



European Economic and Social Committee

**EESC's contribution
to the Commission's 2017
work programme**

Brussels, 14 July 2016

RESOLUTION

on

**The European Economic and Social Committee's contribution
to the Commission's 2017 work programme**

2017 - A Year for a new impetus and greater Solidarity in Europe

Policy Statement

The EESC regrets the result of UK citizens' vote to leave the EU. It was a democratic vote, a legitimate decision, but its consequences will affect not only a divided UK but also the whole EU. Now a long and difficult process of negotiations will be opened in order to define all the conditions of this exit. We do not know how and when Art. 50 of the Treaty will be implemented but the EESC asks for a rapid start to the negotiations in order to respond to the present uncertainty about the future of the EU, and about its institutional and political structure. The reaction of financial markets is a clear signal that a new recession is likely (and not only in the UK) and the EU has to react with urgency.

The EESC demands to be fully involved in the negotiation process with the UK. It is clear that the vote of the British citizens is a new, urgent wake-up call for the European institutions; citizens demand to be involved in the EU decision-making process and the impact of Brexit is a key issue to be managed with the full support of the citizens of the other EU countries as well. The EESC, representing civil society organisations, is ready to actively participate in this process.

Finally, the EESC believes that the European Commission should reconsider the 10 priority areas of its Programme, taking into account the need to manage Brexit with urgency, with all of its institutional, political, economic and social implications.

1. The European Economic and Social Committee expresses its deep concern about the state of the European Union. The current political and economic context, in an environment of increasing mistrust on the part of European citizens towards the EU integration process, means that the European Commission must work to restore a spirit of solidarity and responsibility, as already stated in the Work Programme for 2016. There are growing signs of a lack of will on the part of Member States to find common and cohesive solutions. At the same time, convincing citizens of their ownership of the EU's objectives should be a cornerstone of EU action.
2. The refugee crisis requires urgent humanitarian action. At the same time, special attention must be devoted to the difficulty incurred by European governments in advancing solutions that are agreed upon by all European citizens, who are feeling insecure and afraid. Safe legal corridors have to be opened and the EU has to move firmly towards a Common Asylum System, finalising the policy and legislative initiatives issued in May and July of 2016. The European Commission should increase efforts to enforce the rule of law in the implementation of the EU *acquis* in the fields of migration and asylum and ensure responsible management of the Schengen Area in order to restore mutual trust and the sustainability of the area of free movement. Jeopardising the Schengen Agreement would strike at the heart of the European project and restrict its progress. The just demand for more regulated control and management – in full compliance with the rule of law – of external borders, the general

public's legitimate request for greater safety and security, and the demand for closer cooperation in the fight against terrorism cannot mean erecting barriers within the EU and restricting the free movement of people.

3. Greater concern is caused by the spread of anti-European sentiments and the increasing political representation of xenophobic and populist movements in national parliaments and in society at large, which threaten democratic values in Europe. In some Member States these movements are in a position to influence the government. This hostility towards Europe as a whole can lead to a risky debate on opt-out mechanisms granted to governments based on their respective contemporary political needs, as the Brexit debate has demonstrated. The EU needs to respond to this drift towards protectionism and nationalism by also confronting it on a cultural level.
4. However, we should not forget or undermine the achievements that the EU has secured so far and economic integration has now to be completed with deeper political and social integration. The single market is a core element of European integration and the functioning of the playing field has to be preserved at all costs. Citizens must form an active part of this progress. Dialogue at local, national and European levels must be strengthened and structured with the help of civil society, including social partners who are crucial to charting a new course for Europe.
5. Young people are a priority for this cultural change, as they are both the most affected by unemployment but they also offer the greatest potential for resolving the crisis. Building on lessons learned, the “Erasmus generation” shows an openness and readiness to talk and grow together with different peoples and cultures. For this reason the Commission must offer opportunities, aside from the timid results of the Youth Guarantee, for all young people to benefit from European exchanges, regardless of their education level and occupational status.
6. In an economic and social climate that remains uncertain, the European Commission is urged to harness all available resources to boost growth, high-quality jobs and social progress. Financial, productive and social investments are far from returning to pre-crisis levels. A growth-enhancing macro-economic environment is needed, driven by a favourable investment environment within a well-functioning internal market. All aspects of international competitiveness should be addressed, and increased domestic demand may provide a boost to European companies on the global market, stimulating a virtuous circle that will benefit everyone.
7. Economic governance must be geared towards growth and social progress, implementing all the priorities of the Communication on Steps toward Completing Economic and Monetary Union and the Annual Growth Survey 2016. Country-specific recommendations should make better use of the flexibility within the existing Stability and Growth Pact rules in order to stimulate growth. Ownership of the European Semester has to be increased, involving civil

society at large and recognising the specificity of social partners at European and national level.

8. The updated Europe 2020 strategy should tie in with the United Nations 2030 Agenda incorporating the new sustainable development goals (SDGs), viewing economic, social and environmental aspects as inseparable and interdependent components, and renewing efforts to meet those social goals on which the EU is lagging behind.
9. The EESC asks the Commission to exercise its leadership in building consensus and commitment in the European Parliament and the Council in order to enforce the internal and external agenda of the EU.
10. Against this backdrop the EESC, calls for the Commission to focus its 2017 work programme on the following three strategic areas, recognising that the internal and external dimensions as well as the economic, social, and political dimensions are inseparable:

10.1 *Strengthening the economic and social cohesion of the EU*

- In order to achieve an investment plan that accounts for at least 2% of the EU's GDP, the EESC recommends a fiscal stimulus, through public investment among other things, targeted at investments that stimulate innovation and growth, prioritising sectors such as energy, transport and broadband infrastructure, digitalisation, the low-carbon circular economy, the social economy and skills for entrepreneurship and quality jobs. The use of European Funds should be consistent with these objectives. Sustainable enterprises and industrial growth need to be promoted together with a targeted plan for SMEs.
- As for the European Semester process, the EESC calls on the Commission to precisely follow and fulfil all objectives, both economic and social, that relate to the drawing-up of social country-specific recommendations for recording tangible results in the attainment of the EU 2020 targets including the fight against poverty and inequality.
- The completion of the single market requires a firm commitment on the part of the Commission to the priorities set in 2016. Free movement of workers should remain a priority; fair mobility means ensuring compliance with the principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination on the grounds of nationality, in accordance with the European acquis for European workers.
- The principle “equal pay for equal work in the same workplace”, as stated by President Juncker, into the EU labour mobility framework, is under discussion in the EESC. The Committee has already expressed its concerns about distortions which can undermine labour market integration and fair competition.

- The Economic and Monetary Union is at the core of the single market, and the EESC insists that its economic, social and political pillars need to be developed. The euro area, including those countries that wish to join, needs a stronger identity.
- Making use of the opportunities provided by digitisation requires measures to be taken in numerous fields. The EESC calls on the Commission to set up a regular consultative process to manage the impact on the quality and quantitative aspects of employment, production, consumption and public services for citizens. Special attention must be paid to the implementation of the Digital Skills Agenda, especially in terms of ensuring accessibility for all.
- The Energy Union is still far from complete. The EESC challenges the Commission to speed up the implementation of the Energy Union strategy to ensure the security of energy supplies and reasonable prices by means of diversified energy sources and a fully-integrated internal energy market. A Just Transition Fund to support the transition process to a low-carbon economy is needed. As for climate policy, concrete action is needed immediately. The EC should ensure civil society and citizens at global, national and subnational levels become more involved in the development, review and, above all, implementation of the Paris Agreement.
- The refugee crisis needs to be properly managed. Safe humanitarian corridors have to be opened and the EU has to firmly move towards a common asylum system.

10.2 *Strengthening the EU's global role*

- In 2016, the EU has grown as a global player and should enhance its position in promoting peace and stabilisation in conflict areas. However, insufficient internal cohesion and a lack of political commitment have so far weakened the EU's influence in the world. As a prerequisite for effective external action, integrated policy measures are needed, insofar as possible, between its foreign and internal policies.
- Additional practical measures are needed to reinforce security in Europe: a strong common foreign policy to address open conflicts in neighbouring countries, a development policy that is consistent with that of other international institutions, international police cooperation, and effective control of external borders without restricting individual freedoms and privacy.
- The EESC considers it essential to conclude current bilateral trade and investment negotiations, ensuring a balance of interests as identified in the EESC opinion on the EC Communication “Trade for All”, and to work towards implementing them properly. Transparency and the fair balance of interests also need to be pursued in the multilateral approach to trade agreements within the framework of the WTO. Environmental, social,

labour, consumer and other standards, together with public services, should not be reduced by EU agreements, and indeed these agreements should aim to improve them.

- The global Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Agenda 2030 have to be integrated in the policy areas related to EU external action.
- The EESC calls on the Commission to focus its efforts on influencing and boosting the development and export of climate technologies and solutions on a global scale.

10.3 *Strengthening citizens' ownership of the EU*

- The EESC asks the EC to open a debate on the way the EU operates. We need to reaffirm European values within a shared vision, the importance of Europe's solidarity-based dimension, social cohesion and the construction of a participatory and inclusive democracy.
- The EESC strongly encourages the Commission to closely monitor compliance on the part of Member States with the Rule of Law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and to actively deal with any infringements.
- The EESC regrets that the Commission has not taken into due account the EESC's contribution to the Work Programme for 2016 and that it has not deemed it appropriate to have an in-depth exchange of views on the policy choices made by the Commission itself. Building a systematic dialogue with civil society organisations and strengthening social dialogue at all levels are key to achieving the EU's objectives.

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RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR ACTION LINKED TO THE 10 EC PRIORITIES

1. **A new boost for jobs, growth and investment**
 - **Investment in infrastructure, production and good-quality jobs**
 - **A revamped European Semester for growth, competitiveness and social progress**
 - **Moving quickly toward a low-carbon circular economy**
- 1.1 Employment remains the top priority in 2017, in particular via the creation of new jobs for the long-term unemployed, women, young people and migrants.
- 1.2 As for the European Funds, the Commission should evaluate their use and ensure that financing is allocated in a way that is effectively targeted and maximises the stimulation of innovation and growth, prioritising investment in infrastructure, production and good-quality jobs. Irregularities in the use of EU funds have to be better monitored and sanctioned.
- 1.3 The social services sectors are one of the biggest job creators in Europe. The Commission should therefore develop an action plan to maximise its potential and unlock the European Fund for Strategic Investment for the social sector.
- 1.4 In 2017, the Annual Growth Survey should also prioritise social investment and assist lagging economies in achieving European economic and social standards.
- 1.5 A skills offensive is needed based on the swift implementation of the New Skills Agenda for Europe and the Youth Employment Package (Youth Guarantee and European Apprenticeship Alliance).
- 1.6 The measures envisaged in the Action Plan for the Circular Economy must be implemented without delay, giving priority to measures that help secure a more competitive environment for European businesses. The Committee wants the EC to explore the feasibility of an open European platform for the circular economy bringing together all stakeholders and hosted by the EESC.
2. **A connected digital single market**
 - **Boosting digitisation of infrastructure, production and public services**
 - **Increasing skills and acceptance of digital change across society at large and among workers**
- 2.1 The digitalisation of industry will be a decisive factor for the competitiveness for the European economy. The digitisation process is having a significant impact on European civil society and has become essential to people's lives. The EESC, with its cross-cutting

responsibilities, - a forum representing organised civil society - will act in order to boost the acceptance of policies in this area within European civil society.

2.2 The potential of the digital economy, tied in with other major economic changes (e.g. transition to a sharing economy and a low carbon economy), must be more strategically geared towards the achievement of the UN SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals).

2.3 In order to eliminate disparities between individuals and between small businesses, the digitisation agenda should be fully utilised in the development of smart manufacturing, smart energy grids, smart transport and mobility, smart housing and smart communities. There is also considerable scope to use digitisation to improve public services and administration. The Commission should promote the exchange between Member States of best practices in this field.

2.4 Social partners, as part of a European coordinated strategy, should be called upon to harness all instruments of social dialogue to address the challenges of the digitisation process so as to maximise good-quality employment opportunities, re-skill/up-skill affected workers and identify new forms of protection for these workers. In order to ensure a comprehensive approach, it is advisable to set up a regular consultative process with other civil society organisations.

3. **Resilient energy union with a forward-looking climate change policy**

- **Implementation of the Energy Union Strategy, including its external dimension**
- **Implementation and global enhancement of COP21 decisions**
- **Providing for a fair transition to a low-carbon economy**

3.1 The Commission must continue to implement a far-seeing strategy in line with the work programme annexed to the 2015 Communication on the State of the Energy Union.

3.2 The EESC's proposal for a European Energy Dialogue (EED) must become a key mechanism in ensuring that the knowledge, concerns and interests of civil society feed into the Energy Union process.

3.3 The decisions of COP21 need to be implemented without delay and with the full involvement of organised civil society. A level playing field is required for internationally-competing companies in order to prevent carbon leakage. Calling on the EU Member States to announce their National Determined Contributions would be the right signal. The need to re-launch investments and consolidate the EU's leadership in green technologies should be taken into account as well.

3.4 In the light of the COP21 commitments, risks of carbon leakage have to be carefully assessed and policy instruments implemented to effectively tackle them, particularly in the context of the EU Emissions Trading system for the period 2021-2030.

- 3.5 The food system is both one of the leading causes of climate change and will be significantly affected by it. The role played by the agri-food sector in adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change must be strengthened. The importance of food waste prevention and reduction and civil society's efforts should be highlighted in the context of the EU circular economy action plan.
- 3.6 Beside the Just Transition Fund, the EU must implement the Innovation Fund and the Modernisation Fund and involve social partners and other civil society organisations in the management of these funds.
- 3.7 Following the result of the EESC study on planned obsolescence, a pilot project should be launched on including the estimated or average minimum lifespan in a product labelling system.
4. **A deeper and fairer internal market with a strengthened industrial base**
- **A growing industry and a functioning Capital Markets Union**
 - **Promoting a more competitive and greener economy, developing social economy enterprises, and implementing innovative models**
 - **Making fair labour mobility available for all**
 - **Towards fairer taxation**
- 4.1 As industry lies at the heart of the single market, the European Union must continue to concentrate on revitalising its industry and meet the target of increasing its contribution to the EU's GDP to 20% by 2020. Special attention should be paid to the challenges facing the steel industry, through a re-modulation of state aid and a more targeted use of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund. An Action Plan for the European Defence Industry, which would achieve considerable savings in defence procurement, must also be put in motion.
- 4.2 The EESC calls for effective measures to improve access to finance, alongside the initiatives taken in the framework of the Capital Markets Union. The regulatory and supervisory framework (micro and macro prudential) of the financial sector should be adapted in order to reduce the risk of regulatory arbitrage. The shadow banking sector should also be addressed in this context. Moreover, means should be developed for better tapping into the capital available in sovereign wealth funds. In the banking union process reference should be made to the public service component of banking services. Citizens must be able to use these services knowing that they are transparent, reliable and low-cost.
- 4.3 A concrete action plan is needed to tackle the obstacles that SMEs, including micro-and family enterprises, encounter domestically and in trading across borders.

- 4.4 To unleash the full potential of social economy enterprises, the EESC urges the Commission to launch an Action Plan for the Social Economy, providing a complete eco-system for its development and growth.

The EESC underlines the need to increase Europe's competitiveness and support the green economy. In this context, it is important to encourage, when reviewing the Single Market Strategy in 2017 - in addition to the principle of maintaining a level playing field - new enterprise models which balance economic, social and environmental aspects. The collaborative economy, the functional economy and the circular economy need clear guidelines in order to flourish. A comprehensive approach taking account of the different social, economic and environmental aspects in a coherent policy framework is essential. It is crucial to establish a more ambitious corporate social responsibility strategy that better recognises the contributions of enterprises to the common good, measuring indicators of well-being and social development beyond GDP.

- 4.5 Regarding public procurement in accordance with the new directives, it is necessary to facilitate the application of social clauses and a reserved market, designing a guide for contracting authorities.
- 4.6 Fair labour mobility has to be safeguarded. In this regard, the EESC is currently preparing its opinion on the Commission's proposal concerning the revision of Directive 96/71 and is addressing the issues of supporting the freedom to provide services and of preserving both fair competition in the service market and equal treatment in the labour market.
- 4.7 The policy development needs of the CAP, in the context of the mid-term review of the MFF 2014-2020, should be geared to maintaining multi-functionality, family farms and sustainability at the core of European agriculture. The Commission should prepare a European food strategy with a comprehensive approach covering the whole supply chain, from agriculture to consumers, as well as ensuring policy coherence between different policy sectors, ranging from agricultural policies to trade, education and climate policies.
- 4.8 The EU Urban Agenda is of the utmost importance. The Commission should prepare a White Paper on rural areas. It should be pointed out, however, that urban and rural areas are closely linked to each other and do not have alternatives.
- 4.9 It is important to reap the employment benefits of boosting the Single Market, especially with regard to services, digitalisation and labour mobility. The proper functioning of the Single Market and a framework guaranteeing security for people as well as fair competition are the basis for economic recovery in Europe. The EESC also stresses the need to address the situation of the working poor and to develop effective tools and policies to safeguard a living wage and ensure security in the field of new employment relations.

4.10 The Action Plan for Effective Corporate Taxation has to move forward, notably concerning the common consolidated corporate tax base (CCCTB). The EESC calls for decisive steps to curb tax fraud, tax evasion and aggressive tax planning. Tax should be captured in the place where the economic substance is located. To this end, the EESC wants to ensure that the EU is fully involved in the OECD's action plan to combat tax avoidance, base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS);

4.11 The EESC welcomes the focus on the part of the Commission during the last European Semester cycle on a progressive shift of tax burdens away from low-income taxpayers in a more efficient and equitable tax system, encouraging a move to taxes that have less dampening effects than taxes on labour. Moreover, reforms of taxation systems are necessary in order to ensure their redistributive role which may help to curb inequalities.

5. **A deeper and fairer Economic and Monetary Union**

- **A roadmap for completing the EMU including Banking Union**
- **Pressing ahead with economic and political union**
- **Making the EU Semester deliver the Europe 2020 Strategy and social goals**

5.1 Taking into account the severely limited capacity of the monetary policy to stimulate demand, the euro area economy is in a so-called "liquidity trap". Greater solidarity is needed from countries with structural surpluses which should contribute more extensively to expansionary policies.

5.2 The euro area must strengthen its growth potential and its ability to cope with asymmetric shocks and promote economic and social convergence. This requires a new regulation on a specific fiscal capacity. The EESC calls for a macroeconomic dialogue to be established in the euro area as a key contribution to the democratic and social development of EMU. The EESC emphasises that future discussions should refer not to "competitiveness boards" but to "boards for competitiveness, social cohesion and sustainability". The euro area will need to speak with one voice in international bodies.

5.3 The EESC expects the European institutions to embark on the second stage of the roadmap for completing the EMU in 2017, giving a clear identity to the euro area. A corresponding roadmap should include a political discussion on the implementation of institutional steps, some of which may require Treaty changes.

5.4 The discussion should ideally address the following issues: a more robust structure for the euro area, the euro area's fiscal capacity and joint debt issuance by euro area Member States, managed by a European Monetary Fund; improved accountability and democratic legitimacy for the EMU, achieved by strengthening the powers of the European Parliament, and a better-structured Inter-parliamentary Conference and closer commitment on the part of national parliaments, as well as voting by euro area MEPs only on matters of EMU competence.

- 5.5 As part of the EU Semester, civil and social dialogue can be a driving force for successful, sustainable and inclusive economic, employment and social reforms. National parliaments must be involved in the planning and evaluation of national reform programmes (NRP) and the implementation of country-specific recommendations (CSR), in line with the EU2020 targets. The social partners have a specific role to play concerning their exclusive competences, responsibilities and tasks.
- 5.6 Immediate measures have to be implemented to introduce safety nets for low-paid and vulnerable workers, ensure a living income for households, target areas of poverty and offset inequalities. The European Pillar of Social Rights has to be clearly defined and implemented in 2017 with the active contribution of social partners and other civil society organisations. However, The EU Pillar of Social Rights should contribute to supporting sustainable economic development and job creation, and, to that effect, it should deliver tangible outcomes to improve the quality of life and work of people in Europe and boost efficient and inclusive labour markets and public services of quality and accessible for all.
- 5.7 As part of financial union, banking union is key to guaranteeing the integrity of the euro and to increasing risk-sharing with the private sector. The European Deposit Insurance Scheme proposal is an essential part of the banking union. Further risk sharing as part of the EDIS proposal should be accompanied by further risk reduction in the banking union. Both have to be dealt with in parallel and without delay and actually put into effect. The Commission should carry out a comprehensive in-depth impact study in order to further strengthen the legitimacy of the proposal.
6. **Reasonable and balanced free trade agreements**
- **Conclusion of the trade agreements with ambitious and innovative trade and sustainable development chapters**
 - **Reaping the benefits of civil and social dialogue**
- 6.1 Policy coherence between development and trade policies is needed. As stated in the Communication “Trade for All”, environmental, social, labour, consumer and other standards, together with public services, should not be reduced by EU agreements, but improved instead.
- 6.2 The Committee, under these conditions, considers it important to conclude current trade and investment negotiations in a balanced way (including TTIP, CETA, EU-Japan, EU-China investment negotiations, negotiations involving ASEAN countries and any outstanding EPAs) and, following ratification of the agreements, monitor effective implementation.
- 6.3 Transparency and fair balance of interests also need to be pursued in the plurilateral negotiations on services (TiSA) and environmental goods.
- 6.4 The pursuit of bilateral trade negotiations should not weaken the EU's commitment to the WTO and a strong multilateral global agreement, and should avoid possible conflicting rules.

Within the framework of the WTO negotiations, a more focused approach is needed with digital trade, for example.

6.5 Trade is a key topic for the EU's manufacturing sectors and for defending the European market from unfair behaviours and dumping, by means of updated Trade Defence Instruments (TDIs) to fully protect the internal market from unfair imports from non-EU countries. However, the European Commission should carefully evaluate the impact of the decision on China's Market Economy Status.

6.6 While the Investment Court System recently proposed by the European Commission is an improvement on the discredited US-backed Investor-State Dispute Settlement mechanism, it is still controversial and needs to be evaluated further.

6.7 The EU's trade policy should take into account the different opinions expressed regarding the consequences of trade agreements. Special attention should be paid to the involvement of joint bodies comprising all parts of civil society in the monitoring of all aspects of free trade agreements. The EESC's expertise confers unique value on the work. Impact studies on future or ongoing negotiations remain a key tool for all those involved in monitoring negotiations.

7. **An area of justice and fundamental rights based on mutual trust**

- **Improving the security of citizens**
- **Following the Rule of Law**
- **Removing barriers and filling gaps**

7.1 The growing demand for security on the part of European citizens requires an immediate response to protect the main achievements of EU integration and to restore trust among Member States. The fight against terrorism requires closer cooperation between Member States and between their authorities.

7.2 The search for peace in the Middle East, international police cooperation, the effective control of external borders and development policy are indispensable complements to the measures aimed at reinforcing security in Europe.

7.3 In 2017, the EU must strengthen the pillars of EU action set in the European Agenda on Security. The EU Security Agenda must ensure full compliance with the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights in Member States, including democracy, human rights, economic and social rights, and an effective civil society dialogue.

7.4 The Proposal for a Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment (COM 2008 (426) final) and significantly boosting the participatory aspect of civil society has to be unblocked.

- 7.5 The Gender Equality Strategy 2010-2015 needs a reinvigorated strategy with clear targets, practical measures and effective monitoring of progress against gender discrimination in the labour market, education and decision-making, as well as in tackling gender-based violence.
- 7.6 The European Disability Strategy should be upgraded according to the observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), through relevant legislation and launching an EU priority card that is recognised in all Member States.
- 7.7 In the context of the fight against poverty, specific indicators and objectives have to be set out for children in vulnerable situations.
- 7.8 New forms of vulnerability such as precarious work, in-work poverty, and the situations of elderly and young women, single mothers and migrant women need to be addressed.
8. **Towards a new policy on migration**
- **Proper management of refugees**
 - **Integration of migrants**
 - **Fighting populism and xenophobia**
- 8.1 The EU must respond to the issues of migration and asylum with closer cooperation between Member States, and unified and practical measures. The EESC refers to the recommendations and report it has launched based on fact-finding visits to 11 Member States. Priority must be given to the proposals emerging from the European Parliament report on the situation in the Mediterranean and the need for a holistic EU approach to migration.
- 8.2 In 2017, conditions must be put in place for terminating the derogations to border controls set by the Schengen rules and ensuring the rule of law in the management of the Schengen Area.
- 8.3 The proposed Common Asylum System is reasonably achievable in the medium term. Legislative and policy initiatives proposed by the European Commission have to be swiftly adopted, respecting the overarching interest of international protection seekers, and the rule of law as an expression of concrete solidarity among Member States.
- 8.4 It is therefore important to reconsider the proposal on resettlement, relocation, and protection of asylum seekers to open legal and safe routes for asylum-seekers.
- 8.5 In this regard, the EESC wishes to stress that the EU-Turkey agreement lacks the necessary guarantees to ensure respect for the EU's fundamental rights and international obligations. Firm action is needed to restore positive cooperation with the Turkish authorities, and those of neighbouring countries which remain key to keeping the EU's borders secure.
- 8.6 Migration policy requires resources to integrate migrants and refugees. The Committee appreciates the effort to make more rational use of the resources available under the various

European funds. Resources must be increased, in particular under the ESF, for those Member States most exposed to the challenge of integrating migrants or refugees.

8.7 For people residing legally in Europe, it is crucial to get them involved in training, help them enter the jobs market and to help them integrate into society in general. It is equally vital to address the increasing phenomenon of xenophobia and populism which are often linked to significant migration flows. The Joint Statement issued by European social and economic partners (ETUC, Business Europe, CEEP, Ueapme and Eurochambres) and work carried out by civil society organisations and social economy stakeholders point to the path ahead.

9. **A stronger global actor**

- **Internal cohesion for external action**
- **Cooperation with neighbours and strategic partners**

9.1 The EU should enhance its position as a global player for peace and stabilisation in conflict areas within the framework of international institutions and acting in a more cohesive way. For effective external action, integrated policy measures are needed between the internal and external policies of the Commission. Improving relations and cooperation with strategic partners is essential in order to play a stronger role as a global player.

9.2 The EU's contribution to cooperation and development should prioritise democratisation processes in its neighbouring countries. Concrete action is needed, supported by well-planned investments financed by the EU in coordination with the World Bank.

9.3 Dialogue with civil society organisations and people-to-people contacts should be properly integrated into the EU's external action. It is essential to support the creation of a structured dialogue with CSOs in the region in order to evaluate the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Furthermore, social dialogue should become an integral part of the EU's cooperation and development programmes.

9.4 Evaluation of the ENP should be a priority. Relations with countries south and east of the Mediterranean should not focus on a defensive approach based on security aspects or the refugee crisis, but rather become a real co-development policy between equal partners.

9.5 Specific attention should be paid to relations with Russia, including more active diplomacy towards this country, particularly with regard to energy relations.

9.6 Of key importance will be the need to meet and begin implementing both the Sustainable Development Goals, and the COP21 Goals. The SDGs in particular must shape the EU's development agenda. The EU must be proactive in assessing the means, including budget needs, which it will require in order to face such challenges. An appropriate governance framework must ensure strong involvement by civil society. The EESC reiterates its proposal for a European Sustainable Development Forum.

10. **A Union of democratic change**

- **Promoting active citizenship and participatory democracy**
- **Increasing openness and transparency**
- **Enhancing civil dialogue and reinforcing social dialogue**

10.1 To tackle the common, complex challenges the EU faces, it is crucial to mobilise all sectors and resources in creating joint solutions. Civil society is central to driving forward this vital innovation and change specifically requires trust from citizens. Therefore civil society stakeholders must be involved on equal terms as other stakeholders in order to fully ensure their contributions are fully capitalised on. This requires a change in culture but also supporting the value of a strong and independent civil society sector at the Member State and EU levels.

10.2 In this context, the EESC reminds the Commission of its call for the publication of a Green paper on how civil dialogue could be organised effectively and on a permanent basis.

10.3 The EESC asks also and once again that consultation processes with the parties concerned in terms of representativeness, accessibility, transparency, and feedback be improved.

10.4 Action needs to be taken on the proposal to revise the Regulation concerning the European Citizen's Initiative in order to improve its effectiveness.

10.5 The EESC continues to consider strengthening participatory democracy a priority, with the aim of enhancing the democratic resilience of the European Union decision-making process. Within this framework, the new Commission-Council-Parliament inter-institutional agreement should allow institutional consultative bodies such as the EESC to have a greater impact on legislative proposals in the decision-making process.

10.6 Better regulation should be a method for ensuring more efficient and simplified regulatory texts, which are clear and transparent in their objectives. Consider the proposal for a legislative footprint to better monitor the development of legislation enabling civil society organisations to participate and strengthening the involvement of social partners in the legislative process, making sure their needs and expectations are met.

10.7 The Commission should continue with the REFIT process, in which the EESC should have a stronger role to play. The REFIT programme should not, however, undermine labour and social rights or environmental and consumer protection. More efficient regulation, including for SMEs, may result from the openness and transparency of better regulation processes, which should encourage beneficiaries to propose bottom-up legislative initiatives and should in particular lead to the enhanced involvement of civil society actors.

10.8 In March 2016, European social partners presented four joint positions on the relaunch of the social dialogue, refugees, industrial policies and digitisation. These need to be incorporated into the Commission's work programme for 2017 and promoted as such.

Brussels, 14 July 2016

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Georges Dassis
