations are heavily involved in helping and in fighting the disease. The EU had a delayed start for own initiatives to coordinate help and activities. Then we went through a short period of national dominance and EU bashing. Now for financing in solidarity, a first solution is a fund and the fundamental discussions are continuing. There, the voice of organized civil society is necessary as never before. The discussions have shown that national politicians still express that the Union as such, can be put at stake. Here they need a strong signal that organised civil society has a clear pro Union position, without conditions. There is no way around. This shall be the basis for future trust in collaboration. The exchange of prejudices is neither useful nor helpful.

The reflection on the conditions to build trust among citizens and governments is key for the future. There, people who can collaborate across borders and fight a pandemic can contribute a lot. Politicians shall listen more to the voices of civil society of their citizens.

There is our challenge!

Yours sincerely,

Arno METZLER

President of the Diversity Europe Group

This issue:

Civil society reaching out to citizens during the Covid-19 virus p. 3

The EESC working with global civil society p. 13

Diversity Europe Group Members in the spotlight p. 14

Highlights of the recent plenary session p. 16

Overview of recent Group III Member's work p. 19

Group III Members working on new EESC Opinions p. 20

Other news from the EESC p. 21

CIVIL SOCIETY REACHING OUT TO EUROPEAN CITIZENS DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC

LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF OUR GROUP III VICE-PRESIDENTS...

Poland: joint efforts against the crisis

Krzysztof Stanisław BALON (PL)

*Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group
President of the Programming Committee
of the Working Community of Associations
of Social Organisations (WRZOS)*

In the late evening of early April 2020 in Draganowa, a village with about 600 inhabitants in south-eastern Poland, some 15 km from the Slovak border. Mirka Widurek, a retired teacher and educator and President of the **association 'Dla równości' ('For Equality')**, is calling on the phone practically non-stop, to keep the aid measures "under lock and key" for the next few days. As Mirka said: "We've been thinking for a long time how to adapt our activities to support people who require our help against the background of the Corona Crisis. Actually, we haven't changed the essence of our voluntary work. In cooperation with the association **Food Bank of Rzeszów** we continue to collect food from 22 shops of a big grocery chain from Leżajsk, through Jasło, Korczyn, Krosno, Nowy Żmigród, Dukla, Rymanów, and Zagórz to Lesko. Every day from 10 pm to midnight, we load food boxes into our private cars and then, in the morning, deliver food to the elderly, the sick and the disabled. Among our volunteers are ordinary people – housewives, firefighters – but mostly elderly people, who cover the cost of gasoline from their pensions."

"For Equality" is working **without any public donations**, exclusively on a

voluntary basis. The big threat nowadays: many of the volunteers are in the most dangerous category for Coronavirus infections, too: older persons, with pre-existing health conditions. Their concerns, however, are in those weeks and months focused on the people waiting for food behind the doors of their homes, rather than on their own health.

Latex gloves, disinfectants, masks? "We sew masks ourselves, as to the others things, we try to get them for free" and they very often succeed. "Just today, Kamil Sieratowski, leader of a **fisherman association from Pszczew** – some 700 kilometers north-west from Draganowa – has sent to us a package of gloves and disinfectants".

Both Mirka and Kamil are members of the **Public Benefit Council**, an inter-sectoral consultative body to the government. "Thanks to the good cooperation between the representatives of the government and the civil society organizations within the Council", says Cezary Miżejewski, President of the Working Community of Associations of Social Organizations WRZOS (an umbrella for about 1000 organizations) and also a Council member. "Thanks to them it was possible to enforce demands from WRZOS and many other organizations, for the expansion of the Crisis State Aid for companies to the Nonprofit Sector, as well as for simplifying and postponing the reporting



'For Equality', volunteer Janek Żrebiec, a chemistry student, loads boxes of food to deliver to persons confined to their homes

by the nongovernmental organizations to tax offices". Moreover, the government has introduced the greatest possible flexibility in using public funding for the activities of the nongovernmental organizations, especially at the regional and local level.

But at the end of the day, what really counts for overcoming the crisis, are the **efforts of the organizations and the sacrifices of the people at the grassroots level**. We must also not forget the assistance of their partners. Hence, every employee of the food shops who has been involved I, will receive a big piece of the traditional Easter cake baked by volunteers from **"For Equality"**.

Community outreach Ireland

Séamus BOLAND (IR)

*Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group
Chief executive officer of Irish Rural Link and
member of the Community and Voluntary
Pillar*

*Chairperson of the Irish Peatlands Council
and chairperson of Pobal*

Covid 19 in Ireland means a **radical way of living** and a **complete change in day to day living**. The people most at risk from a health perspective are



now cocooned in their homes and strongly advised not to leave them. The news of the spread in European countries such as Italy, Spain and France

has shocked communities so much, that they are intent on observing all of the directives on the **curtailment of movement**.

At the time of writing, April 7th, Ireland has a total of 5,364 identified cases and sadly 174 deaths. The median age is currently at 79. The measures taken

by the Government are similar to those of many other countries around the world. Social or physical distancing, closure of all non-essential businesses, curtailment of public transport. Of course, the **consequences** of these measures is a **huge spike in unemployment almost reaching 20% from a low of less than 4%**. While the emphasis is strongly on fighting the disease, the challenges facing many people when it is over will be a true test of all governments and the EU.

The fight against Covid 19 has **two pillars**.

1. The **mobilisation of the full health sector**, with many medical people returning from abroad to help.
2. The **mobilisation of local volunteers** to help the thousands of people at risk, who must not leave their homes.

Clearly, the first approach is to ensure that people do not have to go to hospital. That means that people are being asked to stay at home. However, it

was recognized early that **some people need support**. The solution lay in building a **partnership between the Government and the Community and Voluntary organisations**, so that they could agree on a joint programme of work to provide this support.

This programme named **Community Call**, is a **multi-partnership between National Government, Local Authorities, State agencies and all parts of civic society**. Its aim is to ensure that all people have ready access to basic services, including the delivery of groceries and medicine.

Civic society organisations specialising in areas such as urban and rural, disability, older people and many vulnerable communities, are working at the coalface and make life a lot easier for their communities. At the core are the thousands of people who have put their names down as volunteers, all willing to help. **It is proving to be a strong partnership, which should be maintained long after this is over.**

How does civil society support Austrian Communities?

Alfred GAJDOSIK (A)

*Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group
Vice-chair of the Austrian Federal Group
of Christian Trade Unionists (FCG), board
member of the Austrian Trade Union
Federation (ÖGB), chair of the Austria-
Tunisia Friendship Association*

In my community in **Wiener Neudorf**, the community offers a **medical service with general practitioners, for all residents over 65 years of age**. Residents can call their doctor or write an email to them.

When the doctor issues a prescription, it is picked up by **community employees** and handed over to the pharmacy,

which then prepares the medication. The community employees then bring the medication to the patient and the patient receives the invoice at a later date. This entire service is free of charge.

We have also set up a **shopping service with the scouts**, for **people over 65 years of age** who cannot rely on family or private help and who need basic food. This service is also free of charge.

Finally, we have created a **neighbourhood help 'Team'**, where individuals are available to help single isolated

persons, by calling them, or taking their dog for a walk.

We all hope to normalize the crisis again in the near future.

But for now: **Stay healthy! Stay at home!**



Advice from Lithuania: stay safe, eat fresh and healthy!

Mindaugas MACIULEVIČIUS (LT)

*Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group
Director of the "Quality of Lithuanian
agricultural farm produce" agricultural
cooperative*

*Vice-president of Lithuanian "Cooperative
way" agricultural cooperatives*

In Lithuania on 15 April 2020, we have 1091 cases of Covid-19 and 29 people have died. We are in quarantine already a month so far, until 29 of April, but it looks like it is going to be **extended further**. All public places, restaurants and shops are closed, excluding food shops, food markets, pharmacies and veterinary supplies. Most people are working from home, but **manufacturers are still working and people are allowed to go to work**.

It has been a very challenging month, as there were not enough face masks and respirators for medics, the world supply chain collapsed and of course, everyone wanted to buy them. Many ordinary people started to **sew face masks for the elderly** and to share them with neighbours. Moreover, a number of **fundraising campaigns** have started, in order to **buy safety equipment for medics**. In addition, a lot of volunteers have helped the police to patrol the streets and to make sure that there are no large gatherings. Volunteers are also helping elderly people to buy necessarily food and medicine supplies. It is a **very hard time**, but it has **helped the nation to work together and combat the disease**.



As I am a director of an agricultural cooperative which organizes **Mobile farmers markets** in the four biggest cities in Lithuania, for us it was very important to **protect our farmers** and to make their **everyday business safe**. It is of the highest importance at this time, to **supply citizens with fresh natural food** from our countryside and of course, to send the signal that there is no panic and that there is plenty of food available. We have started the **campaign 'Let's live healthier'**, to strengthen the organism with natural products. Just to remind people **how important the healthy diet is**.



In this context, **at the European level the most important issue is our food security**. We have done so much work in relation to sustainable food systems in the past. Now it is obvious how important it is to **implement these systems as soon as possible**. Farmers in Europe as in Lithuania, are facing disruptions in the market and **now is the time for the European Commission to step in**. We can see that global supply chains are not functioning properly and it is a



challenge for our exports. At the same time, in our internal single market, we can see some disturbances, also lack of seasonal workers in farms, as borders are closed for travel and this is very worrying for most of the farmers in the Western parts of Europe. Now is the time for **rethinking our agriculture** and reminding our citizens how **important the food supply is**.

Stay safe, eat fresh and healthy!

Emergency measures to protect consumers

Baiba MILTOVIČA (LA)

Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group International and EU Affairs Adviser of the Latvian National Association for Consumer Protection (LPIAA)



The coronavirus 19 is one of the **greatest challenges the EU has ever faced**. The spread of the virus will further hit the EU Member States' economies, resulting in major threats not only for businesses and employment, but also for consumers. This has prompted governments to implement exceptional measures to **protect the vulnerable consumers**.

Showing **solidarity** is one of the cornerstones of the European Union. Especially in difficult times, **civil society organizations, including consumer organizations**, share examples of emergency measures introduced in EU countries to protect vulnerable consumers against COVID19. Examples are collected not only by **BEUC** (European Consumer Organization), but also by national umbrella organizations.

The **Latvian National Association for Consumer Protection** (which brings together 10 regional member organizations in cities and towns in Latvia), has been collecting replies from the government, municipali-

ties, regulators and companies, on measures introduced to deal with COVID19. The list below offers just a **snapshot of different measures**:

1) If a resident is unable to provide his/her **basic needs** due to an emergency situation, the **municipalities grant a crisis benefit**. Due to the emergency situation caused by Covid-19, half of these expenses will be reimbursed to the municipality by the State;

2) The Cabinet of Ministers approved a **seven-bill package** prepared by the Justice Ministry, including a procedure that ensures **debt relief opportunities for consumers with a low income and small debt**;

3) Due to the emergency situation caused by Covid-19, **municipalities will postpone or shift real estate tax payments**;

4) **Vulnerable consumers can apply for heating allowance**: allowance for individual heating, raw materials and other energy related services, as well as individual heat cost allocations and flexible calculation and billing methodology.

The **Latvian National Association for Consumer Protection** remains committed to supporting governments and municipalities, as they take steps to protect vulnerable consumers due to COVID19. While in this crisis, **solidarity and coordination among civil society organizations** are what we need.

Besides the efforts of national civil society organizations, in the post-Covid 19 period we will require a strong and stable **EESC**, where the Members are knowledgeable and ready to work to

fully represent the interests of their civil society organizations.

Wishing you all health and strength!

Czech civil society at its best!

Pavel Trantina (CZ)

*Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group
EU relations and project manager of the
Czech Council of Children and Youth
(ČRDM)*

Czech civil society has shown a high degree of **innovation, creativity, voluntarism and solidarity**, when it comes to the fight against Covid-19.

The Czech Republic has been one of the first EU countries, **where citizens are obliged to wear protective face masks whilst in public**. It was civil society organisations (CSOs) which were campaigning in favour of wearing them (see the video at <http://masks4all.org>). As there were not enough of these masks, people started to make them on their own. There are numerous (hundreds if not thousands) of voluntary initiatives that are sewing or 3D printing of protective face masks all around the country, often coordinated by CSOs.

CSOs (including also famous singers, actors, athletes, musicians and other creative arts groups, as well as universities in cooperation with companies), have responded effectively, flexibly and creatively.

The main areas of civic engagement have been:

- assistance to elderly people mainly with **shopping** (Scout Help, Neighbourhood Assistance);
- production of necessary **personal protective equipment** – masks and respirators (COVID19CZ - an informal group mainly of IT experts, companies and high-tech universities that is offering **innovative IT solutions** – see their <https://covidhacks.org>);
- assistance to various professional groups engaged on the frontline: healthcare staff, rescuers, firemen, policemen, staff of grocery stores (such as **'Energy for Doctors'** - the provision and distribution of food products "energy packages" to medical staff (doctors, nurses) at hospitals);
- **debunking hoaxes and fake news** – (Czech Elves initiated a new campaign called "Send it to your grandma" targeting the elderly affected by chain letters);
- **assistance to other socially or economically disadvantaged groups** (homeless people) and the provision of various other services (legal, education, psychological, IT solutions, healthcare);



- **education** – Czech TV is offering a daily programme of new, live, **interactive broadcasting for school pupils**, 45 minutes dedicated to various subjects (for example maths and Czech language) substituting regular school classes. Many CSOs too have opened their on-line education resources to the public (such as 'People in Need').

I am extremely proud for the CSOs engagement, which in many cases substitutes the governmental work.

For further information, please see the following publication: report "Lessons learned and best practices from the Czech Republic: COVID-19" by the former EESC member David Stulík, now Senior Analyst of the Kremlin Watch Program, European Values Centre for Security Policy. Available at <https://www.europeanvalues.net>.



Actions taken by the national confederation of disabled people (NCDP) of Greece, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic

Ioannis Vardakastanis (EL)

*Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group
President of NCDP Greece and of the
European Disability Forum (EDF)
Treasurer of the International Disability
Alliance (IDA)*



The **National Confederation of Disabled People (NCDP)**, the umbrella organization representing persons with **disabilities, persons with chronic diseases and their families in Greece**, in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disproportionate impact on them, from the first moment has been **striving for the protection of their health, safety and well-being**. At all levels and in all directions, to the government and to all respective authorities, NCDP has continuously and strongly addressed the problems and risks that persons with disabilities, chronic diseases and their families face in these difficult times. **The biggest risk is to be left behind or even left out, discriminated or excluded from prevention, protection and support measures and services.**

We follow the developments regarding COVID-19 on a daily basis and through NCDP website, social media and e-mail, over the phone and with SMS, **we keep our member organizations continuously updated** on all of the government's general and special measures for persons with disabilities, chronic diseases and their

families and on the actions undertaken by the Confederation. Responding to the campaign of the Ministry of Health **"We Stay at Home"**, the NCDP is fully operational, with some staff working from the office, others working from home and with open phone-lines responding daily to telephone enquiries. Through letters and other communication means, **we continuously make concrete proposals and claims** to the Prime Minister, all involved Ministers and to members of Parliament. But also, to regional, local and all respective authorities, urging them to immediately undertake measures needed for the protection of the **rights of persons with disabilities, chronic diseases and their families** and for guaranteeing the safety and quality of their life during this unprecedented crisis. We keep providing guidance and recommendations for ensuring **disability mainstreaming in the COVID-19 response**. We make our voices heard publicly through **press releases** regarding our concerns and demands.

We demand equal access to information on COVID-19 through accessible means and formats. We call for accessible healthcare services and guarantees that persons with chronic diseases (e.g. thalassemia, hemophilia, cancer), will continue receiving their treatment in hospitals with safety. We have asked for the **continuation, in any possible way, of the support services that persons with disabilities and chronic diseases received before the pandemic crisis**, including those with psychosocial disabilities on whom the isolation measures have greater impact. We urge proactive and effective measures to protect specifically those living in institutions, who face the risk of being isolated, neglected or abused. NCDP has also requested from the govern-

ment that **all employees with disabilities and chronic diseases stay at home and work from home, with no pay reductions**. We are calling for the accessibility of distant-education programs and of any other measures adopted at these times, to balance the consequences of the need to stay at home.

As President of the NCDP, I am constantly alert in Greece to ensure that the **fundamental human rights of all persons with disabilities, with chronic diseases and their families are not violated**, and their needs are effectively and appropriately met. I do the same from my position as President of the **European Disability Forum (EDF)** and in this capacity I have sent a letter to the European Commissioner for Equality, Ms Helena Dali. At EDF, we are working hard, on a daily basis, to respond to such unexpected challenges and to strongly address all issues that concern the European disability movement at these critical times. It is of utmost importance for each one of us, for policy makers and authorities, for civil society and at all levels, national, European and global, to respond to this tragic situation of the new pandemic all over the world with personal and social responsibility in order to **"Leave no one behind"**. As required by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and in particular Article 11 "Situations of Humanitarian Risk and Emergency", we need now, more than ever, to **protect the fundamental human rights of the most vulnerable**. We need to safeguard the lives and well-being of all persons with disabilities, chronic diseases and their families, elderly people and children, including refugees and migrants with disabilities, **protecting the most valuable fundamental human right, that of Health.**

LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF OTHER GROUP III MEMBERS...

One more crisis for a final wake-up call! The very last one?

Alain Coheur (BE)

Member of the Diversity Europe Group
Director of European and International
Affairs, National Union of Socialist Mutual
Health Funds



The financial, economic, social, food, migration, security, environmental... **crises...** and finally... **the health crisis**, not the first one by far. Through the **marketing of fear**, we are being pushed from one crisis to another and the world is being pushed dangerously deep into a crisis, **deliberately paralysed** by an unwillingness to fundamentally **question the economic model of development** which for years has given priority to financial interests by privatizing its public services and **weakening its social protection**. It has seized wealth for the benefit of some, has dismantled the State and **sacrificed the weakest on the altar of austerity**, repeatedly presented as the refrain that "there is no alternative". Our economic system has led to self-fulfilling prophecies and has **atomized the relationships between human beings**, to make them compulsive consumers of pleasure.

The sacrificed of today were already the sacrificed of yesterday: all those anonymous, all those professions that

have become insignificant in the eyes of the powerful, trivialized, little valued or even devalued are now in the spotlight. **Professions that we have forgotten are essential to social cohesion**; professions that have for years resisted the blows of profitability, productivity and economic efficiency, despite the protests, despite the calls made in the face of a **staggering political vacuum**. These workers on the front line of our health and our health system, are the nurses, the caretakers, the home helpers, the generalists, the educators, the psychologists, the childcare workers, the social workers, all the professionals who accompany the sick, excluded or suffering, marginalized, dependent, homeless, undocumented...

We have forgotten, we have neglected the sense of the common, the importance of the **common goods**, those that unite us, those that **bring us together**, those that define us in our human relationships, in our existence. Our society is drifting further because it was already weakened, deliberately segmented, disoriented, surrounded by the **deadly shadows of nationalist and populist revivals**.

This health crisis reveals all the excesses and inequalities of our societies: from the state and quality of our health systems, to access to healthy housing, highlighting the precariousness of families, job insecurity and indecent wages. Upwards for some and downwards for most professions, often in highly feminised sectors. It will have taken only **one virus**, fed by the avidity and greed of some, for all this to be revealed and for the **whole**

of our economy to be destroyed in one movement and for many certainties to be shaken.

From now on, both the political and the economic world will bear a heavy responsibility for imagining the way out. For there will only **be two possible outcomes**: either we consider this crisis to be one of the hazards we have to face on an *ad hoc* basis and we will organise society to respond better to it. Or we **radically change our perspective and choose another development model**. "There is an **alternative**" **post-health crisis, a New Deal, a new Social and Environmental Pact** whose pillars would be the values of solidarity and equality, inspired among other things by the successes of the social economy, put into practice by strong gestures such as the relocation of our production through short supply chains, local and secure, in addition to the creation of jobs that provide a decent income for each and every one of us. We need **revitalized public services**, recognized as essential, capable of carrying out their missions properly, under the auspices of a social and regulatory State that is free of financial markets.

If we make the **right choice**, we not only have a chance to experience the "crisis to end all crises", but also to **change our relationship with society and its environment**. If we do not, we will relive the worst moments in human history.

Trusted media to counter fake news about COVID-19

Klaas Johan OSINGA (NL)

Member of the Diversity Europe Group
Senior adviser, international affairs at LTO
Nederland

Eating garlic, drinking hot water, avoiding ice cream. You must have come across this advices on the internet as a **'help' to avoid COVID-19**. Recently I spoke with a friend, I am not mentioning any name, and she said that it was so frustrated not being able to find real information on the virus.

Trust in the media, this is the concern. We are used to panicking about fake news whenever huge stories emerge. There are questions about the role and responsibilities of major tech platforms. They have a **responsibility in fighting the misinformation**. Claims like:

- A giant hoax
- It is a chemical weapon
- Cured by garlic

...have all probably been seen by millions. Among them a farmer and member of my organisation LTO. The other day we spent one hour and ten minutes on the phone and I had a my work cut out **countering all the conspiracy theories** he believes in, and probably was spreading through private forums like WhatsApp. It was early March.

What I told the farmer: if you look at disputable sites for reliable information, your judgement is not up to much. A lot of the information up there is either badly edited material made to raise the number of views – crucial for the writer's CV - and which is then **distributed through social media** by those who are looking for confirmation of their prejudices. **But**

of course, the reality around the virus is much more complicated. Then there are also deep fakes.

It is sad that even President Trump is himself sending misinformation while castigating the "fake news media" and his political opponents. At the start of the pandemic he said the **virus was a 'hoax'**. He was not just 'misleading' but outright lying. Asked on March 12 if he accepted responsibility for the testing problems, he said: "I don't take responsibility at all". **Words that are going to haunt him for the rest of his mandate.**

If anything is learnt in this crisis, is the **need for reliable information** by trusted media. For example: I listen a lot to the BBC World Service. There are still many others, luckily, although hit

by budget cuts. **People want trusted, independent information and yes, they know where to find it.** Hopefully my farmer know this too by now.

For an impartial journalist the challenge remains when to pass on the best, trusted information, and **when to avoid slipping into government propaganda**. I am sure many are grappling with that dilemma. But when some are saying they don't trust the media anymore and don't know where to turn for reliable information on COVID-19, they cannot be looking very hard.

Oh yes, my farmer thanked me for taking so much time on the phone. That's not happening to him every day, he said.



Swedish civil society rising to the challenge

Ariane RODERT (SV)

*President of the INT Section of the EESC
Member of the Diversity Europe Group
Senior policy adviser, Church of Sweden*



Swedish volunteering organisations mobilizing

Sweden has a vibrant civil society and a high number of volunteers. Historically it **shaped the Swedish welfare system and continues to innovate new approaches** and contributes to a **cohesive and inclusive society**. On average half the population volunteer 15 hours per month, making Sweden one of the countries with the highest degree of volunteering. With the Covid-19 outbreak civil society responded quickly. The new restrictions called for adapting activities, but also intensified dialogue with the government and authorities to ensure **best support to people in Sweden**.

Adapting activities and offering support

The first response from civil society was to adapt its activities to the new restrictions to limit risks to people. This included **limiting public gatherings, offering activities digitally and supporting high-risk groups such as the elderly and vulnerable**. Civil society is doing practical things

such as shopping or picking up prescriptions, but also informing hard-to-reach groups on the pandemic and collaborating with public authorities. As an example, the Swedish Civil Contingency Agency, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions together with the Church of Sweden, the Red Cross, Save the Children, the City Missions and the National Sports Federation, recently signed a cooperation agreement to ensure **services and psychosocial support to the elderly in isolation**, due to Covid-19 across all of Sweden.

Protecting the most vulnerable

The current need for isolation is necessary but also results in **further marginalization and greater risks for certain groups in society**. Quarantine may result in increased risk for violence in close relationships. As a response to civil society raising the alarm, the government has allocated specific dedicated financial resources to civil society organisations working with children, women and LGBTIQ-groups during the pandemic.



Civil society has also highlighted the risk of **increased mental health issues, anxiety and even suicide** due to the financial stress, fear of unemployment and isolation. This has called for new ways to reach and expand support services. The **Evangelical Lu-**

theran Church in Sweden, the **largest civil society organization in the country** with close to **6 million members**, reaches peoples across the county daily with various support services. As a response to the current situation is has increased its support services, such as its 112 call lines, and offers support services through telephone, chat and e-mail in various languages. **The demand on these services has doubled**. It has also expanded its diaconal support to offer alternatives for social contacts to prevent distress and anxiety.



In addition to supporting the elderly and at-risk groups, civil society is assisting groups that face further marginalization during the pandemic, such as **asylum seekers, migrants, unaccompanied minors and EU-migrants**. There groups face additional issues during the pandemic such as lack of information and in some cases, limited access to care services. Here, focus is placed on information and ensuring care and social support include these groups.

Challenges for civil society and preparing for the aftermath

The pandemic affects many aspects of civil society. One key challenge is **fundraising** from both businesses and private persons, who have themselves felt the economic impact of

Swedish civil society rising to the challenge (continued)

the pandemic. This will remain a challenge, as many civil society organisations target their activities towards marginalised groups, which are expected to increase in number as a result of the pandemic.

The crisis has called for drastic measures and fast actions by the political leaders and legislators. There is a risk of fundamental rights being undermined, if some of these actions become permanent. Civil society will continue to monitor progress. But **on the positive side, we see emerging**

initiatives for co-construction and cooperation between sectors, which will remain after the crisis.



In Sweden civil society is often called upon to engage quickly in crises situations. However, this pandemic is unprecedented and will change society

at large for a long time. Civil society is already flagging the challenges ahead. Many organisations already work with limited means and have lost income from various sources, have had to let employees go etc. Therefore, the **civil society sector will also require a boost in the aftermath of the crisis, in order to ensure that it can play its active role in the Swedish society in the future.**

Together against the virus

Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG)
President of the External Relations (REX) Section
Member of the Diversity Europe Group



With the spread of coronavirus in Bulgaria and around the world, many people are **looking for ways to help**. The donation response has been inspiring so far. Many companies have started producing essentials that they **donate to hospitals and other people in need**, and hundreds of employers have shown flexibility and their employees have entered work from home.

The civil society sector is very active. In the three weeks after Bulgaria declared a state of emergency, non-governmental organizations and civic groups redirected all their energy and efforts to deal with the crisis. Some have taken care of **providing protective clothing and other necessary materials for healthcare professionals, others are caring for the elderly ensuring that they continue to receive food and medicines, whilst others have helped Bulgarian education move into the online sphere**. thousands of people have organized themselves to meet a range of needs. It gives me hope and makes me believe that the good is more contagious than the virus.

The efforts of the teachers should be explicitly mentioned, thanks to which Bulgarian education has moved forward in a few weeks only. In this way, our children continue to acquire knowledge and develop their skills with minimal interruption. Non-governmental organizations play an im-

portant role in this process by sharing resources, preparing web-based lessons, providing training and consultations for free. There are a number of **online platforms that are helping Bulgarian pupils and teachers** in the process of education every day.

All these people and their efforts show that each of us can be involved, no matter where he/she is or what his/her financial situation is. For most of us, this means **staying home, as far as possible, following social distance measures**. I know this is extremely difficult, but it is one of the most effective tools available to combat coronavirus. The need for generosity and empathy has never been so great, but donation and volunteering have never earned as many followers as they have now. In these difficult times I hope we are not going to be lost in this steady flow of bad news, but stay positive and **let's start exchanging positive news of good examples of donations and actions from civil society!**

THE EESC WORKING WITH GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY

EU HUMANITY AND SOLIDARITY GLOBALLY



Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG)
President of the External Relations (REX)
Section
Member of the Diversity Europe Group



COVID-19 is a test of **solidarity and humanity worldwide**. The virus recognizes no boundaries. In these difficult and tense times, the **EU is showing its empathy and solidarity**.

As part of the global response to the coronavirus outbreak, the **European Commission supported the Eastern partner countries** and **reallocated €140 million** for the most immediate needs in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and

Ukraine. In addition, the Commission will also redirect the use of existing instruments worth up to **€700 million to help mitigate the socio-economic impact of the coronavirus crisis**.

The European Union has also granted Tunisia 250 million euros in aid to help it cope with the economic and social effects of the coronavirus outbreak. Tunisia suffers from limited health infrastructure and its Prime Minister Elyes Fakhfakh, said last week that the government was allocating \$850 million to combat the economic and social effects of the health crisis. **Tunisia now expects an economic recession**, prompting the central bank this month to cut its key interest rate by 100 basis points from 7.75%.

European countries will club together and “create a package” to try and help African countries hit by the coronavirus pandemic, the **EU’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell** has said. “Africa is of particular concern to us, they’re our neighbours and the pandemic there

could get out of control very rapidly”. Priority should be given to **assistance to the most vulnerable countries** as this is also in our interest in the longer term. We should not forget that Africa has “fragile” healthcare systems, comparing the number of doctors per capita, the number of hospital beds and intensive care units (ICU) with Europe. So it’s clear that the **same virus threat can cause much damage in Africa**. European development ministers are meeting on 8 April to discuss “concrete measures” to help the African continent with coronavirus.

Covid-19’s spread will not be over until it is under control everywhere. **The EU as the global leader in humanitarian aid and donation should ensure international cooperation, collaboration and solidarity world-wide.**

DIVERSITY EUROPE

MEMBERS in the spotlight

The Real Right of Persons with Disabilities to Vote in European Parliament Elections

Krzysztof PATER (PL)

*Member of the Diversity Europe Group
President of the National Scout and Guide
Court of the Polish Scouting and Guiding
Association (ZHP)*

On 19 February, the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions invited Mr Krzysztof PATER, in his capacity as EESC rapporteur, to present the Committee's Information Report entitled "The Real Right of Persons with Disabilities to Vote in European Parliament Elections".



Mr Pater took the floor to present the principal outcomes of the report and outlined the **legal changes in electoral systems** which have occurred in some Member States, between the date of adoption of the Information Report and the 2019 European Parliament elections.

Ms Inma Placencia Porrero, representing the European Commission, thanked the rapporteur for the **comprehensive report** and declared the **intention of the EC to support legal steps towards assuring real voting rights for all EU citizens.**

During the ensuing debate, Members of the European Parliament underlined the **necessity and urgency to address the problem of voting rights of persons with disabilities.** The MEPs

complimented the high quality of the report and expressed their satisfaction that the EESC work on this topic will be continued with the forthcoming EESC Opinion "The Need to Guarantee Real Rights for Persons with Disabilities to Vote in European Parliament Elections", for which Mr Pater will also be rapporteur.

The EESC's draft 2021 budget

Mihai Ivascu (RO)

*Member of the Diversity Europe Group,
EESC Rapporteur for the 2021 Budget
Adviser to the President of the Romanian
Chamber of Commerce and Industry*

On 4 March, an EESC delegation, composed of **Mihai Ivascu**, Rapporteur for the 2021 Budget, Milena Angelova, Vice-President for Budget (Gr.I) and Gerhard Riemer, Member of the EESC's CAF (Gr.II), met with **Mr Johannes Hahn, EU Commissioner for Budget and Administration.** They discussed the EESC budget and the current negotiations for the next multi-annual financial framework.



Mr Ivascu presented the **draft for the EESC's 2021 budget, which was approved by the Committee Bureau in February.** All the lines where the EESC is exceeding the EC recommendation of a maximum 2% increase on non-salary related items were also explained to the Commissioner. Furthermore, **Mr Ivascu**

highlighted the need to **increase the budget allocated to the political activity of the Committee (especially budget line 1004), as well as to the budget for communication.** The Members had the opportunity to exchange views with the Commissioner on the current negotiations concerning the **EU's multi-annual financial framework (MFF), for the years 2021-2027.** Finally, they discussed the role of civil society and the necessity to come to a swift budgetary agreement.

The Future of Work and the European Pillar of Social Rights

Pavel Trantina (CZ)

*Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group
EU relations and project manager of the
Czech Council of Children and Youth
(ČRDM)*

The Future of Work and the European Pillar of Social Rights – full intervention of Mr Trantina in debate with Guy Ryder, Director-General of the International Labour Organisation

Discussion about the future of work can't stand separate from the topic of **skilled labour force.** Our committee is currently drafting an Opinion tackling lifelong learning for the Croatian Presidency and I would like to raise this issue in our debate, **as both work and learning are inter-related parts of the European Pillar of Social Rights.**

We all know that the changes on the labour market are making the **task of predicting future skills needs quite challenging.** Simply, it takes time to adapt to emerging skills needs. And even though employers still underline the importance of STEM, digital skills and VET, many of them shift their focus towards soft/transversal skills. Because these **"soft" skills enable people to adapt to working environments and different life situations.**



For instance, the World Economic Forum highlights – besides traditionally mentioned foundational literacies – the need for **competencies** (such as critical thinking and collaboration) and **character qualities** (such as curiosity, initiative and leadership).

These skills are usually developed in organisations offering non-formal education (youth organisations, etc.), working on the basis of volunteer work.



I am happy that already years ago, the **ILO has included volunteer work in its operational framework**, for instance by producing the **Manual on its measurement**. In it, it is rightly said that “Volunteer work, often referred to simply as “volunteering,” is a crucial renewable resource for social and environmental problem-solving the world over. The scale of such work is enormous and the contributions it makes to the quality of life in countries everywhere still larger.”

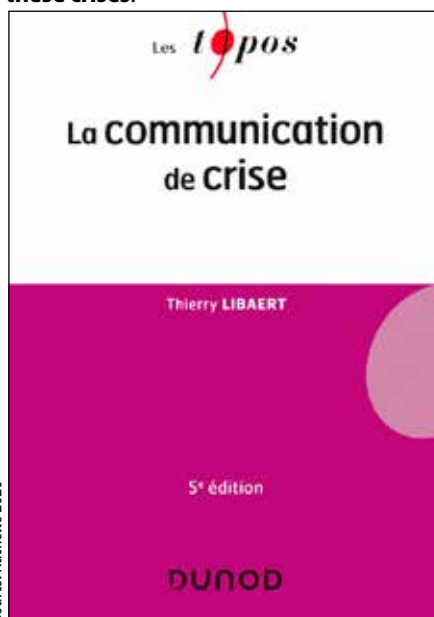
Allow me to ask you whether there are any plans for any further ILO work in this area. I am sure that **volunteer-based civil society organisations would be happy to cooperate with you alongside the classical tripartite model**.

New publication: “La Communication de Crise”, by Thierry Libaert (March 2020)

Thierry Libaert (FR)

*Member of the Diversity Europe Group
Representative of the Nicolas Hulot
Foundation for Nature and Mankind NGO
Research associate at the Catholic
University of Leuven*

Mr Thierry Libaert has just released the 5th edition of his work **La Communication de Crise**, first published in 2001 by Dunod editions. In this fully updated and illustrated edition with precise and up-to-date examples, Mr. Libaert retraces the **main characteristics of a crisis and details the organisation of the management of these crises**.



Source: Hachette 2020

Furthermore, he analyses the typology of the disseminated messages and the role of the media. The book focuses on current trends and issues, such as the role of social media or fake news.

<https://www.hachette.fr/livre/la-communication-de-crise-5e-ed-9782100805525>

Discussing the responsibilities of civil society with MEP Mr Rainer Wieland

Renate Heinisch (DE)

*Member of the Diversity Europe Group
Pharmacist and board member of BAGSO
(Germany's Federal Association of Senior
Citizens' Organisations)
MEP (1994-1999) and Chairwoman of
Baden-Württemberg Parents' Association*



On the occasion of a political meeting organised by CDU city association of Grünsfeld, **Ms Renate Heinisch**, Member of the Diversity Europe Group, met with **Mr Rainer Wieland, Vice-President of the European Parliament**. Ms Heinisch represented the EESC and discussed the interests and responsibilities of civil society. She stressed that: **“Europe always progresses when it becomes difficult. In such times, we have to act together.”**

Highlights of recent plenary sessions

With the cancellation of the March EESC plenary session, the most recent plenary was that of February 2020, during which four debates took place. A summary of those debates and key interventions by Members of the Diversity Europe Group are summarised below.

Debate on The Future of Work and the European Pillar of Social Rights with Guy Ryder, Director-General of the International Labour Organisation

Mr Ryder reminded EESC Members that **2019 constituted the centenary of the ILO** and commented that the ILO and the EU share converging histories and values. The Director-General stressed that the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and the ILO's agenda on the Future of Work have the potential to **allay a number of the fears felt by citizens regarding the future and the workplace**. To this end, Mr Ryder called for an EU directive on work-life balance, EU frameworks for minimum income and minimum wages, in addition to a just and inclusive Green Deal.



Mr Ryder, Director-General of the International Labour Organisation

Mr Guerini highlighted that **sustainable economies depend on an equal distribution of work** and that it will be necessary to reflect further on how to use technology at work. Mr Guerini added that **social economy actors**

and the EESC had actively contributed to the ILO centenary commemorations.



Mr Guerini, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

In turn, **Mr Trantina**, Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group, commented that “soft” skills enable people to adapt to working environments and that they are usually developed in organisations offering non-formal education through volunteer work. The Vice-President asked whether there are any plans for further ILO work in this area.



Mr Trantina, Vice-President of the Diversity Europe Group



Ms Cser, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Recalling that the ILO had inspired Hungarians with notions of freedom and human rights, Ms Cser called for a shared responsibility to promote these values in other parts of the world. **Ms Cser** also called for the **EU's Green Deal to be renamed a Human Green Deal**.

Presentation of the European Commission work programme and the multiannual political priorities for 2019-2024 with Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President of the European Commission - Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight



Mr Šefčovič, Vice-President of the European Commission

Mr Šefčovič began his presentation by stating that the **world is facing the twin green and digital revolutions and that the EU's key principal undertaking will be to ensure that European businesses can innovate and compete globally**. The EC Vice-President stressed that the **next five years will define the EU's place in the world until the end of the century**. He added that **only a strong economy can guarantee the continuation of the European social system**. Among the key challenges stressed by Mr Šefčovič during his presentation, were supporting the transformation of the coal and other 'old' industries, rendering the EU Climate neutral by 2050, completing the Banking Union, ensuring that the EU becomes a global data hub and adopting an EC multi-annual programme for the first time.



Mr Pater, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Mr Pater took the floor to highlight the **important contribution of volunteering to European societies**, recalling that since the 2011 European Year of Volunteering, only the European Solidarity Corps had emerged as a policy initiative. Mr Pater referred to the fact that the **economic value of volunteering constitutes 1.2% to 2.4% of the European GDP** and that European investment in the sector would help to leverage its potential.



Ms Kekeleki, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

The appreciation of consumers for the EU's Green Deal were expressed by **Ms Kekeleki**, who nonetheless added that certain key aspects are absent from the proposal. In particular, there should be **greater financial assistance for renovating and insulating houses**. Ms Kekeleki stressed that the **price of food is likely to increase** due to climate change and that consumers should be advised to form 'green communities'. Finally, Ms Kekeleki expressed her dissatisfaction with the EC recommendation of 'one in, one out' for EU legislation and called on the EC to examine steps taken by the ECB to prevent funding of natural gas in Greece.



Mr Haken, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

The necessity for the EU to consult and involve citizens more was highlighted by **Mr Haken**, who noted that **Europe-**

an civil society has many useful good practices which could be shared with the EU.



Mr Ribbe, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Finally, **Mr Ribbe** stated that the **Green Deal is the EU's most important project over the last ten years and that this project inspires hope among young Europeans**. Nonetheless, Mr Ribbe was of the view that the payments to agriculture to combat climate change were too high, in relation to the emissions produced by the agricultural sector.

Discussing the ECI 'Eat ORIGINAL'

During the February plenary session, Members had the opportunity to discuss the successful **European Citizens' Initiative Eat ORIGINAL**, presented by **Mr Paolo Di Stefano**, head of the Col-diretti EU Liaison Office. The organisers of the petition aim to make the declaration of the origin of all food products mandatory within the EU, so as to help prevent fraud, promote public health and guarantee consumers right to information.

The EESC Vice-President for Communication, **Ms Isabel Caño Aguilar**, welcomed this initiative, stressing that the EESC has already argued for better food labelling on several occasions and is proud to grant attention to European Citizens' Initiatives during its plenary sessions.

Members of Group III greatly supported this initiative as well.

Mr Tainen described the ECI as an important step towards **more transparency for consumers** and the **prevention of food fraud**. He also highlighted the need for **EU-wide legislation** in this matter and the role of digitalisation in the improvement of product traceability.



Mr Tainen, Member of the Diversity Europe Group



Mr Bryan, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Mr Bryan complimented Mr Di Stephano on the successful initiative. He mentioned the **EU's high standards** with regard to food production and particularly stressed the need to maintain these guidelines when products are imported from **third-party countries**. Furthermore, Mr Bryan called for a **proper enforcement** of this labelling, in order allow the consumer to differentiate between products produced in the EU and products that were imported.

The role of the EESC in international crises

This February plenary session was also an opportunity to discuss **how the Committee can most effectively respond to international crises**.

While other European institutions clearly have to play a leading role in

Highlights of recent plenary sessions

the management of international crises, the EESC's responsibilities in this matter are less obvious. However, as **conflicts of low intensity** but with high potential to undermine our socio-economies are becoming more numerous, it seems fitting for the Committee to reflect on this issue. According to **President Jahi-er**, it is particularly timely to open this debate and to try to identify precise criteria on how and when to respond to such crises.

Group III Members actively contributed to the discussion.



Mr Balon, Member of the Diversity Europe Group

Mr Balon stressed that the Committee possesses few instruments to respond to international crises and that the EESC's action should consequently be focused on the **coordination of civil society organisations across Europe**. This goal, Mr Balon suggested, could be achieved through the arrangement of conferences or seminars targeted at Member's organisations.

Mr Haken underlined that the **most valuable tools of the EESC are its partners**, to which Members can turn when looking for solutions. He also invited Members to **reflect on and map other measures** (such as election observation) and to determine their willingness and readiness to use them.

According to **Ms Raunemaa**, the Committee can contribute to the resolution of conflicts by **generating additional knowledge**. If the relevant information is rightly communicated, M. Raunemaa commented that it may **encourage**

politicians to change their behaviour and thus foster conflict resolution.



Ms Raunemaa, Member of the Diversity Europe Group



Ms Slavova, President of the REX Section

Closing this debate, **Ms Slavova, President of the REX Section**, re-affirmed that the **EU should play a leading role in international relations** and assured the Members that the REX Section will continue to reflect and deliberate on this issue.

Overview of our Members' Work in the EESC

EESC position papers – urgent referrals relating to the Covid-19 pandemic

“European Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative”

Rapporteur General:
Bernd SCHLÜTER (DE)

In light of the current COVID-19 crisis, the EESC published three position papers reflecting its opinion on the corresponding regulation proposals for the European Parliament and the Council. For one of these position papers, the introduction of a “European Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative”, the EESC General Rapporteur was Mr Schlüter, Member of the Diversity Europe Group.

With this initiative, the European Commission aimed to support the health-care systems of the Member States and other relevant sectors of the economy in response to the current pandemic. According to the Commission, the regulation will enable Member States to benefit from unspent pre-financing within the cohesion policy programmes so as to help to strengthen national health care systems, SMEs and labour markets.

In its position paper on the aforesaid initiative, the EESC welcomed the Commission’s investment plan, but urged the institution to examine additional funding options in order to tackle the public health and economic crisis without delay. “It is clear that the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative must be just part of the support provide, specifically the ESI Funds’ contribution to a larger European investment plan to support its Member States”, Mr Schlüter wrote.

The paper further urged the Commission to take into account the following elements:

- the need to pay more attention to workers and self-employed in less stable situations as well as to not-for-profit social enterprises and civil

society organisations, who play an important role in the upkeep of social and health systems;

- the need to financially support cooperation and communication between the social, health and crisis management departments and all relevant decision-making bodies;
- the need for increased flexibility mechanisms and quick adoption of the multi-annual financial framework, as well as the use of existing flexibility instruments in the European fiscal framework.

Finally, the EESC called for a swift adoption of the proposal, highlighting that “since the EU faces an unprecedented crisis, an unprecedented response is required”.

The Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative was adopted by the European Parliament and the Council respectively on 26 and 30 March. It entered into force on 1 April 2020.

Adopted at the February EESC plenary session

ECO/502 - Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020

Rapporteur: Tommaso DI FAZIO (IT)
National president of the Confederazione Italiana di Unione delle Professioni intellettuali - CIU (Italian Confederation of Academic Professionals)

The EESC:

- welcomes the announced change in the annual strategy, moving away from the current thinking that focuses on programming and short- and medium-term objectives to finally make provision for long-term strategies.
- regrets that the Communication from the Commission gives little space to the annual report on growth in the Union. In the EESC’s view, the greatest priority of all is to restore sustainable growth, above all in the weakest countries and regions, with a strong increase in Euro-

pean GDP in order to generate prosperity and the wealth that is crucial to supporting the strategy.

- agrees on the need to strengthen the stability and resilience of the financial system and tighten the rules governing the financial markets in order to reinforce the international role of the European currency and to take precautions against any future crises that may emerge elsewhere in the world and have an impact on Europe as a result of globalisation.
- highlights the importance of keeping the well-being of people at the heart of the 2020 growth strategy, by preserving and strengthening the social advances that make the EU a world leader;
- believes that more robust single market governance infrastructure needs to be put in place at EU and national level, together with thorough-going administrative simplification, an ambitious process of digitalisation and intensive capacity-building initiatives for all stakeholders.

Other position papers

Renate HEINISCH (DE) is the rapporteur general for the EESC position paper on the referral ‘Regulation on the Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL amending Regulation (EU) 2017/745 on medical devices as regards the dates of application of certain of its provisions’

Sarro IPARRAGUIRRE (ES) is the rapporteur general for the EESC position paper on the referral ‘Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL amending Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 and Regulation (EU) No 508/2014 as regards specific measures to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak in the fishery and aquaculture sector’

The complete texts of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee’s website:
<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions>

GROUP III MEMBERS

working on new opinions

FEBRUARY

Jorge PEGADO LIZ (PT) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Better Regulation / Foresight' – INT/900

Carlos TRIAS PINTÓ (ES) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'SDGs in new economic models' – INT/901

Rudolf KOLBE (AT) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Liberal Professions 4.0' – INT/904

Ronny LANNOO (BE) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'Towards circular procurement' – INT/902

Giuseppe GUERINI (IT) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Inclusive and sustainable Banking Union' – ECO/509

Karolina DRESZER-SMALEC (PL) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'The rule of law and its impact on economic growth' – ECO/511

Etele BARÁTH (HU) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'Enhancing sustainable economic growth across the EU' – ECO/513

Krzysztof PATER (PL) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'The need to guarantee real rights for persons with disabilities to vote in European Parliament elections (additional opinion)' – SOC/638

Jean-Marc ROIRANT (FR) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Creation of a European statute for associations and NGOs incorporating a precise definition of an NGO or a European association (information report)' – SOC/639

Pavel TRANTINA (CZ) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'EU Competence Framework for Green Skills (own-initiative opinion)' – SOC/636

Bernd SCHLÜTER (DE) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Life quality for all citizens and regions – good governance and legal frames for social, political, cultural economic and ecological wellbeing (own-initiative opinion)'

Christian MOOS (DE) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Securing media freedom and diversity in Europe (own-initiative opinion)' – SOC/635

Bogomil NIKOLOV (BG) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'Digital Mining in Europe: New solutions for the sustainable production of raw materials (own-initiative opinion)' – CCMI/176

Anastasis YIAPANIS (CY) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'Fostering competitiveness, innovation, growth and job creation by advancing in global regulatory cooperation, by supporting a renewed multilateral trading scheme and by reducing market-distorting subsidies (own-initiative opinion)' – CCMI/175

Diego DUTTO (IT) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Public procurement as a tool to create value and dignity in work in cleaning and facility services (own-initiative opinion)' – CCMI/174

José Custódio LEIRIÃO (PT) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'The industrial dimension of the Security Union (own-initiative opinion)' – CCMI/173

Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG) is the co-rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'An integrated approach for the EU's rural areas, with particular emphasis on vulnerable regions (own-initiative opinion)' – NAT/790

John BRYAN (IE) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Compatibility of EU trade policy with the European Green Deal (own-initiative opinion)' – NAT/791

Thierry LIBAERT (FR) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'Towards an EU strategy on sustainable consumption (own-initiative opinion)' – NAT/789

Cillian LOHAN (IE) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Towards structured youth engagement on climate and sustainability in the EU decision-making process (own-initiative opinion)' – NAT/788

Lutz RIBBE (DE) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Between a trans-European super grid and local energy islands – the right mix of decentralised solutions and centralised structures for an economically, socially and ecologically sustainable energy transition' – TEN/706

Krzysztof BALON (PL) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'Universal access to housing that is decent, sustainable and affordable over the long term' – TEN/707

Benedicte FEDERSPIEL (DK) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'Building the Single European Sky: a key condition (or requisite) for a more efficient and greener economy' – TEN/709

Evangelia KEKELEKI (EL) is the co-rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Energy: women as equal players in the 21st century' – TEN/705

Lidija PAVIĆ-ROGOŠIĆ (HR) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Sustainable development in the Mediterranean region (information report)' – REX/526

Meelis JOOST (EE) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'Evaluation of the role of civil society in the participation structures under the European Union/Colombia/Peru/Ecuador Agreement (information report)' – REX/530

Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG, Gr. III), Thomas WAGNSONNER (AT, Gr. II) and Dimitris DIMITRIADIS (EL, Gr. I) are the rapporteurs of the study group for the Opinion 'EU and Africa: Making an equal development partnership a reality based on sustainability and common values (own-initiative opinion)' – REX/527



OTHER NEWS FROM THE EESC

Ionuț SIBIAN (RO) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'Contribution of civil society to the Green Agenda and sustainable development of the Western Balkans as part of the EU accession process (own-initiative opinion)' – [REX/528](#)

MARCH

Benedicte FEDERSPIEL (DK) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'Identifying and addressing barriers to the Single Market' – [INT/899](#)

Krzysztof BALON (PL) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Strengthening non-profit social enterprises as an essential pillar of a socially equitable Europe' – [INT/906](#)

Roman HAKEN (CZ) is the co-rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Revision of the Territorial Agenda of the EU, the Leipzig Charter and the Urban Agenda for the EU' – [ECO/507](#)

Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'The role of EU structural and cohesion policy in driving forward the transformation of the economy in an innovative and smart manner' – [ECO/514](#)

Bernd SCHLÜTER (DE) is the rapporteur-general of the study group for the Opinion 'Investment initiative in response to coronavirus' – [ECO/515](#)

Indrė VAREIKYTĖ (LT) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Integration of women, mothers and families with a migrant background in the EU Member States and target language levels for integration' – [SOC/641](#)

Ákos TOPOLÁNSZKY (HU) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'Diversity management in the EU Member States' – [SOC/642](#)

Christian MOOS (DE) is the rapporteur of the study group for the Opinion 'Principles for public services (i.e. public services for citizens, public administration) that contribute directly to the stability of the free democratic basic order (democracy and the rule of law) in EU countries' – [SOC/643](#)

Krzysztof PATER (PL) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'Social dialogue as an important pillar of economic sustainability and the resilience of economies taking into account the influence of lively public debate in the Member States' – [SOC/644](#)

Carlos TRIAS PINTÓ (ES) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'Good work in the platform economy' – [SOC/645](#)

Pavel TRANTINA (CZ) is the president of the study group for the Opinion 'European Year of Rail (2021)' – [TEN/710](#)

Meeting of the Consumers and Environment Category of the EESC

On 4 March, the EESC's Farmers' Category held its first meeting of the year, welcoming **Gijs Schilthuis** (Policy Perspectives Unit, DG Agriculture and Rural Development). Mr. Schilthuis gave details on the new *Farm to Fork* strategy (as part of the Green Deal) and its implications for the upcoming CAP reform. Subsequently, **Florence Buchholzer** (Foresight and Impact Assessment Unit, DG Agriculture and Rural Development) informed Members about the preliminary results of the ongoing foresight study "*Farmers of the Future*", drawing up a projection of agricultural activities for the years 2040-2050. Finally, **Arnold Puech d'Alissac** (Gr. I.) presented his work on the opinion NAT/780 – *EAFRD and EAGF transitional provisions*, in which he supported the Commission's proposal to extend the current legal CAP framework until the reform enters into force.



Gijs Schilthuis, DG Agriculture and Rural Development



Florence Buchholzer, DG Agriculture and Rural Development

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