



The European Economic and Social Committee during the Irish Presidency

January – June 2013



European Economic and Social Committee



The European Economic and Social Committee:

a bridge between Europe and organised civil society

Established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is made up of members of organisations representing employers, workers, and other groups that are representative of civil society in the Member States, particularly in the socio-economic, civic, professional and cultural spheres. The EESC is a consultative body of the European Union. The role that the European treaties confer on the EESC enables economic, social and civic players in the Member States to take part in the EU's policy-framing and decision-making processes. With views occasionally being diametrically opposed, the EESC's discussions often imply real negotiations involving not only the representatives of employers (Group I) and workers (Group II), but also – and this is one of the distinguishing features of the EESC – all the other sections of organised civil society represented (Group III). As a forum for dialogue and consultation, and for bringing together differing views, the

EESC helps to make the European integration process more democratic and more transparent while also bringing the European Union closer to the general public. In this way, participatory democracy enriches parliamentary democracy – the foundation of political democracy – by enabling players from civil society to make their views heard. The EESC, in other words, plays a distinct role of its own in consolidating the democratic legitimacy and effectiveness of the EU, in partnership with other European institutions. In so doing it helps to promote a genuine identification with Europe.

Furthermore, the EESC contributes to the promotion and development of dialogue with and between civil society organisations, as well as the establishment of structures for consultation beyond the borders of the European Union as part of the EU's external policy.

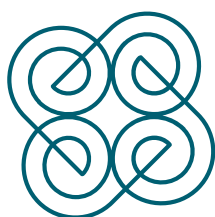


The Presidency of the Council of the European Union

The Council of the European Union brings together ministerial representatives of the governments of the EU Member States, meeting in various formations according to the policy area under discussion. The Council's legislative and political decisions are prepared by a large number of specialised working parties and are fed upwards through the Permanent Representatives Committee to the Council itself. Member State governments in turn chair the Council's various meetings and represent the Council vis-à-vis the EU's other institutions and the European Union vis-à-vis the larger world. These presidencies of the Council of the European Union traditionally establish a set of broad political priorities and a work programme.

The Republic of Ireland holds the Presidency in the first half of 2013. Its priorities can be found at <http://www.eu2013.ie>.

This publication sets out some of the major activities of the European Economic and Social Committee during the period of the Irish Presidency from January to June 2013.



Uachtaránacht na hÉireann ar
Chomhairle an Aontais Eorpaigh
Irish Presidency of the Council
of the European Union
eu2013.ie

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Introduction by EESC President Staffan Nilsson

"If you do not sow in the spring you will not reap in the autumn."

I can't help mentioning this Irish proverb when I think of the upcoming Irish Presidency marking next spring. What does Europe need at the time of the Irish Presidency, and what could Ireland bring to the table and cultivate for the EU? In times of significant economic challenges, Ireland will need to display effective management of the EU agenda. Holding the Presidency offers Ireland a valuable opportunity to seek ways of advancing legislation and policy that will positively improve the lives of all EU citizens.

As time is a great story teller, let us see what is different now than in 2004 when Ireland first took up the EU reins, and what remains to be confronted by Ireland during its EU Presidency in the first half of 2013?

One of the challenges to be faced in 2013 is that the EU and the role of the Presidency has changed significantly in recent years, particularly following the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty. There is a permanent president of the European Council, a High Representative for Foreign Affairs heading up the European External Action Service, and the European Parliament now has broader powers in the legislative area. At the same time, the Union has enlarged to 27 Member States with Croatia to become the 28th in mid-2013.

The economic and social crisis, the EU 2020 strategy, and the long term budget to cover EU initiatives over the next decade: all these challenges make the input and involvement of organised civil society, through the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), more relevant than ever.

Europe 2020: More integration through sustainable growth

I dislike harping on about the crisis, as it easily becomes a mantra that we repeat, but now we not only have an economic crisis, manifesting itself differently in different countries, but also a social crisis and crisis of confidence. While dealing with the crisis, we must focus on the future, and how we can move forward. While the financial crisis continues to remain a central concern for the EU, attention should now turn to the challenge of getting the European economy back on track. This could be done by improving the EU's global competitiveness, promoting sustainable growth and creating jobs.

I welcome the fact that the EU2020 strategy is a top priority of the Irish Presidency. The Committee organised a high level conference on the 2020 strategy in September 2012, resulting in a list of 30 concrete conclusions that we would like to share with the Irish Presidency. Our work on this subject will conclude in March 2013 with an integrated report of contributions from all of the national ESCs, evaluating "going local" implementation of the flagship initiatives. In the first half of 2013, the EESC is holding a public hearing on the future role of monetary policy and the euro within a fiscal and banking union. It will be the basis of our opinion on restoring growth.

A strong European budget for more Europe

Our Committee will continue to closely follow the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the EU Budget 2014-2020. The EU must work to promote sustainable economic growth and job creation, and at the same time create the necessary conditions for stability by implementing the EU's new economic governance rules and procedures. We must ensure that a budget is agreed with a new regulation for spending for the period 2014-2020. We must champion the need for a strong, properly funded EU budget, while we and the other EU bodies must demonstrate responsibility, good governance and sound management of our own resources. The MFF will influence the future of the full spectrum of EU policies, including the Common Agricultural Policy.

The CAP – to become a robust agriculture policy


Among the EESC priorities during my Presidency, I could mention the work on the political agreement of the Common Agriculture Policy reform, the 7th Environmental Action Programme, the review of EU water policy, the setting up of a permanent study group on food security and its opinion on food waste prevention. I believe that Ireland has a clear national interest in the CAP's future. The CAP is an aspect both of the national market and of the EU's future budget. We have been closely involved in the CAP debate, on which we have issued several opinions. The EESC is a strong partner to the Commission, supporting a robust and sustainable agricultural policy in the future.

Deeper European integration is unthinkable without a well-articulated cohesion policy. The adoption of an EU cohesion policy framework for the programming period 2014-2020, to which the EESC has contributed at all stages, is closely linked with the adoption of the MFF. This is a top priority that may fall to the Irish Presidency.

The EESC will continue to follow up on the outcome of Rio+20, mainly with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals and the greening of the Europe 2020 strategy. The inter-institutional meetings on this subject have already started at the EESC's initiative in October 2012.

2013: the European Year of Citizens through dialogue and participation

Participatory democracy and active citizenship are fundamental principles of the EU. Therefore the EESC is providing the space for dialogue and debate between the EU institutions and organised civil society, implementing our role laid down in Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union. Every year the EESC aims to improve its relations with structured civil society; in March 2013 our Civil Society Day will address the European Year of Citizens and include a debate on what makes us a citizen of the European Union in terms of economic, social and political rights? The EESC's civil society prize rewards innovative civil society activities.



In the area of social policy, we will focus on youth unemployment, preparation of an opinion on a European Social Label, as well as the gender dimension of the Europe 2020 strategy.

European integration must move forward and be strengthened. We must concentrate on opportunities, growth and jobs, social justice and a sustainable Europe and European Union. I hope that the Irish Presidency will go in this direction when taking the helm of the EU. I believe that the Irish EU Presidency has got what it takes to use this opportunity to generate engagement and support what the EU needs.

EU leaders and members of the other EU institutions have on numerous occasions paid tribute to the EESC's knowledge and experience and the

added value they bring to EU policy-making and to all the necessary civil society engagement backing it. The EESC is here to advise and support the Irish Presidency, based on the grassroots experience of our members and on our long-standing tradition of cooperation with the EU's Presidencies.

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Foreword by Lucinda Creighton T.D., Irish Minister of State for European Affairs

Ireland looks forward to taking over the Presidency of the European Union in January 2013 and to working closely with partners, including the European Economic and Social Committee, to deliver on its Presidency priorities which are focussed on restoring economic recovery and jobs in Europe.

The crisis across Europe has demonstrated how interconnected our economies are, and this means that common problems can only be resolved by common solutions. The EU has demonstrated on many occasions in the past that it is at its strongest and most effective when it works together to address challenges. The Irish Government believes that this approach, which has served the Union so well in the past, is necessary to ensure that the EU can deliver renewed stability, jobs and growth to all our citizens.

The Irish Presidency will focus on three overarching priorities:

- *Firstly, Ireland will work across all policy areas on measures that support the jobs and growth agenda, including reinvigorating the Single Market which has delivered enormous benefits for consumers and European business over the past 20 years. The Presidency will seek to secure the adoption of proposals remaining under the first Single Market Act and to make progress on Single Market Act II legislative proposals.*
- *In order to ensure that Europe retains its competitive edge in a rapidly evolving global economy, we will place a particularly strong emphasis on the digital economy.*
- *The Irish Presidency will also work to boost the European Union's research and innovation capabilities over the coming decade by advancing agreement on the Horizon 2020 programme which will play a pivotal role in fuelling sustainable economic growth across the Union, generating smart jobs, and strengthening European global competitiveness.*
- *Ireland will also focus on promoting the Union's external trade agenda during its Presidency as a vital source of growth and jobs.*
- *The Presidency will make special efforts to address the serious challenge of youth unemployment across the EU and will work closely with partners to seek solutions to deliver a better future for Europe's youth.*

- *Secondly, effective implementation of the Union's economic governance and Banking Union proposals will be essential for the rebuilding of confidence in Europe.*
- *Our economies can only grow if stability and confidence are restored. This is why the Irish Presidency will work to implement the Union's new economic governance measures to restore the conditions for business, investors and consumers to spur growth and job creation. Ireland will also work to advance the Banking Union proposals aimed at promoting stability and trust in the Union's banking sector to underpin and support economic recovery.*
- *Thirdly, agreement must be reached on the EU's future budgetary and policy framework for 2014 to 2020. Ireland will take forward negotiations and the necessary legislation to ensure that the EU has a budget to support programmes that are of major economic importance to Member States such as the Common Agriculture and Fisheries Policies and Horizon 2020, the EU's future framework programme for research and innovation. These programmes can play a key role in boosting the Union's global competitiveness through strategic investment, adding growth and creating employment.*
- *Success in furthering the economic governance and budget objectives are necessary to provide a solid foundation for the Presidency's overarching objective of restoring economic growth and creating jobs across the Union.*
- *Next year has been designated as the European Year of Citizens. Ireland, working closely with the European Commission, is planning a range of events to promote greater public discussion and debate on citizen engagement in Europe ahead of the European elections in 2014.*
- *Restoring the EU on a sustainable path to recovery will involve governments, business and civil society. The composition of the European Economic and Social Committee means that it can play a key role in this regard. I look forward to working together with the EESC to deliver a better future for Europe and its citizens.*

Activities of the European Economic and Social Committee during the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Communicating Europe in partnership



Anna Maria Darmanin
Vice-President
President of the Communication Group

During the Irish EU Presidency, the European Economic and Social Committee will continue in its role as a committed player in the EU communications process in line with the ambitions of the Commission Communication on *Communicating Europe in Partnership* and under the scrutiny of the EESC Communication Group, chaired by Vice-President Anna-Maria Darmanin.

- The EESC will focus on the issues of economic recovery – including addressing the challenges of growth and jobs (Europe 2020 strategy) – immigration, the EU budget, CAP reform, climate change and energy. The watchwords during this period will be “dialogue and participation”, “sustainability and growth” and “solidarity and development”.
- During the European Year of Citizens, the Committee will support the following inter-institutional communication priorities:

- I) **Economic recovery**
- II) **The European Year of Citizens (2013)**
- III) **Organisations and promotion of the 2014 European Parliament elections**

and work on improving relations with national Economic and Social Councils and organised civil society.

- The EESC will work to strengthen the communication partnership with the other European institutions, in line with its “Communication Strategy for 2010–2015”. As part of its work programme, the Committee will continue to present the proposals of civil society before the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission. It will use both traditional and digital means of communication.

- During the Irish EU Presidency, the Communication Department will organise a series of events on communicating with young people, including the Your Europe Your Say project. Under this project, EESC members visit schools throughout the EU 27, culminating in a youth plenary session held in Brussels. The EESC Video Challenge, meanwhile, is aimed at young people aged between 18-30, who are primarily targeted via social media and encouraged to take part in the video challenge by producing creative videos on an EU related theme.
- The change in the EESC’s Presidency will be appropriately communicated, as will the preparations for the accession of a new EU Member State, Croatia, on 1 July.
- Lastly, the EESC will continue to implement the communication policy set out in the February 2012 European Commission-EESC Cooperation Agreement. This policy focuses on decentralised cooperation (“Going local”) and on creating synergies with the European Commission in the area of communications. Communication contact points from the EESC, together with all other EESC members, will continue to participate in local events. The EESC communication contact points will meet in Ireland to exchange best practices in the spring of 2013.

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Participatory democracy and civil dialogue



Civil society involvement in the process of framing EU policies and decisions is a key instrument not only for strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the European institutions and EU action, but also for encouraging the growth of a shared understanding of what Europe is for and where it is going and for ensuring that European citizens play a full role in building Europe. This is all the more important as the EU's citizens are now experiencing and suffering the consequences of the economic and financial crisis in their everyday lives, including problems with employment, social exclusion and poverty. At a time of increasing anti-European sentiment and growing populism and extremism, the involvement of civil society is of paramount importance.

Thanks to its provisions enshrining participatory democracy and the introduction of the citizens' right of initiative, the Treaty on the European Union provides fertile ground for the development of democracy in Europe. Participatory democracy and active citizenship are fundamental principles on which the success of the EU's policies – and hence the Union's very future – depend.

It is therefore essential to implement a genuine strategy based on dialogue which listens to Europe's citizens, and which allows the people of Europe and the organisations that represent them to say exactly what they expect from the EU's policies and how they see their common future. This calls for a genuine and long-term commitment on the part of all EU institutions, as required by the Treaty, and is necessary in order to establish effective and efficient civil dialogue at European level. To achieve this objective, the EU institutions and bodies must act in partnership with one another to make the dialogue with organised civil society more effective by promoting synergies, thereby ensuring the lasting involvement of organised civil society in the European process.

In keeping with the tasks assigned to it by the European treaties, the Committee will continue to pursue its own initiatives, in close cooperation with the EU institutions and all other civil society players, with a view to contributing to the creation of a genuine European public space for dialogue and debate and to give new impetus to the European project based on a forward-looking vision of Europe's future for its citizens. The Committee makes its networks and infrastructure available to all EU institutions by providing constructive support for dialogue with civil society and its representative organisations, thereby contributing to the effective implementation by those institutions of the provisions of Article 11 TEU on participatory democracy and civil dialogue.

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Europe 2020 – A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth



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President of the Europe 2020 Steering Committee

The Europe 2020 strategy is the EU's comprehensive reform agenda for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth this decade. Its implementation is largely dependent on the commitment and responsibility of all stakeholders involved. The 2011 and 2012 Spring European Councils formally recognised the role of the Committee, the social partners and other stakeholders within the framework of this strategy.

The EESC's Europe 2020 Steering Committee has a horizontal mandate to ensure consistency and to incorporate the concept and working programme of Europe 2020 into the daily activities of the EESC sections, CCMI and observatories.

The Steering Committee particularly welcomes the fact that Europe 2020 and its growth pillar is a top priority of the Irish Presidency. The Steering Committee will focus on building the consensus needed for the reforms that can kick-start Europe's engine of growth.

Building on successful past experiences and the positive feedback on its reports, the Europe 2020 Steering Committee will continue its joint work with national Economic and Social Councils (ESCs)/similar organisations to ensure that organised civil society and the social partners are more closely involved in the practical implementation and evaluation of the Europe 2020 strategy.

The Steering Committee will prepare an integrated report ahead of the 2013 March European Council, containing contributions from national ESCs/similar organisations on their involvement in the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy.

Other activities will be:

- preparing an EESC opinion on the 2013 Annual Growth Survey;
- holding joint meetings with national ESCs/similar organisations to discuss issues such as the country-specific recommendations and to feed into the European Council's discussions;
- organising "going local" events in cooperation with EESC sections to evaluate the implementation of the flagship initiatives;
- preparing an EESC opinion on the third European Semester;
- organising missions to national ESCs and similar organisations to establish effective dialogue and involve them more closely in the strategy.

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Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion

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Economic crisis: On the road towards a genuine economic, fiscal and banking union

The Irish Presidency comes at a decisive moment for the future of Europe, a moment when the EU needs to show that it has the necessary political will and a vision of how to achieve substantially closer integration. From an economic perspective, this integration should aim to create a deep and genuine economic and monetary union, including a fiscal and banking union. These should be the main building blocks of a union where stability is matched by sustainable growth rather than austerity alone; where a well-balanced macro-economic policy mix complements structural reforms; where competitiveness and cohesion are the drivers of the European economy.

With this in mind, the EESC is currently drawing up an opinion on the implementation of the broad economic policy guidelines for the Eurozone Member States. This opinion is scheduled to be adopted in February 2013, which will enable the Committee to present its proposals before the Spring European Council and to feed them into the next European semester to be held under the Irish Presidency.

The Committee is also planning to organise a public hearing during the first half of 2013 on the future role of monetary policy and the euro within a fiscal and banking union. Based on the conclusions of this hearing, the EESC plans to adopt an opinion which will build on its earlier proposals on debt mutualisation and restarting growth. The opinion will further analyse issues such as the economic and political instruments that the euro area needs to consolidate the euro and to prevent systemic risks, the new role of the ECB, the European Stability Mechanism and the international financial institutions as well as the economic and monetary policy choices and the changes needed to bring the EU and its economy back on a sustainable growth path.

On the issue of progress towards a banking union in the Euro area, the EESC has adopted an opinion on the Commission's proposals for a single supervisory mechanism. Given the high political profile of the debate and the controversial interests involved, it is widely believed that this dossier will continue to dominate the agenda during the Irish Presidency. The EESC is following the debate closely and is ready to provide additional input where appropriate.

In addition, the Irish Presidency will need to discuss another important EU regulatory framework i.e. the Commission proposal for bank recovery and resolution. The Committee has been very active in this area as well and successfully adopted its opinion following intense consultations with all the stakeholders involved. The EESC is closely monitoring further developments and is ready to contribute further.

Budget: financial perspectives

The Irish Presidency must continue negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the EU Budget 2014-2020 as a matter of absolute priority. The Committee has already made an important contribution to this discussion having adopted an opinion on the EU Budget review and an opinion on the MFF proposal during the Danish Presidency as well as organising a number of hearings and conferences on this issue. It will continue to closely monitor this dossier during the Irish Presidency and put forward further proposals as appropriate.

Taxation

In view of the crisis, taxation is at the forefront of the debate on deepening European integration. Specific action and initiatives in the area of enhanced taxation administration are expected during the Irish Presidency. These will focus on a number of basic principles:

- shifting to growth and labour friendly taxation schemes (e.g. property, consumption),
- broadening the tax base (e.g. dismantling VAT exemptions),
- eliminating and/or phasing out hidden subsidies, and
- enhancing efficiency and transparency (e.g. double taxation, double non-taxation).

The Irish Presidency will also need to try and finalise the discussions on a number of very important taxation initiatives which have already been discussed by the EESC. These include the energy taxation directive, the common consolidated tax base for company taxation (CCCTB), the financial transaction tax (FTT), the review of the savings taxation directive, certain key aspects of double taxation and VAT-fraud. The EESC has thoroughly examined all of these issues and has adopted relevant opinions. The implementation of the FTT will be a particularly difficult administrative process which will require a separate Commission proposal for those countries which introduce the FTT; the EESC has worked intensively on this topic and will be closely monitoring the ongoing process.

In the area of VAT, the EU intends to abolish the numerous exemptions to the standard tax rate. A public consultation has been launched and the Committee will need to examine this matter in detail in order to identify which exemptions may be justified and which are not.

Another important topic is the Communication and Action Plan on improving good governance in the area of taxation, which places



a particular emphasis on “tax havens” and (aggressive) tax avoidance. The EESC has already done a substantial amount of work on this topic and will elaborate specific recommendations for the Irish Presidency in its upcoming opinion.

Economic, social and territorial cohesion

It is anticipated that the negotiations on the EU’s cohesion policy proposals for the 2014-2020 programming period (originally published by the Commission on 6 October 2011) will be brought to a close during the Irish Presidency. The Committee followed up its original opinions on the cohesion package with additional opinions on the Common Strategic Framework and the European Code of Conduct on Partnership. It will now maintain a watching brief on how the cohesion package proposals are implemented at national level.

The EESC continues to be actively involved in bringing the voice of civil society to the discussion on the EU’s macro-regional strategies, especially the Danube strategy, with the Action Plan foreseeing a role for the EESC through the Danube Civil Society Forum. The Committee will also be involved in the Adriatic-Ionian macro-regional strategy, which was requested by the European Council. Furthermore, the Committee has taken an active interest in a macro-regional strategy for the Atlantic region, and will continue to communicate its views on this issue during the Irish Presidency.

The crucial role of metropolitan areas has been recognised within EU cohesion policy, and their importance is also acknowledged in the overarching EU Europe 2020 growth strategy. Following on from its successful workshop during the Open Days in October 2012, the Committee will continue to call for action during the Irish Presidency to maintain a favourable climate for metropolitan areas.

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Single Market, Production and Consumption



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Production and Consumption)

Competitiveness of European enterprises and support for SMEs

The success of European industry is of central importance to the economic and social welfare of Europe's citizens.

The EESC will therefore support all initiatives strengthening the position of European enterprises, in particular SMEs.

The recent Commission Communication on Security Industrial Policy will be among the initiatives that the EESC will be discussing during the first half of 2013.

Research, development and innovation

Research, development and innovation are vital for the development of EU enterprises and for responding to today's societal challenges. The European Union has an extraordinary potential for innovation and should take full advantage of this opportunity.

The new framework programme for research and development, Horizon 2020, will support Europe's growth and innovation efforts, thereby enhancing the EU's global competitiveness.

The EESC will continue to monitor new developments in this area, in particular the recent initiatives on Partnerships for R&I in the European Research Area and on International Cooperation in this field.

Financial services

A safer, sounder, more transparent and more responsible financial system, which works for the economy and society as a whole and which is able to finance the real economy, is a precondition for sustainable growth. The EESC intends to contribute to the public debate on this issue.

Accordingly, the EESC will be closely following all legislative initiatives aimed at reforming the financial system.

Consumers' rights

The protection of consumers' rights is among the EESC's priorities. The INT section has organised an annual European Consumer Day every year since 1999, in close cooperation with the European Commission and the Member State holding the Presidency of the Council. The 2013 European Consumer Day is currently in preparation.

During this six-month period, the EESC will follow with interest the planned Commission initiatives on general product safety, unfair commercial practices and collective redress.

Single Market

The internal market is, without doubt, one of the EU's most significant and valuable achievements, and has contributed greatly to growth and employment in the Member States. However, much remains to be done and the EESC will be on the front line supporting initiatives that aim to unleash the full potential of the single market.

The EESC will therefore follow up the implementation of the Single Market Act Two Communication on the Twelve levers to boost growth and strengthen confidence ("Working together to create new growth").

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Single Market Observatory

Edgardo Maria Iozia
Group II – Workers
President of the Single Market Observatory
(SMO)



The Single Market Observatory (SMO) was set up by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in 1994 with the support of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission. Its objective is to act as a “pressure group,” made up of representatives of EU civil society organisations, to identify shortcomings in the single market, propose solutions and help the legislator fine-tune its proposals. The SMO has 33 members assisted by a secretariat within the Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT).

The SMO was responsible for the Committee’s work on the **Single Market Act** and is closely monitoring its implementation and evolution. The Observatory has also improved its cooperation with the EFTA Consultative Committee and a joint publication on a citizens-orientated single market (an issue that is important for both bodies) was issued in the second half of 2012.

It will also maintain its focus on **smart regulation** issues. This will also include cooperation with a number of platforms such as the European University Institute (EUI), the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) and the European Policy Centre (EPC). The SMO database on European self- and co-regulation, which involves close cooperation with the

Secretariat-General of the European Commission, will also feed into its external activities (e.g. the Hague Institute for the Internationalisation of Law, HiiL, and DG CONNECT).

The SMO will join forces with the INT section for the European Consumer Day in March 2013.

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For more information about the observatory:

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The SMO’s activities can be followed on Facebook and Twitter.



Employment, Social Policy and Citizenship, Immigration and Integration



Leila Kurki
Group II – Workers
President of the SOC Section
(Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship)

The SOC section covers a broad range of policy areas such as employment and working conditions, social policy and integration, gender equality, disability issues, education and training, health and justice and home affairs, including immigration. During the current term of office, the SOC section is focusing on three strategic priorities, each of which is divided into three sub-categories:

Better functioning labour markets

- A good and productive working life
- The potential of young people
- Development of the internal market and free movement of labour

Management of the social crisis

- Social security systems and the social impact of the crisis
- Giving every child the best start in life
- Healthy and active living

Europe for all

- Proactive integration and immigration
- Enhancing rights and opportunities
- Active citizenship and volunteering

One of the main issues during the Irish Presidency will be youth employment. The Committee will prepare an opinion on the Commission youth package which will discuss the implementation of the Youth Opportunities Initiative, in particular youth guarantees, and the Quality Framework for Traineeships. At the very beginning of the Irish Presidency, the Committee's plenary session will discuss an own-initiative opinion originating from the SOC section on Employee influence and participation. At the request of the European Parliament, the Committee is also working on an opinion on a European Social Label while an own-initiative opinion on The role of companies in relation to education in the EU is also currently in preparation. In addition, a conference is scheduled to take place at the beginning of 2013 in connection with the opinion on the Gender

dimension of the Europe 2020 strategy. Together with the European Commission, the section will jointly organise the ninth meeting of the European Integration Forum, with political input from the SOC section's Permanent Study Group on Immigration and Integration. A coordination group under the SOC section will monitor and organise various events as part of the European Year for Citizens 2013.

Labour Market Observatory



Krzysztof Pater
Group III – Various Interests
President of the Labour Market Observatory (LMO)

The Labour Market Observatory (LMO) carries out extensive work on a wide range of labour market issues in line with the strategic priorities of the SOC section. **The LMO will organise at least two events during the Irish Presidency: one in Warsaw on "Typical and atypical labour contracts – Advantages and disadvantages" and one in Brussels on "Effective tools of active labour market policies during the crisis".**

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or about the observatory:

www.eesc.europa.eu/lmo

Agriculture, Rural Development, Environment, Sustainable Development



Mario Campi
Group III – Various Interests
President of the NAT section (Agriculture,
Rural Development and the Environment)

The Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment will continue working in its usual areas of activity during the Irish EU Presidency. Certain topics, however, such as the reform of the Common Agriculture Policy, the 7th Environmental Action Programme or the review of EU water policy, will be particularly visible in its work.

Agriculture

The Irish Presidency will be leading the negotiations on the final stage of the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. The end of April 2013 is generally considered to be the final deadline for reaching an overall political agreement if the new rules are to be implemented as of January 2014.

The NAT section will continue to monitor the results of the ongoing discussions, making sure that the views of civil society, as expressed in the EESC opinion adopted in April 2012, are given due consideration.

Another area of interest is agrobiotechnology in the EU i.e. the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in agriculture. The Committee will continue to monitor the review of EU legislation on the cultivation of GM crops (in particular the proposal to amend Directive 2001/18/EC) and the discussion on new techniques.

Food security will also be a key topic and the Committee will follow up the important work already carried out, in particular through the permanent study group on food security. One of its main focuses will be on food waste and how to counter it, including an own-initiative opinion on a European strategy for the prevention and reduction of food losses and food waste, which will be adopted in February 2013.

Drawing on its previous consultative work, the Committee will facilitate a stakeholder debate in the first half of 2013 on the product safety, animal health and plant health packages currently in preparation by the European Commission. Reinforcing the food chain and improving the traceability of food products will remain major priorities for the Committee's work during this period.

Forestry

In response to the decision taken at the Forest Europe Ministerial Conference in Oslo in June 2011, the EESC should get involved and contribute to the negotiations on a Legally Binding Agreement on Forests in Europe. The EESC's involvement may also take the form of an event in 2013. In addition, a new (updated) forest strategy is expected in the first quarter of 2013. It will provide an opportunity to give the forest sector a stronger voice and to consider how forests and forestry can contribute to the EU 2020 objectives.

Environment

The promotion of the 7th Environmental Action Programme will be given further support. The Programme is expected to define the priority objectives of environmental policy, set out strategic orientations for the short to medium-term as well as a longer-term vision, and focus on better implementation. Furthermore, it should contribute to the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, as well as to the follow-up of the Rio+20 commitments.

The Committee is looking forward to launching a discussion in early 2013 on a proposal for a reviewed Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive to ensure updated requirements and a consistent approach to environmental assessment at Member State level.

A review of the REACH directive will be discussed during the Irish Presidency and the Committee will contribute to this process. Climate change is another policy area which will remain on the Committee's agenda, through EESC opinions and its participation at related events.

The EESC advocates an integrated, cross-cutting approach to environmental, economic and social issues in water policy, with a view to achieving sustainable development. The end of the European Year of Water 2012 will see the launch of the Commission Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources. The EESC will actively contribute to the debate on this major review of EU water policies, and will organise a

Conference on Water and Agriculture in early 2013 focusing on efficient water use and resilient farming systems in the context of climate change.

The Committee will seek to strengthen and support the protection of biodiversity and the restoration of ecosystem services in Europe, especially within the framework of the Green Infrastructure Initiative. It will also focus on sustainable resource use issues such as the expected Commission Green Paper on the sustainability of phosphorus and the legislative proposal for an international regime on access to genetic resources.

During the Irish Presidency, the EESC will strengthen its involvement in the implementation of the Convention on Access to Information, Public

Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus).

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Sustainable Development Observatory



Hans-Joachim Wilms
Group II – Workers
President of the Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO)

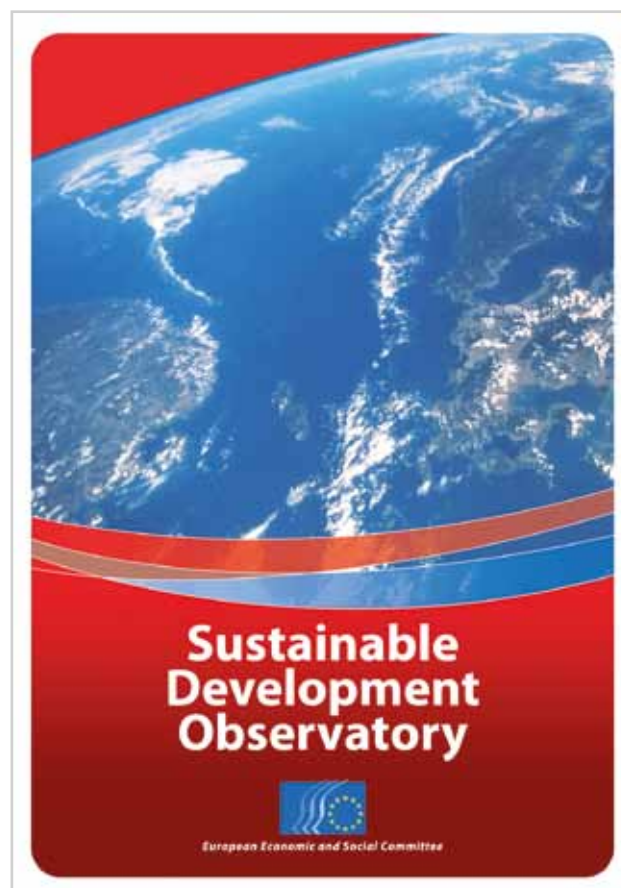
The Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) is working on several issues that will be of importance during the Irish Presidency.

The EESC president's slogan "Engaging People for a Sustainable Europe" places sustainable development at the heart of the EESC's priorities. The UN Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio in June 2012 (Rio+20) has given new momentum to sustainable development issues. The EESC will also organise a broad civil society debate on Rio+20 follow-up issues which will feed into the Rio follow-up process at EU inter-institutional level. Key topics will include the Sustainable Development Goals and greening the Europe 2020 strategy.

During the Irish Presidency, the SDO will work on an own-initiative opinion on the Green economy and will organise a major public hearing in connection with the Commission's online consultation. As part of its work, the SDO will also focus on the social aspects of sustainable development. It will also discuss Europe 2020 and EU SDS in the light of the outcome of Rio. In addition, the SDO will continue to provide input into the EESC's work on the Europe 2020 strategy in particular via its follow-up work on its opinion on the *Resource Efficiency Roadmap*.

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Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society



Stéphane Buffetaut
Group I – Employers
President of the TEN section (Transport, Energy,
Infrastructure and the Information Society)

In cooperation with the Irish Presidency, the EESC will continue to work on the main proposals set out in the **Transport** White Paper. In particular, it will explore how to establish innovative forms of cooperative decision-making between European civil society and the different levels of government. In the area of maritime affairs, the Committee will adopt an opinion calling for stronger EU action to fight piracy, a plague that has huge human and economic costs. The EESC will also work on so-called blue growth, which taps into the huge green development opportunities provided by the maritime sector. In the area of air transport, the EESC will support the Presidency in taking firm action to implement the Single European Sky package, in particular by ensuring the full involvement of all stakeholders and the allocation of adequate financial resources for key enablers such as SESAR.

The EESC will build on its previous activities in the area of **energy** policy and seek the support of the Irish Presidency to further promote the idea of a European Energy Community (EEC). The EESC is heavily committed to developing the European dimension of energy policy in political, technical, market design and social terms. The integration of energy markets, in particular through better interconnections, is a priority if we are to avoid significant national divergences among both operators and end-users. The internal energy market will therefore be a major topic during the Irish Presidency, particularly in light of the Commission communication on this subject. At the same time, the EESC will also step up its action to ensure greater public involvement in energy issues to encourage an informed debate on the energy transition ahead. This will involve an assessment of the future EC proposal on the adjustment of the biofuel target in the EU Climate and Energy package. In the context of the Fukushima disaster, the EESC will continue its efforts to promote more transparency in nuclear energy debates, in particular by jointly organising a final Round Table on the Aarhus Convention & Nuclear (ACN) on 12-13 March 2013 and by supporting the EC with the formulation of transparency guidelines for the implementation of the Radioactive Waste Management Directive by the Member States. After assessing the outcome of the stress test process, the Committee will prepare an opinion on the EC legislative proposal to improve the EU regulatory framework on nuclear safety.

The EESC will focus on several key actions for implementing the **Digital Agenda** for Europe, which are in line with the Irish Presidency's objectives to boost growth and job opportunities within the EU. The priorities will include the "Connecting Europe Facility" (CEF), Guidelines for Telecoms, the Regulation on Electronic Identification and Trust Services, as well as the Commission proposals on reducing the cost of high-speed broadband and on a European Internet Security strategy. "The EESC expects to co-ordinate with the Irish Presidency on the Digital Agenda Assembly (DAA), one of the largest events organised in Dublin in June 2013, which the EESC has (co)hosted in 2012."

It will also work together with the Irish Presidency on the "Safer Internet" conference which it plans to organise in Brussels in the first quarter of 2013.

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www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.sections-commission.

Industrial Change



Jorge Pegado Liz
Group III – Various Interests
President of the Consultative Commission on
Industrial Change (CCMI)

The CCMI will make an active contribution during the Irish Presidency, providing both expertise and experience, and will support the Presidency in its principal areas of interest. The CCMI will continue to discuss the proposals on how to achieve the objectives of the EU 2020 strategy and implement the changes needed to switch to a competitive, socially responsible and environmentally sustainable economic system, while taking account of the current climate of economic uncertainty. In this context, the CCMI will give its views on:

- the recent Commission communication outlining a new strategy for a sustainable construction sector (CCMI/106). It will analyse the current situation and perspectives of this sector following the recent construction bubble and its dramatic impact on several European countries, including Ireland. The sector needs urgent restructuring and a shift in action guidelines.
- the Commission's follow-up to the 2010 communication on "Creative industries" (CCMI/107), commenting on the proposed action to foster an appropriate environment at EU level for cultural and creative industries that use ICT technologies.
- the new Commission document updating the current "flagship initiative" on industrial policy "New Name" (CCMI/108).
- a new own-initiative opinion will be prepared on Growth Driver Technical Textiles (CCMI/105), which aims to provide the Commission with concrete proposals in terms of research, development and best practices for this high potential industrial sector. The results of this

work are scheduled to be presented at Frankfurt's Tech Tex, the largest technology fair in the textiles sector.

In addition, the Consultative Commission for Industrial Change envisages preparing:

- follow up action on the opinions focusing on the aviation sector: CCMI/071 and CCMI/095 on the Revision of 1994 and 2005 EU aviation and airport guidelines. The increasing importance of so-called "low-cost" airlines and their contribution to both local development and tourism at large merits a more targeted approach to the sector.
- an own-initiative opinion on the local dimension of the beer industry: In addition to huge global groups – most of them European – a large array of small and micro-breweries in rural areas may be explored as this sector shows high potential for growth and exports and contributes actively to local development.

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External Relations



Sandy Boyle
Group II – Workers
President of the REX section (External Relations)

The **enlargement process**: a meeting of the EU-Turkey Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) will be held in the EU in the spring of 2013. The final meeting of the EU-Croatia JCC will take place in Croatia in the first half of the year while the seventh meeting of the EU-the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Civil Society JCC will be organised in the EU during the first quarter of 2013. At regional level, the Western Balkans Contact Group will continue to develop contacts and promote cooperation with civil society organisations in the Western Balkans region. The Irish Presidency will be invited to attend all of these meetings. The 2nd meeting of the EU-Montenegro Joint Consultative Committee will also be held in early 2013 in Montenegro. The third meeting of the EU-Iceland JCC will take place during the first half of 2013.

Relations with the EU's **Eastern Neighbours and Russia**: the EESC will continue developing its relations with Russian civil society through its EU-Russia Contact Group. The sixth joint workshop between the EESC and the Civil Chamber of Russia will be organised in the EU with the first half of April having been suggested as a possible date. The Committee will also be actively involved in the work of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum through its coordination of a new Working Group for social rights and labour policies in the region. An opinion on social dialogue in the EaP countries will provide the basis for the EESC's contribution to the work of this group. The Committee will also continue participating in the Eastern Partnership intergovernmental platforms and other Working Groups and Panels. The EESC Eastern Neighbours Contact Group will continue to monitor the negotiation of association agreements with Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova as well as the DCFTAs with these countries. The Committee will pursue its bilateral cooperation with Ukrainian civil society and will organise a study visit to Ukraine. The situation in Belarus will be assessed in a new own-initiative opinion, work on which will begin in 2013.

Relations with **Southern Neighbourhood Countries**: the EESC will continue to monitor civil society developments in the countries undergoing democratic transition to identify those areas where it can provide further support and build close ties with legitimate civil society organisations, including the creation or restructuring of Economic and Social Councils. It will continue to promote all efforts to establish consultative platforms for civil society in Tunisia, Egypt, the Palestinian Territories and Lebanon, which could lead to the creation of ESCs in those countries. In so doing, the EESC will continue to cooperate with the other EU institutions and with partner organisations such as the ILO, the CoR and the ETF. The EESC will also seek to improve the support which the EU provides to civil society in the region through the European Neighbourhood Policy, in

particular the support for employers' and trade union organisations. One landmark event during the Irish Presidency of the EU will be the biennial Anna Lindh Forum of Euromed civil society to be held in Marseille in April 2013. The EESC plans to use this forum to contribute to the process of networking among civil society organisations and will also explore which instruments can boost the involvement of social and economic civil society stakeholders, especially in policy-making. It will also examine and discuss with the other EU institutions the possible creation of instruments for involving civil society in the process of monitoring the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs), which the EU is due to negotiate with a number of Mediterranean countries during the first half of 2013.

Relations between the EESC and **Asia**: the 12th China EU Round Table is due to take place in Vienna and will examine the issue of intercultural dialogue and measuring prosperity beyond GDP. The Irish Presidency will be invited to attend this event. The EESC will continue its work as a partner in the EU-China partnership for sustainable urbanisation. As far as India is concerned, the focus will be on civil society monitoring of the negotiation of an EU-India Free Trade Agreement. As for Japan, the EESC will continue to develop relations with Japanese civil society organisations to jointly monitor the negotiations on an EU-Japan Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and a Framework Agreement, as agreed at the 20th EU-Japan summit.

Relations with **developing countries**: the EESC maintains regular cooperation with ACP countries through its joint ACP-EU follow-up committee. The EESC will be actively involved in the area of sustainable development and inclusive growth and will adopt opinions on the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals, the role of social protection in development policy and on relations between the EU and the Pacific region. These issues, as well as monitoring the negotiations of Economic Partnership Agreements, will be the main areas of work with our ACP partners.

The EESC will continue monitoring the implementation of EU development policies and its consistency with the objectives set out in the communications "Increasing the impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change" and "The future approach to budget support to third countries". Particular attention will be given to the coherence of EU financial instruments.

As regards EESC relations with **Latin America**, a special follow-up will be given to EESC opinion REX/355 The role of civil society in the EU-Colombia and EU-Peru trade agreements to examine the possibilities of institutionalising civil society involvement in the trade agreement between the EU, Colombia and Peru. The EESC will also monitor the ongoing negotiations on an Association

Agreement between the EU and Mercosur, following the adoption of an EESC opinion on these negotiations in 2011. Moreover, the EESC will actively monitor the possible creation of a Joint Consultative Committee in accordance with Article 10 of the Association Agreement between Chile and the EU and will continue with its work to promote structured relations with Mexican civil society under the EU-Mexico Association Agreement. The EESC will also contribute to the work of the next EU-LAC Head of State Summit, to be held under the Irish Presidency in January 2013. Its work will focus on the issues of i) social economy in Latin America; ii) investments with a social and environmental dimension; iii) social protection agreements between the EU and Latin America.

Transatlantic relations: the EESC will continue the follow-up to the opinions adopted on EU-Canada and EU-USA, and will monitor and assess the negotiations on the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement and on the possible agreement with the USA, should the negotiation process begin next year.

Trade issues: The EESC will continue working on the implementation of trade-related mandates for civil society involvement in the EC-Carforum Economic Partnership Agreement and the EU-South

Korea Free Trade Agreement with the aim of monitoring and providing advice on the implementation of the trade and sustainable development chapter of the FTAs. The second EU-Korea Civil Society Forum will take place in June 2013 in Korea. The monitoring of ongoing negotiations at multilateral and regional level will continue.

The EESC will continue monitoring the implementation of the European Instrument for Democracy and **Human Rights** through its Contact Group for the EIDHR.

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For more information about the work of this section, please consult our website:
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The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

For your information, the structure below is only valid until mid-April 2013. A new EESC president, two vice-presidents, the group presidents, the section presidents, and the Bureau members as well as the questors will be elected during the Plenary Session on 17-18 April 2013.



Staffan Nilsson
President



Anna Maria Darmanin
Vice-President
President of the
Communication Group



Jacek Krawczyk
Vice-President
President of the Budget Group



Henri Malosse
President of Group I
– Employers



Georgios Dassis
President of Group II
– Workers



Luca Jahier
President of Group III
– Various Interests



Martin Westlake
Secretary-General

The European Economic and Social Committee is a consultative body set up by the Rome Treaties in 1957. It is made up of members of organisations representing employers, workers and other sections of organised civil society in the Member States, particularly in the socioeconomic, civic, professional and cultural spheres. Its main task is to advise the three major EU institutions (the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission).

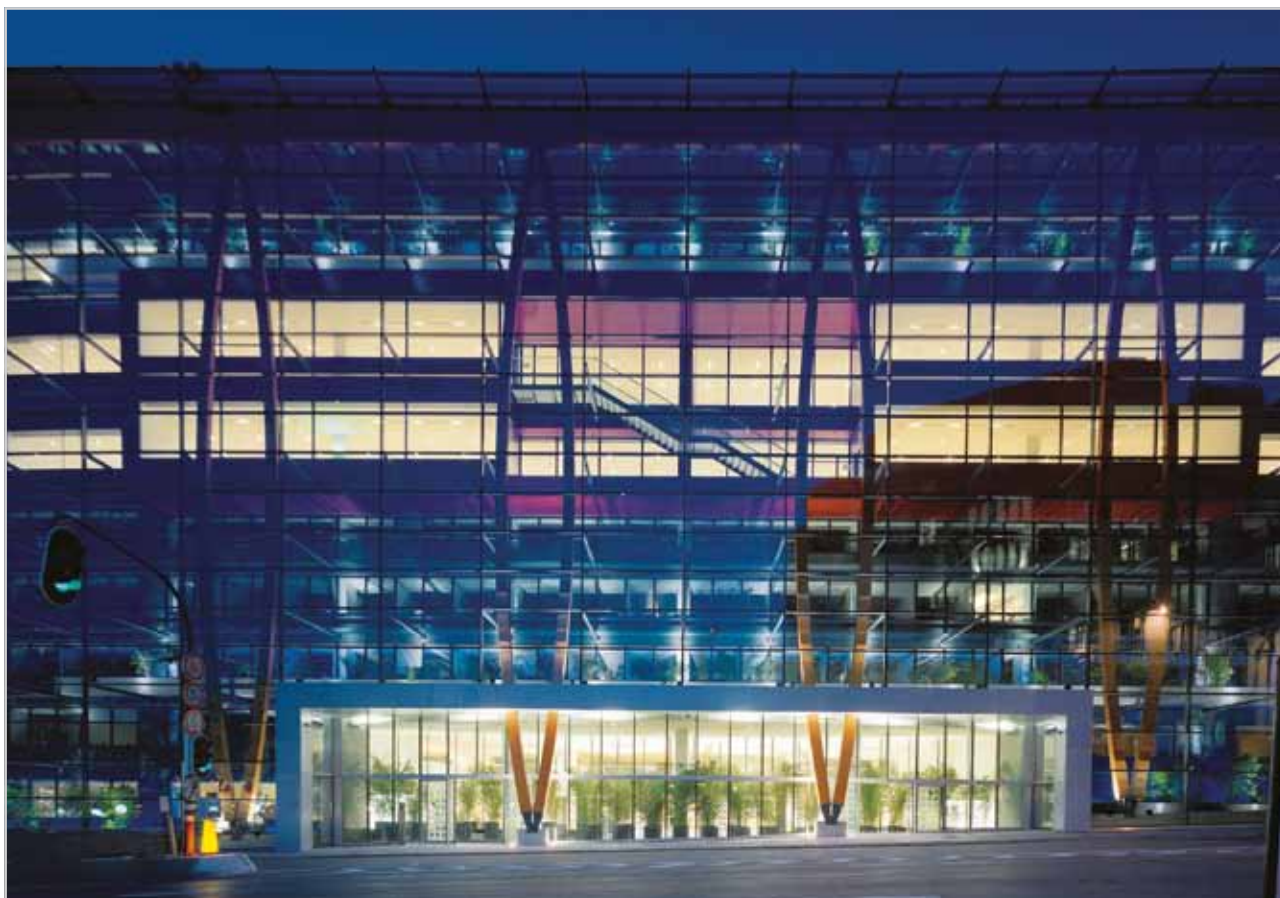
It is mandatory for the EESC to be consulted on all those issues stipulated in the treaties and whenever the institutions deem it appropriate. It can also be consulted on an exploratory basis by these same institutions, or can itself take the initiative to issue an opinion (around 15% of its opinions are own-initiative opinions). The EESC adopts on average 200 opinions a year on a wide range of subjects

concerning European integration. It therefore plays an active role in the European Union's policy-framing and decision-making processes

The mission of the EESC:

Committed to European integration, the EESC contributes to the strengthening of the democratic legitimacy and effectiveness of the European Union by enabling civil society organisations from the Member States to express their views at European level. The Committee fulfils three key missions:

- helping to ensure that European policies and legislation tie in better with economic, social and civic circumstances on the ground, by assisting the European Parliament, Council and European Commission, making use of EESC members' experience and



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representativeness, dialogue and efforts to secure consensus serving the general interest;

- promoting the development of a more participatory European Union which is more in touch with popular opinion, by acting as an institutional forum representing, informing, expressing the views of and facilitating dialogue with organised civil society;
- promoting the values on which European integration is founded and advancing, in Europe and across the world, the cause of democracy and participatory democracy, as well as the role of civil society organisations.

Thanks to the EESC, building Europe is therefore the task not only of the European Union and politicians, but also of members of the public belonging to organisations involved in economic, social, civic and cultural life.

The EESC is made up of 344 members split into three groups: the “Employers” group, the “Workers” group and the “Various Interests” group, which brings together representatives of the various sections of organised civil society not covered by the other two groups, i.e. bodies representing craftsmen, farmers, SMEs, the professions, consumers in the social economy, family associations and associations promoting the rights of people with disabilities and combating social exclusion, the general interest, etc. The EESC’s membership is not static. It changes with each renewal so as to reflect changes in civil society in the Member States as accurately as possible.

Links between the European Economic and Social Committee and national economic and social councils and similar bodies

The EESC and economic and social councils and similar institutions have, through close cooperation, built up an important network of cooperation and communication at EU level. In the EU’s Member States, this cooperation involves regular meetings on specific subjects (in particular the Europe 2020 strategy), the exchange of information and the development of a joint website (<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/ceslink/>).

The EESC also actively participates in the work of the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (IAESCSI), which has some 60 member countries.

The Irish members of the European Economic and Social Committee



Seamus Boland

Chief Executive Officer of Irish Rural Link since 2001 and member of the community and Voluntary Pillar

Member of Group III – Various Interests

Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)

Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment (NAT)

In an economic crisis, one of the main casualties is the loss of focus on people affected by poverty and inequality. It is my sincerest hope that the EU will reconnect with people who are without the resources to access basic needs such as food, shelter, education and health. I would also hope that the EU will ensure that there is world wide support for the many stateless persons who have no rights and are consigned to lives of continuous suffering.



David Croughan

Economist, former Head of Economics and Taxation, Irish Business and Employers Confederation

Member of Group I – Employers

Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)

Section for External Relations (REX)

Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO)

Following several years of disastrous political ineptitude in solving the financial and banking crisis, the Council took decisions at the end of June that promise to reverberate for many years to come, including a banking union and Van Rompuy's pursuit of a Genuine Economic and Monetary Union. Many of these governance changes will still be at a formulation stage during the Irish Presidency and the EESC should play a helpful role in explaining and promoting among citizens the merits of pursuing a European approach, rather than narrow national interests of Member States that has been gaining ground.



Siobhán Egan

Representative of Environmental Pillar which comprises 27 environmental NGOs in Ireland (www.environmentalpillar.ie)

Member of Group III – Various Interests

Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO)

Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)

Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT)

During its Presidency Ireland will play a crucial role during in determining whether Europe can transition to a future where jobs and quality of life are based on sound sustainability principles. How we managing our natural resources and reach a low carbon future and measure our progress through such a transition is key.

The 'true cost' to society of our land and resource use and production patterns, as well as consumption and waste patterns need to be reflected in policies.

The role of civil society needs to be developed further, engagement needs to be facilitated and a wide range of voices heard so as to ensure longer term thinking rather than short term gain prevails.



Sally Anne Kinahan

Assistant General Secretary – Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)

Member of Group II – Workers

Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)

Section for External Relations (REX)

Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)

Since the outset of the crisis a combination of poor policy decisions, hesitation and inaction has prolonged the economic crisis and exposed millions of people to intolerable hardship. Changing this has to be the priority for the Irish Presidency. It cannot be delayed any longer. A strategy for economic recovery and equality that places the interests of our citizens before any other interest is the only acceptable approach to take. This requires an investment in and commitment to the creation of decent jobs, growth and social progress. The European Year of Citizens is an appropriate time to start putting people first.



Heidi Loughheed

Head of IBEC Europe (Irish Business and Employers Confederation)

Member of Group I – Employers

Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)

Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)

Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO)

The beginning of the Irish Presidency will mark the 40th anniversary of Ireland's accession to the EEC; an appropriate time to acknowledge the enormous benefits that membership has brought citizens and renew our commitment and engagement. It is important that the Presidency work constructively with all of our partners to address the substantial challenges facing the European Union and its citizens. Finishing off the final details of the Multiannual Financial Framework so that it promotes growth enhancing measures and overseeing the third European Semester are likely to be substantial pieces of work. The most acute issue however, that has the potential to have an immediate impact on Europe's citizens, would be to progress rapidly and pragmatically Member States' capacity to comprehensively address youth unemployment.



Jim McCusker

Former General-Secretary, Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)

Member of Group II – Workers

Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)

Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)

Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT)

Ireland will chair key strategic debates on Europe's future. A key issue for the economic future of Europe is the "Connecting Europe" facility and its energy strand, which, among other things, aims to eliminate "energy islands" in the EU.



Thomas McDonogh

Chairman of Thomas McDonogh & Sons Ltd

Member of Group I – Employers

Section for External Relations (REX)

Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)

Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)

The Irish Presidency should concentrate on restoring confidence in the Euro, and financial stability in the Eurozone. It is also important to have sufficient credit available from the Banking sector to ensure economic growth and the creation of employment, which is more or less dependent on this.

The development of research and innovation should be widely encouraged, which will enable European industry to become competitive on a global scale.



Manus O'Riordan

Former Head of Research of the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), Ireland

Member of Group II – Workers

Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO)

Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI)

Section for External Relations (REX)

EESC opinions have repeatedly emphasised the urgency of introducing Eurobonds as an essential mechanism for tackling the economic crisis. I would hope that the Irish Presidency will at last see the implementation of such an EU strategy.



Pdraig Walshe

Former President of Irish Farmers Association and Former President of COPA , the organisation representing European farmers

Member of Group III – Various Interests

Section for External Relations (REX)

Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT)

The final decisions on the CAP are likely to be made during the Irish Presidency. European consumers have been the beneficiaries of a successful Common Agricultural Policy for the past 50 years, with a guaranteed supply of clean safe food. If the CAP is not adequately funded going forward there will be less food produced in Europe and food prices will increase as Europe soaks up food from other parts of the world. The biggest losers will be developing countries. Civil society must convince decision makers to continue to increase the funding for a new CAP in line with inflation.



Focus areas of the Irish Presidency of the Council January – June 2013 as perceived by the European Economic and Social Committee

Ireland looks forward to its seventh Presidency of the European Union which coincides with the 40th anniversary of its accession to the EU in 1973. As Presidency Ireland will place a strong emphasis on three overarching priorities:

1. Promoting sustainable economic growth and jobs and building Europe's competitive advantage

The Presidency will work intensively to advance the European Council's compact on growth and jobs which provides a framework for action to strengthen economies at national and EU level and to fight unemployment.

The Single Market has delivered enormous benefits to both business and consumers across the EU and has the potential to give greater impetus to the EU economy. The Irish Presidency will seek to advance the key actions for growth identified by the Commission in the Single Market Act I and II.

As Presidency Ireland will seek to underpin and stimulate research and innovation across the EU for the coming decade by advancing agreement on the Horizon 2020 framework programme. The programme can play an important role in boosting the EU economy, generating smart and sustainable growth and jobs, and strengthening the Union's global competitiveness.

To sustain a globally competitive economy, the EU needs to invest in its infrastructure. The Connecting Europe Facility envisages a EUR 50 billion investment in infrastructure in the transport, energy infrastructure and telecommunications/digital infrastructure sectors. The Presidency will prioritise negotiations on the Connecting Europe Facility as well as building agreement on proposals in transport and energy sectors.

Ireland will prioritise the external trade agenda during its Presidency as a vital source of growth and jobs and will hold a meeting of Trade Ministers in Ireland during the Presidency which will focus on the EU-US trade relationship.

As Presidency, Ireland will also work to promote greater equality, social cohesion and inclusion in Europe. Elements of the Europe 2020 Strategy including improving training, skills and access to education will play a critical role in equipping citizens, particularly young people, to find work and in attracting investment into the EU.

As an island nation, Ireland has a strong interest in the Integrated Maritime Policy as a Presidency policy priority, and will aim to

build on the work carried forward by the Cyprus Presidency. A key deliverable for Ireland is the possibility of the Atlantic Strategy Action Plan being endorsed by the Council.

2. Restoring stability and confidence through effective economic governance for Europe

The Presidency will seek to build stability and boost confidence in Europe by implementing the range of measures adopted to improve economic governance in the EU, in particular through the supervision of the European Semester, the EU's new system of economic and budgetary coordination. Ireland will work to ensure that the European Semester process is implemented effectively and that debate in the relevant sectoral Councils is focused on ways of boosting growth and job creation.

Ireland will also seek to make progress during its Presidency on the Banking Union proposals which aim to put the European banking sector on a secure footing, including through more effective supervision.

3. The EU's future budget

The outcome of negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will have major implications for the policy direction of the EU for much of the next decade. The Irish Presidency will undertake the tasks that remain to ensure the EU's budget is in place to underpin growth, competitiveness and employment in Europe.

Some basic facts about Ireland

Official name	Eire or The Republic of Ireland
Capital	Dublin
Surface area	70 284 km ²
Other major cities	Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford
Official languages	Irish and English
Currency	Euro (€)
Population, total in Oct. 2012 (est.)	4 487 000
GDP per capita in Purchasing Power Standards (EU-27 = 100) in 2012	127
GDP at market prices in millions of euro, forecast for 2013	166 906
GDP at market prices per capita in 2010	32 400
Unemployment rate in September 2012	14.7 %
Religion	Predominantly Roman Catholic, Protestant, Presbyterian and small numbers of Muslims and Hindus through immigration
Life Expectancy estimated in 2011	Males 78.07, Females 82.69
Important Exports	Machinery and equipment, computers, chemicals, medical appliances, pharmaceuticals, food products, animal products
Important Imports	Data processing equipment, other machinery and equipment, chemicals, petroleum and petroleum products, textiles, clothing

Internet sites

President of Ireland	http://www.president.ie/
The House of Representatives/Houses of the Oireachtas	
An Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann	http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/
Tourism, i.e.: Irish Tourist Board	http://www.failteireland.ie/
Site of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU	http://www.eu2013.ie/

President

Prime Minister (An Taoiseach)

Foreign Affairs Minister and Deputy Prime Minister (An Tánaiste)

Minister of State with special responsibility for European Affairs

Mr Michael D Higgins

Mr Enda Kenny

Mr Eamon Gilmore

Ms Lucinda Creighton

Government:

Mr Enda Kenny assumed the office of Prime Minister or An Taoiseach in March 2011. He is the leader of the Fine Gael party which is currently in power as part of a coalition government with the Labour Party. Mr Eamon Gilmore, who is the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Deputy Prime Minister, is the leader of the Labour Party.

Opposition (in order of number of representatives):

- Fianna Fail
- Sinn Féin

The state


Form: Constitutional Parliamentary Democracy

Ireland is the third largest island in Europe and lies to the west of Great Britain, separated by the Irish Sea. Ireland became an independent sovereign state when it gained independence from Great Britain in 1922. Ireland became a Republic following the entry into force of the Irish Constitution in 1937. The Irish Constitution is the foundation on which the State is built, setting out its structure of government, the House of Representatives, and its courts system. The Irish Constitution states that Ireland is a neutral country and is therefore not a member of NATO. The Republic is separate from Northern Ireland, which forms part of the United Kingdom. Although earlier articles of the Irish constitution claiming jurisdiction over the whole island were amended as part of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, the Irish Constitution specifically states that the people of Northern Ireland have the right to be a part of the Irish nation and to Irish citizenship. Ireland joined the EU in 1973. Ireland enjoyed a period of rapid economic growth, and became known as the “Celtic Tiger” before the recession in 2008. Ireland’s economy has since been in crisis and is one of the EU’s worst affected countries. The current government, which is led by a Fine Gael/Labour Party coalition, ousted Fianna Fail which has been the ruling party in Ireland for 61 of the last 79 years. The ruling coalition enjoys the largest parliamentary majority of any government in the history of the republic.

The House of Representatives (Parliament)

Ireland is a parliamentary democracy based on the Westminster model and established by the Constitution of Ireland which was created in 1937. The Oireachtas is a bicameral national parliament composed of the President of Ireland and the two Houses of the Oireachtas: Seanad Éireann (Senate) and Dáil Éireann (House of Representatives). The Dáil Éireann is the lower house in the House of Representatives but is the primary chamber of government. The head of the House of Representatives is known as the Taoiseach while the deputy prime minister, who is currently





also Ireland's Foreign Affairs Minister, is referred to as the Tanaiste. Dáil Éireann is directly elected every five years by the people of Ireland through a system of proportional representation. It is the most powerful parliamentary chamber in Ireland's bicameral system but is subject to a number of limits imposed by the Constitution. Seanad Éireann, or the Senate, is the upper chamber of the House of Representatives. It is not directly elected by the people and is made up of members who are elected through a variety of methods including appointment by the lower house, Irish Universities, the Taoiseach and vocational panels. Its main power is to review bills. It can delay the passing of a bill but does not have the power to veto proposed legislation. There have been a number of recent proposals to abolish this arm of the House of Representatives in view of its composition and its perceived limited function.

The President

Technically the head of state under the Irish Constitution, the President of Ireland is primarily a ceremonial office. The President is directly elected by the people of Ireland every seven years. The President may only hold two terms in office. The President fulfils a number of ceremonial functions such as signing bills into law, appointing the Taoiseach and convening and dissolving the House of Representatives. However, the main role of the President is to refer bills to the Supreme Court for constitutional review and to act as Ireland's representative in foreign affairs. The current President, Mr Michael D Higgins, was elected last year. Former Presidents of Ireland include Mary Robinson, the former High Commissioner for Human Rights. The President of Ireland has long been seen to have played a pivotal role in the success of the peace process in Northern Ireland and in Ireland's relations with the UK.

The Courts

Ireland's system of courts is founded on Article 34 of the Irish Constitution. The court system consists of the Supreme Court, the Court of Criminal Appeal, the High Court, the Circuit Court and the District Court. Under the Constitution, the High Court and the Supreme Court are empowered to judicially review the laws and action of the main governmental institutions in order to determine their compatibility with Ireland's Constitution. Except for special cases, Ireland's courts sit in public. The Special Criminal Court was established to examine paramilitary organisations such as the IRA and sits with no jury to avoid intimidation.

The Constitution of Ireland guarantees the separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. The Judiciary, however, is appointed by the President on the advice of the government. This advice is binding. The Judicial Appointment Advisory Board was established to encourage the independence of the judiciary from the executive branch of government.

Administrative Divisions

Ireland has four provinces, each of which is divided into counties. There are 32 counties on the island of Ireland, six of which form part of the United Kingdom, while 26 are part of the Republic of Ireland. Local Government in Ireland was set up by a series of Acts dating back to 1898. Under these Acts, Counties are administered by 34 County Councils. A number of larger counties, such as Dublin, have more than one County Council. Traditionally, the County Councils have enjoyed wide powers and controlled local services in each county. However, the County Council local government system now has increasingly limited powers. The responsibility for certain services such as education and health has been passed on to regional or national level bodies. County Councils are responsible for planning, transport infrastructure, sanitary services, public safety (notably fire services) and for the provision of public libraries. Local government elections take place every five years. There are a further 80 town councils which form a lower tier of local government and have a more limited role.

Role and structure of the Irish Economic and Social Council

The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) was founded in 1973 and brings together representatives of business and employers' organisations, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the government, community and voluntary organisations as well as representatives of agricultural and farming organisations. The NESC analyses and reports to the Taoiseach on strategic issues such as effective economic development, achieving social justice and the development of a strategic framework for dialogue between the government and the social partners. Despite recent budget cuts, the NESC took over the Presidency of the network of EU ESCs in 2012 under the guiding theme of Social and civil dialogue in a time of national and European crisis. This has provided a good base for in-depth discussions on the difficulties wrought by the economic crisis throughout the Member States, acting as a useful tool for coordinating work on European best practices. The last Annual Meeting of Presidents and Secretary Generals of the network of EU ESCs (held in Dublin Castle on 8 to 9 November 2012), entitled Labour Market and Welfare/Benefit Reforms was a particularly successful event and is testimony to the NESC's high level of professionalism and efficiency.

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Website: www.nesc.ie

Programme of events 2013

Conferences, seminars, hearings and extraordinary meetings
1st half of the year

1. COMMITTEE EVENTS

CROSS-CUTTING INITIATIVES

Civil Society Day	Brussels, 6 March
Annual meeting of the EESC members as Communication Contact Points – Exchange of best practices	Dublin, 14-15 March
Award of the winners of the 2013 of the EESC Video Challenge II linked to the European year of Citizens	Brussels, 20 March
Your Europe, Your Say IV – Youth plenary	Brussels, 18-20 April
Open Day	Brussels, 4 May
Vernissage of Irish art exhibition followed by an Irish evening	Brussels, 22 May

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Extraordinary meeting of Group III in cooperation with European Movement Ireland and Eurofound: “Ireland 40 years on: the benefits, opportunities and challenges of EU membership”	Dublin, 1-2 February
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SECTION ACTIVITIES

ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION AND ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COHESION

Hearing on ECO/334 “Ten years on, where is the euro headed?”	Brussels, 19 February (tbc)
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SINGLE MARKET, PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

European Consumer Day	Brussels, 14 March
Hearing of the SMO	Date and place to be confirmed

TRANSPORT, ENERGY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Political event to disseminate the TEN496 opinion “Maritime piracy: Strengthening the EU response”	Brussels, January, date to be confirmed
Final Round Table on the Aarhus Convention in Nuclear (ACN)	Luxembourg, 12-13 March

Public hearing on Europe's external aviation policy	Brussels, date to be confirmed
"Safer" internet conference	Brussels, date to be confirmed

EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND CITIZENSHIP

Open space meeting on the European Year of Citizens 2013	Brussels, date to be determined
Conference on immigration, coorganised with the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council and the Council of Europe	Brussels, date to be determined
Conference on "The gender dimension in the Europe 2020 strategy"	Brussels, date to be determined
Conference on "Effective tools of active labour market policies during the crisis"	Brussels, March
Conference on "Typical and atypical labour contracts"	Warsaw, 8-9 April
European Integration Forum	Brussels, 4-5 June

CONSULTATIVE COMMISSION ON INDUSTRIAL CHANGE

Presentation of the result of "Growth Driver Technical Textiles" (CCMI/105) during the largest technical fair in this field, TechTextil	Frankfurt, 11-13 June
Follow-up action on the opinions dealing with the aviation sector: CCMI/071 and CCMI/095 on the "Revision of 1994 and 2005 EU aviation and airport guidelines"	Dublin, date to be confirmed
The beer industry: A large array of small and micro-breweries in rural areas showing high potential for growth	Date and place to be confirmed

AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Water and Agriculture Conference	Brussels, 29 January
Event linked to the 7 th EAP	Date and place to be confirmed
Rio+20 online consultation – Hearing	Brussels, April or May

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

6 th Joint Workshop between the EESC and the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation	Date and place to be confirmed
21 st meeting of the EEA Consultative Committee	Date and place to be confirmed
3 rd meeting of the EU – Iceland JCC	Iceland, May or June
Public hearing on the EU Arctic Policy	Rovaniemi, date to be confirmed
2 nd meeting of the Civil Society Forum under the EU – Korea FTA	Korea, June
EU-China Round Table	Date and place to be confirmed
13 th (and last) meeting of the EU-Croatia JCC	Zagreb, date to be confirmed
2 nd meeting of the EU-Montenegro JCC	Podgorica, March or April
32 nd meeting of the EU-Turkey JCC	EU, May or June

7 th meeting of the EU-The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia JCC	Date and place to be confirmed
ACP-EU Follow-up Committee	Date and place to be confirmed
ACP-EU Seminar	West-Africa, 2 nd quarter
1 st meeting of the EU-Cariforum civil society JCC	Date and place to be confirmed
7 th EU-Brazil Civil Society Round Table	Brussels, January
Joint EESC-EC Seminar on social protection agreements with third countries	Brussels, date to be confirmed

2. COMMITTEE PARTICIPATION IN OTHER EVENTS

SECTION ACTIVITIES

ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION AND ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COHESION

Atlantic Forum Event "Reducing carbon footprint and achieving socially inclusive economic growth"	Cardiff, February
Atlantic Forum Event "Research and innovation and overview of the Action Plan"	Galway, March
Brussels Tax Forum	Brussels, Spring
Brussels Economic Forum	Brussels, Spring

TRANSPORT, ENERGY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Digital Agenda Assembly	Dublin, June
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EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Participation of President Nilsson in the EU-Latin America & Caribbean Head of State Summit	Santiago de Chile, 25-26 January
Participation in the EuroLat Joint Parliamentary Assembly	Santiago de Chile, January
Policy Forum on Development, organised by the European Commission	Place and date to be confirmed
Participation in the Anna Lindh Euromed civil society forum	Marseille, 4-7 April
Participation in the ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly	Place and date to be confirmed
Participation in the Euromed-UfM Joint Parliamentary Assembly	Place and date to be confirmed
Participation in the Euronest Joint Parliamentary Assembly	Place and date to be confirmed
Participation in the Eastern Partnership Platforms	Place and date to be confirmed

For more information on the work of the Committee's sections, please consult our website: www.eesc.europa



Would you like to know more?

This brochure is one of a series of information documents published by the European Economic and Social Committee. Other titles in the series include: *Discover the EESC* and *The EESC: A Bridge between Europe and Organised Civil Society*. These, and a number of more specialised publications, can be consulted and downloaded free of charge at **www.eesc.europa.eu**. The Irish Presidency website **www.eu2013.ie** will provide up-to-date information on the Presidency as it unfolds.

The website of the Council of the European Union (**www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3_fo/index.htm**) provides a great deal of information about the Council and its ongoing activities.

The website of the European Parliament (**www.europarl.europa.eu/**) similarly provides a large amount of information about the Parliament and its ongoing activities.

The Europa website of the European Union (**<http://europa.eu/>**), which is managed by the European Commission, provides a vast amount of information about the European Union's activities. It contains a number of interactive pages specifically designed to provide a more interactive service for the European Union citizen.

If you have any questions about the European Union or its activities, please send an email to the Europe Direct service on **www.europa.eu/eurodirect/** or call the following free number: **00 800 67 89 10 11**.



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