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Civil Society Organisations' Bulletin



**LIBERAL PROFESSIONS: LESSONS
LEARNED AND CHALLENGES AHEAD**

FOREWORD

Séamus BOLAND (IE)

President, Civil Society Organisations' Group



The liberal profession, a concept that brings together the millions of professionals who are responsible for organising

our society in the areas of Medicine, Architecture, Law, Planning, Engineering, Administration, Science and so much more, has a huge influence on how we as a society function and manage our lives. Without their presence, our lives would be lived in a continuous state of chaos, without any adherence to rules of fairness, equality, justice or order. However, despite their best efforts, our world remains one of unfairness and is still subject to the chaos caused by nature and by our own addictions to the phrase first used by the Scottish poet Robbie Burns 'Man's inhumanity to man'.

The primary objectives of the organised liberal professions are to ensure that their work is defined by the need to serve the best interests of people and to ensure that this work is not the cause of distress. So when I attended the European Liberal Professions Day¹ organised by the EESC's Liberal Professions Category², on 10 May, it was a learning experience to hear the discussions on the many challenges ahead in terms of digitalisation, the impact of COVID-19, sustainable development and the related topics of war, climate change, food security, etc.

Clearly, these challenges demand urgent solutions. At the same time, we need to respect the fundamental rights and common values, that form the basis of the European Union. During the pandemic, it was our scientists and medics, along with many other professionals, who through the vaccines ultimately shortened the

lifespan of the virus. It was our law makers, advised by the legal profession and others, who allowed us to alter our behaviour, in such a way that we put aside many of our freedoms.

With the digitisation of our society, we are challenged by the possibilities of artificial intelligence and its intrusive effect on our lives. In climate change, we are facing the enormous reality that we must radically alter our behaviour, or risk a serious if not permanent disablement of our planet. Clearly, governments must make these difficult decisions. However, they can only do so with the help of experts such as the liberal professionals. These challenges will test our civilisation in terms of the maintenance of human rights, e.g. equality and social inclusion. Hence, it is essential that we continue to support and resource the work of the liberal professionals of the Civil Society Organisations' Group and the EESC.

On a separate note, I am pleased to say that the change of our Group's name to Civil Society Organisations' Group³ has met with widespread acclaim. In our Group, all of our Members are embedded in civil society organisations ranging across the wide spectrum that affects our daily lives and it became imperative that our name reflected this reality. The immediate and lasting assistance of civil society organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing war in Ukraine, as well as the during the disastrous consequences of climate change witnessed in Europe last summer, have been essential. Equally, these organisations have been willingly passing on their knowledge, gained in these particular circumstances, willingly on to governments and EU policy-makers, so that these can adjust their programmes to maximise support to people affected by the various events.

And finally, I would like to remind you of *World Refugee Day* on 20 June. Refugees around the world exist as a consequence of human kind's inability to ensure that all people, irrespective of background and circumstances, are treated with dignity. It is a day for us to think about the millions affected by war, famine, poverty and persecution, who are forced to leave their homes in search of hope of a safer life elsewhere.

Séamus Boland

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2. EESC Liberal Professions Category, <https://europa.eu/!MJ76wG>

3. EESC, Press Release on change of name, <https://europa.eu/!HTxJ4N>

LIBERAL PROFESSIONS: LESSONS LEARNED AND CHALLENGES AHEAD



Gaetano Stella

Professions such as healthcare, law, accountancy and engineering are natural supporters, guarantors and custodians of human rights, democratically organised societies and the rule of law.

At the same time, our own family of professions undeniably plays a key

Interview with Gaetano Stella, President of CEPLIS¹ and Confprofessioni²

What role should the liberal professions play in the future of Europe?

role in Europe's growth, not only because of their own numbers, but equally because of the number of jobs they create as employers. Studies have shown that during the last financial crisis liberal professional SMEs were amongst the most stable and reliable employers and this will most probably be the case again in the post-COVID-19 economic situation. It is crucial for us that this role and our specificities, especially

regarding quality guarantees for our patients and clients, are recognised when it comes to measures for boosting entrepreneurship, innovation and services.



In the follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe³, we need to continue advancing towards these goals.

What are the current challenges for the liberal professions?

Our professions, given their natural position as mediators between citizens and the state, must become key players in the ecological transition of Europe. Their own wellbeing, and that of their patients and clients, is obviously linked to that of their environment.

The energy crisis we are already facing as a result of the war in Ukraine is another big challenge for our sector. Our experience from the years of the pandemic has taught us that our

socio-economic category is among the first to face the consequences of major crises with little help from the authorities. In that context, building strategic alliances that will allow us to guarantee decent living conditions for our colleagues as members of the workforce is another absolute priority.

Liberal professions must further strive to advance the debate on gender equality, professional ethics and digitalisation. As CEPLIS⁴ (the

European Council of the Liberal Professions), we have contributed to the debate on these big issues for the future of our professions with campaigns, positions and conferences, but there is still work to be done. Brexit, the Conference on the Future of Europe, European social dialogue and the issue of professional regulations must also continue to be important fields for our activities.

How do the liberal professions respond to crisis situations?

Liberal professionals have played, and continue to play, a major role in overcoming the different crises we are facing. Nobody can now deny that the liberal professionals of the healthcare sector were the front-line heroes of the battle against COVID-19. CEPLIS, as a collective voice for our sector, was amongst the first actors to actively and concretely

support the vaccination campaign.

In the case of the war in Ukraine we were also amongst the first to contact Kyiv's permanent representative to the EU in order to enter into contact with our colleagues in this country and discuss with them how to best help.

Our members' organisations are, of

course, doing their own bit in this context with a lot of enthusiasm.

1. CEPLIS, European Council of the Liberal Professions, <https://ceplis.org/>
2. Confprofessioni, Italian Liberal Professions Confederation, <https://confprofessioni.eu/>
3. Conference on the Future of Europe, <https://futureu.europa.eu>
4. CEPLIS, European Council of the Liberal Professions, <https://ceplis.org/>

Let us discuss the role of liberal professional chambers and the definition of 'public interest'



Rudolf Kolbe

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Architects and Chartered Engineers*

Society's dependence on high-quality liberal professional services became painfully apparent during the pandemic, with a wide range of medical and social professions providing help and support for people in frightening health and social situations. SMEs and other companies relied on the high-quality advice and support from legal and finance-related professions for survival during the health and economic crisis. As

teleworking increased, engineers enabled the broad digital support that became necessary for society to function.

This revelation during the health and economic crisis is also applicable to other **current challenges**; sustainable development and the green transition will significantly depend on smart engineering and planning. Solutions from engineers and architects will contribute considerably to rebuilding housing and infrastructure in Ukraine in the post-war period. Once again, the crucial role of medical and social professions in times of war has been made painfully apparent.

We therefore need to urgently **discuss a new role for liberal professional chambers** in national and European policy-making, and especially their full implementation as social partners on a national and European level. Additionally, the **definition of 'public**

interest' as regards the EU legal framework **has to be redefined** if we want to secure the liberal professions' crucial contribution towards making communities more resilient, equitable, productive, sustainable and socially just.

Last but not least, the professions have had to **adjust their services** to technological and societal developments, and make the best possible use of them. This ranges from optimising the use of AI⁸ and other digital applications, enforcing interdisciplinarity, and overcoming gender and generational gaps to enable more service flexibility.



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The professions - guardians of a more inclusive Europe

The resilience forged by the pandemic is now faced with the need for a crosscutting approach to meet the challenges ahead



Marina Elvira Calderone © EESC

Marina Elvira CALDERONE (IT)
*Co-spokesperson,
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fessions Category
President,
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Labour Consultants*

*President, CUP association for the
professions*

A more inclusive Europe cannot do without the professions. Together, however, the professions need to learn how to bring out the added value embedded in their work by taking a crosscutting approach.

Various challenges were posed by digitalisation, training and regulation in the aftermath of the pandemic, clearly revealing societies' heavy reliance on the quality and coverage of highly-skilled professional service provision in all fields. The response to the health emergency, which ensured that systems continued to operate in the critical phase, came at a cost: professionals were called on to make a **huge effort** to update, reorganise and manage large workloads, often without sufficient support.

The biggest challenge facing the



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European Union now is precisely **closing the gaps caused by the pandemic**, working to be more inclusive with greater focus on young people and women. Women are still few and far between in the scientific, technology, engineering and IT sectors and at the top of the professions. They need services and support, as well as better redistribution of work commitments.

This is the time to act: with the pace of digitalisation increasing, the issue of training comes to the fore - both upskilling and acquiring specific skills - along with regulation. **Internal ethical standards are needed**, with more general rules to prevent machines replacing people rather than serving as tools, thus destroying the very concept of work. When it comes

1. Artificial Intelligence

to the institutions, greater, constant **synergy** will therefore be needed between the bodies representing the

professions at European level. At the same time, Member States will need to swiftly accompany the processes with

regulation that can rely on the expert support of the professions.

Putting the liberal professions on the European roadmap

Victoria ORTEGA

President, *Unión Profesional*¹

First Vice-President, *CEPLIS*²



Victoria Ortega

The professions must - and want to - be part of the roadmap currently being drawn up in the European Union, whose priorities include being a driver of economic and social change for citizens. We are aware that the strategic coordinates are being shaped by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, a conflict that is being played out on the stage of the old continent and which has led the registered professions to question both its causes and its consequences, in line with their unequivocal commitment to human rights.

In times of conflict and uncertainty, our commitment is to speak out against injustices and to highlight professional criteria based on peaceful coexistence and sustainable and fair development. We are referring to professional criteria such as the ability to discuss matters with others, management skills and a great deal of specialist knowledge in each situation. These are all

crucial to address situations such as the current war, which has turned part of Europe into a battleground, with geopolitical and humanitarian consequences that are difficult to predict. Both the pandemic and the current circumstances have highlighted the need to apply the holistic perspective of professional action in the medium to long term, as set out in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals³. This overall strategy keeps 2030 as a possible horizon and is in line with the professional culture for which we in the registered professions advocate.

PROFESSIONAL CULTURE

At the conference organised by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) for the European Day of Liberal Professions⁴, I sought to convey the importance of a professional culture based on ethical self-requirements as a duty reflected in the codes of conduct for each profession. These create a homogeneous model of continuing professional development, which professionals need in order to keep their knowledge, competences and skills up to date and to build on them. This implies a responsibility based on the very ethics inherent to the



professions and the creation of a climate that prioritises lifelong learning as a guarantee of good professional conduct.

I also referred to the professional values that the European Council of Liberal Professions (*CEPLIS*)⁵ has been promoting for years, which cover the main aspects of professional behaviour and to which we should add, to reflect the changing times, the importance of protecting the environment and ensuring gender equality. This is why I welcome the concern stated at this forum about sustainable development and fairness when it comes to promoting careers in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM), as well as the debate on the ethical and unbiased adoption of AI⁶ technologies in a way that serves citizens. All the statements made at the meeting addressed the strategic role that the European liberal professions must and do play, as they are crucial to any economic and social roadmap that aspires to build a fairer Europe for all.

Here and now



Ágnes Cser © EESC

Ágnes CSER (HU)
Representative, Hungarian Children's and Youth Alliance

On 10 May, we celebrated the European Day of the Liberal Professions⁷ with a first-rate

professional conference at the EESC building. What are the **liberal professions**? They consist of people – accountants, doctors, engineers, surveyors, lawyers, pharmacists, tax advisers, etc. – who provide essential services to EU citizens in their daily lives, even in the radically changed circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the EU, **more than 22%**

1. Unión Profesional, Spanish inter-professional association, www.unionprofesional.com
2. CEPLIS, European Council of the Liberal Professions, <https://ceplis.org/>
3. United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
4. EESC, European Day of the Liberal Professions 2022, <https://europa.eu/!C8bCnV>
5. CEPLIS, European Council of the Liberal Professions, <https://ceplis.org/>
6. Artificial Intelligence
7. EESC, European Liberal Professions Day 2022, <https://europa.eu/!C8bCnV>

of workers are employed in the liberal professions; they are self-employed, and in 2013 they generated more than 10% of the EU's GDP.

Liberal professionals provide their clients with individual **professional and intellectual services** on the basis of specific training. Service provision takes place in the context of an individual face-to-face relationship between client and service provider, and the service provider carries out their activities on their own responsibility.

What are the characteristics of the liberal professions? First and foremost **professional independence**, with continuous training, study, and real life-long learning, as they need to keep up-to-date with the evolution of their professions in the interest of their clients. The professions represent their **clients' interests**, and have each their own **professional organisations/chambers**, which is very important for clients and service providers alike,

ensuring adherence to strict ethical rules.

The COVID-19 pandemic has opened a new stage in the life of the liberal professions – a revolution in relations with clients, as face-to-face meetings disappeared almost overnight. **Digitalisation and artificial intelligence** have been useful to the liberal professions, but the personal nature of relationships with clients, especially as regards trust, has found itself in a critical situation. How can interpersonal contacts be built in the context of digitalisation? There is still a lot of work to be done on forging human relationships without face-to-face meetings, ensuring the protection of clients' data, and providing high-quality personalised services in a radically changed world.

After 70 years of peace, how has the Russia-Ukraine war changed day-to-day relationships between practitioners of the liberal professions and their clients? These professions



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once again stand before a challenge.

What does the intellectual capital that the EU's liberal professionals have represented and practised for decades mean not only for the EU but for the world? **Working for the common good**, these individuals give useful and indispensable advice to EU citizens in their daily lives, solving their life problems and providing them with guidance and appropriate representation.

They are in **need of special support and protection** to be able to represent the interests of their clients in radically changed circumstances. A **dedicated fund** should be set up for them at EU level to provide the financial support they need for continuous training and learning in the world of digitalisation and AI¹.

My take on European Liberal Professions Day 2022



Benjamin RIZZO
(MT)

Financial and management consultant

President, Civil Society Committee,

Benjamin Rizzo © EESC

Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD) Vice-President, Malta Federation of Professional Associations

Vice-President, European Council of Liberal Professions

I would like to express my feedback following the excellent work undertaken by the organisers during [Liberal Professions Day 2022](#)².

The day was divided into four panels with very good speakers and the European Parliament Vice-President Evelyn Regner. If we consider the work that has to be undertaken by

professionals, then according to the speakers the future looks good.

I would like to reflect on the process for professionals to keep up to date in their professional activity.

All professionals have to keep up with their **code of ethics** as indicated by the individual profession to which they belong. They also have to keep up to date and report in various forms on the **continuous professional development** that they undertake in order to keep up to date so that they can give the best advice to their clients.

It is also essential that professionals who give advice to the public (clients) have **professional indemnity insurance** that covers the work they undertake. Certain professionals who work for a government entity or for other companies/institutions should

be covered by such insurance and not be left to cover their own work, as they are doing the work as instructed by their employer.

Therefore, professionals must see that their work is undertaken to the best of their ability and be insured in order to cover any mishaps.

I am looking forward to next year's Liberal Professions Day and seeing what targets will have been reached and what new challenges arise.



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1. Artificial Intelligence
2. EESC, European Liberal Professions Day 2022, <https://europa.eu/!C8bCnV>

COMMENTS ON CURRENT AFFAIRS

Migrants must never be seen as a weapon

Comment in view of World Refugee Day on 20 June 2022



Pietro Vittorio Barbieri © EESC

Pietro Vittorio BARBIERI (IT)
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Former Spokesperson, Forum Terzo Settore (Third Sector Forum)
President, Centre for Autonomy (Centro per l'Autonomia)

The first years of the new millennium are certainly not lacking in geopolitical events: war has erupted on many fronts. The Russian aggression in **Ukraine** is the focal point of this new reality. This is because one side has vastly more resources than the other. The aggression itself is a potent symbol of neo-colonialism and contempt for democracy. This war is not only a "conventional" war, it is also a "hybrid" war involving propaganda, energy-based blackmail and **millions**

of refugees being taken in by the EU, especially from neighbouring countries. Time will tell whether the latter aspect was a deliberate decision or an inevitable side effect of such a violent and horrific act of aggression.

Using the lives of migrants and asylum seekers to gain political advantage is certainly nothing new. The last time this demonstrably happened was on the Belarus border with Poland and Lithuania. The defining characteristic of **an act of hybrid warfare weaponising migration** is intention. The EU has already experienced similar situations in the Mediterranean, with Greece, Spain, Malta and Italy on the frontline. Most migrant crises come under this heading.

The **EESC** is of the view, and has stated in opinion [REX/554](#)¹, that there is a line that cannot be crossed: migrants must never be seen as a weapon rather than human beings with fundamental rights.



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When migrants are seen as a weapon, **countries become human traffickers**. However, migration is accepted as something that happens: it is part of human history, a result of war, violation of human rights, land grabbing, climate change and poverty. As long as those root causes are in play, migration will continue and criminal organisations will make money out of it. It is therefore imperative that we **set up legal, safe reception routes**, as the EESC suggests in its opinion [SOC/707](#)². This, along with properly coordinated **EU-level law enforcement investigations**, is one of the few ways to **stop human traffickers**.

ECI Day: The European Citizens' Initiative turns 10!

Comment on ECI Day 2022



Kinga Joó © EESC

Kinga JOÓ (HU)
Chair, EESC ad hoc
group for the European
Citizens' Initiative
Vice-President,
Civil Society

Organisations' Group
Vice-President, National Association of Large Families (NOE)
President, Social Responsibility Board,
National Cooperation Fund (NEA)

On 2 June, the EESC hosted the **annual ECI Day** under the motto "The European Citizens' Initiative 10 years on, ready for the future?"³, providing a platform for dialogue and information

on specific citizens' initiatives (ECI⁴). It was an opportunity to look back as well as into the future. Over the past ten years, more than 15 million signatures have been collected, 89 initiatives registered and six have been successful.

From the earliest days since this instrument for participatory democracy was launched, the **EESC** has strived to play a crucial role in promoting the ECI and what it is meant for: to give citizens a voice in EU policy-making. Very recently, the EESC also decided to introduce the possibility for its sections to draft own-initiative opinions on successful initiatives before the European Commission's official reply.



With war raging in Ukraine, democratic processes challenged in Europe and the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#)⁵ revealing the participants' great interest in contributing to

1. EESC opinion REX/554 Instrumentalisation of migrants, <https://europa.eu/!x8MfBG>
2. EESC opinion SOC/707 Migrant smuggling, <https://europa.eu/!PxhdY3>
3. EESC, ECI Day 2022, <https://europa.eu/!3Nb73B>
4. European Commission, European Citizens' Initiative, https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/_en
5. Conference on the Future of Europe, <https://futureu.europa.eu>

decision-making, this anniversary edition could not have been more timely. It is clearer than ever that **democracy and peace cannot be taken for granted**. We can also see that participatory processes only work if citizens are aware of their rights and

of the tools they can use to make their voices heard.

This year, as part of the [European Year of Youth](#)¹, ECI Day shed a special light on the **involvement of young people** in citizens' initiatives. We need to raise young people's awareness

of this innovative and promising instrument and reconnect them with our democratic institutions. We must make sure that future generations also make use of this powerful tool to influence policies that ultimately impact their generation.

2022 Euromed Summit

A comment by:



Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL)

Vice-President, Civil Society Organisations' Group

Ioannis Vardakastanis © EESC

National Confederation of Disabled People (NCDP)

President, European Disability Forum (EDF)

President, International Disability Alliance (IDA)

Member, Economic and Social Council of Greece (OKE)

Member, Greek National Commission of Human Rights (EEDA)

The [Euromed Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions](#)² took place on 31 May and 1 June in Marrakesh, attended by 120 participants from a range of economic and social councils and similar

institutions as well as representatives of employers, trade unions and other social interest groups from member states of the [Union for the Mediterranean](#)³.

The aim of the summit, which was organised by the EESC in cooperation with the Moroccan Economic, Social and Environmental Council, was to promote a greater understanding of the key issues affecting organised civil society in the Euro-Mediterranean region and to enhance interregional dialogue.

This year's summit focused on the topic "COVID-19: the role of civil society in the reconstruction and resilience of the Euro-Mediterranean region". A number of points were raised, not only about mitigation of the pandemic's social impact and the opportunities it might provide for sustainable development, but also about economic recovery despite

COVID-19.

Because the Mediterranean region is strongly exposed to climate change, water scarcity and coastal erosion, and because the energy transition plays an essential role in climate mitigation on both shores of the Mediterranean, **next year's Euromed Summit**, which is planned to take place in Egypt, will be dedicated to **energy policies and strategies in the Euro-Mediterranean region**. The Mediterranean countries have great potential in the field of renewable energy and some of them could become net energy exporters in the foreseeable future. Moreover, this green transition could receive a further boost from the EU's renewed partnership with its Southern Neighbourhood and its support for climate resilience, environment and energy.

NEWS FROM THE GROUP

Civil Society Organisations' Group is the new name of the EESC's Diversity Europe Group



On **18 May 2022**, the Diversity Europe Group (Group III) of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) decided unanimously to change its name to "**Civil Society**

Organisations' Group". The change of name enters into force with immediate effect.

Séamus Boland, president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, said: "The economic and financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and now the war in Ukraine, have demonstrated that civil society organisations actively contribute to the resilience and sustainability of our

communities. They bring solutions to challenges, they defend our European values and are essential for the implementation of effective policies. Civil society organisations are key players for a sustainable future and must be recognised as such."

1. European Year of Youth 2022, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en

2. EESC, 2022 Euromed Summit, <https://europa.eu/jmbNmT>

3. Union for the Mediterranean, <https://ufmsecretariat.org/>

Within this context, the Group has decided to change its name, in order to provide stakeholders with more **clarity about its composition and mission**.

The change of name is especially timely, in the light of the publication of the [final report](#)¹ on

the outcome of the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#)². The report proposes **strengthening existing structures**, to better reflect the needs and expectations of EU citizens in the decision-making process and further states: “Within this framework, **enhance the**

institutional role of the EESC and empower it as **facilitator and guarantor** of participatory democracy activities like **structured dialogue with civil society organisations** and Citizens’ panels.”

Evelyn Regner: the liberal professions are an essential part of our society

On 10 May, the Vice-President of the European Parliament Evelyn Regner took part in the [European Day of the Liberal Professions 2022](#)³, which was hosted by the [Liberal Professions Category](#)⁴ of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). She spoke during the opening session of the annual conference, which focused on the topic of *Liberal Professions: Lessons Learned and Challenges ahead*. Various civil society and other institutional representatives participated in the event.



Evelyn Regner, Rudolf Kolbe & Marina Elvira Calderone © EESC

In her introductory statement, **Ms Regner** stated that the “Liberal professions contribute positively and are an essential part of our society. They plan and build our houses, they take care of us when we are sick and they protect our democracy through their investigative work.” Moreover, she underlined the timeliness of the discussion about the future of work for the liberal professions: “As many liberal professionals were suffering great economic losses during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is time to take stock and find solutions to be more resilient to future crises.” In this context, Ms Regner stressed the importance of participatory democracy, in particular the role of the EESC and its liberal professions representatives.

Keynote speaker **Julia Told**, professor of civil and corporate law at Vienna University of Economics and Business, also spoke about the impact of the pandemic and the related legislation on the liberal professions. In terms of the increased digitalisation of services, Ms Told was reasonably optimistic and saw opportunities: “It is possible that clients got used to online interactions and building trust in an online environment. There might be potential to increase the market.” In addition, she said that the professions expected legal certainty, clear measures in good time, and tailored and quick financial aid, if necessary, in crisis situations such as the pandemic.

Several participants highlighted that professionals have done their utmost to update and reorganise their services and to contribute to the response to the pandemic. Transition processes that have been accelerated by the pandemic need to be supported by specific funding.

With regard to other challenges such as gender equality in the liberal professions, **Evelyn Regner** stressed the need to adapt STEM jobs⁵ to workers’ needs, for instance in terms of working hours. This could also help attract more women. Political and legal solutions and a mental shift were needed, including the creation of a common level playing field at EU level. Ms Regner concluded: “A common European definition of the liberal professions could be helpful to find a good balance between unification and national requirements at European level. The European labour policy



Julia Told © EESC

must ensure both minimum standards and safeguards for the liberal professions.”

Professor **Giuseppe Colavitti** from the University of L’Aquila and LUISS, University of Rome, proposed that the European Commission base a European definition of the liberal professions on the [Rome manifesto](#)⁶. He also stressed the need for the professions to provide independent services solely in the interest of the client. This is of particular importance in the context of digitalisation of services.

For **Anna Maria Bardone**, president of the Italian Industrial Property Consultants Institute, there are three issues to focus on: the digital revolution, geopolitical changes and demographic developments, which give rise to threats and new opportunities. The combined effect of these three factors must be studied to assess how to facilitate the development of the professions, both for professionals and for the businesses with which they work.

1. Conference on the Future of Europe, report on the final outcome May 2022, [8pl7jfcz6ae3jy2doji28fni27a3 \(prod-cofe-platform.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com\)](#)

2. Conference on the Future of Europe, <https://futureu.europa.eu>

3. EESC, European Day of the Liberal Professions 2022, <https://europa.eu/!C8bCnV>

4. EESC Liberal Professions Category, <https://europa.eu/!MJ76wG>

5. Jobs in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

6. EESC, Rome manifesto, <https://europa.eu/!kPnN8Q>



Friedemann Schmidt © EESC

Friedemann Schmidt, president of the Federal Association of Liberal Professions in

Germany, addressed the question of how to secure trust in liberal professionals in digital environments. He said, "The 'human factor' is at the core of professional services and therefore it is necessary to state that in the field of artificial intelligence the final decision must rest with people."

In this context, participants stressed the need to update ethical standards for professionals and service providers and to monitor ethical behaviour in the context of digitalisation. A negative impact on jobs and services should be avoided and, with a view to providing cross-border services, it is necessary to uphold quality standards and to avoid a race to the bottom in terms of prices. Emerging digital platforms should develop – not hamper – professional services.

Blaženka Mičević from the Council of European Geodetic Surveyors (CLGE) and AGRODET Ltd. presented the CLGE's *Women in Surveying* project, which addresses the question of how to encourage more women into STEM professions and how to make them successful in their careers. Ms Mičević



Blaženka Mičević © EESC

explained: "The vision of the project is to change the surveying sector and the perspective of women in surveying through education, entrepreneurship and empowerment of women."

Discussions also addressed challenges such as the lack of young professionals and education. **Thomas Kearns** from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) highlighted the need for continuous professional development (CPD): "Investment in CPD is fundamental, however, it is critical that this investment is linked to policy and is evaluated in terms of outcomes and value for money."

Sabrina Diamanti, president of the Italian Council of the National Order of Agronomists and Forestry Doctors, stressed the idea of a deep connection between training, ethics and personal skills, and stated that the role of professionals in the field of sustainable development must be promoted in public administrations, universities and training centres. Networking is essential when it comes to sustainability.

The two spokespeople for the EESC Liberal Professions Category

believed that society's aim of making communities more resilient, equitable, productive, sustainable and socially just would depend in many areas on high-quality liberal professional work. This view was supported by several participants.

Category co-spokesperson **Rudolf Kolbe** said: "Due to the crucial role of liberal professions in overcoming societal challenges, we should take up the discussion about a new role for liberal professions' chambers in national and European policy-making and fully implementing them as social partners at national and European level. We also have to discuss new and innovative approaches to defining public interest as regards the EU legal framework."

Category co-spokesperson **Marina Elvira Calderone** concluded the conference by highlighting the role of legislation, education, training and interdisciplinary cooperation in tackling current challenges for the professions. She argued: "States need to support all processes for setting up professions, with legislation taking on board the specific aspects of the professions which will influence the social and economic development of our countries." Legislators need to adapt the regulatory framework to new tools and needs.

MEMBERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Mum is a professional footballer



Ody Neisingh © Ruud Pos

Ody NEISINGH (NL)
Coordinator of Public Affairs, WOMEN Inc. Former senior policy advisor and advocate for Rutgers (sexual and reproductive health and rights) Former programme manager, Humanist Union

On 29 June, long-time lobbyist for gender equality **Ody Neisingh**, together with her co-author Marieke Visser, launched her **second children's book in Dutch**, entitled [Mama is profvoetballer](#)¹ ("Mum is a professional footballer").

Following the success of her first children's book, entitled [Mama is minister-president](#)² ("Mum is the

prime minister"), she has launched a series of children's books that have a female role model in the leading role and break stereotypes.

"Only 13% of mothers in children's books have paid jobs, which is

1. Rose stories, Mama is profvoetballer, <https://rogestories.nl/boeken/mama-is-profvoetballer/>
2. Rose stories, Mama is minister president, <https://rogestories.nl/boeken/mama-is-minister-president/>

almost six times less than in reality,” Ms Neisingh said. “We **play with stereotypes** in the books: for example, the father of 11-year-old Naomi is a caring man who runs the household, while her mother can focus on her elite sport.” But the book launch also raises another important issue: “By publishing the book, we also want to draw attention to the **lack of focus on women’s football**. We’ve all heard the stories of the lack of girls’ changing rooms at local football clubs and of girls’ training sessions taking place either very early or very late, ‘when there is space’. Girls who play football are not taken as seriously as boys. This can quickly lead to gender roles becoming engrained, and stereotypes are persistent. This book can help to

achieve equality to ensure that women who play football are paid the same as men, for example.” At the moment, the book is available in Dutch only.

Ms Neisingh is also currently president of the study group for the EESC exploratory opinion on [Gender equality](#)¹ requested by the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU. The opinion will be presented and put to the vote at the July 2022 plenary session. In addition, Ody Neisingh is co-rapporteur for an opinion on [Combatting violence against women](#)² that will be presented and voted on in July 2022 and rapporteur for the opinion [Gender lens investing as a way to improve gender equality in the EU](#)³. The latter will be presented to the EESC plenary in December 2022.



© Berne; Illustration by Nadia Meezen

Krzysztof Balon on European measures vis-à-vis the Russian aggression against Ukraine



Krzysztof Balon © Urząd Marszałkowski Województwa Lubelskiego

Krzysztof Stanisław BALON (PL)

Secretary, Programming Committee of the Working Community of Associations of Social Organisations

(WRZOS)

On 24 May 2022, an **expert debate** on “Non-governmental organisations in solidarity with Ukraine – a national and a European dimension”, **initiated by Krzysztof Balon**, Member of the Civil Society Organisations’ Group, took place in Lublin, 75 km from the Ukrainian border. The event was organised by the Association Forum of the Non-Governmental Organisations of the Lubelskie Voivodeship (FLOP) and the regional Public Benefit Council.

The debate focused on the **help provided** by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) **to Ukrainian war refugees** and on **building partnerships** between NGOs from

the European Union to contribute to Ukraine’s integration into the European Union. Among the 30 participants were representatives of civil society organisations from the Lubelskie Voivodeship and representatives of the City of Lublin, the Euroregion Bug and a Ukrainian NGO.

Mr Balon presented the **European political measures and financial support** vis-à-vis the Russian aggression against Ukraine, as well as the EESC’s position – especially the Ukraine resolution and other EESC activities in this field. Mr Balon explained that, in a [recent opinion on cohesion policy](#)⁴, for which he was the rapporteur, the EESC proposes the swift establishment of a **separate EU fund** for the reconstruction and development of Ukraine, similar to the Commission’s proposal for the Strategic Reconstruction Plan ‘Rebuild-Ukraine’⁵. He said: “Support for Ukrainian civil society should be of a financial nature but should also prepare Ukrainian civil society organisations for EU membership and give them the opportunity to

jointly shape all the **reconstruction** measures. The EESC advocates granting **Ukraine EU membership** as soon as possible.”

In the following debate, experiences in helping refugees and supporting Ukrainian NGOs were exchanged. One of the main **conclusions** was that broad involvement of civil society organisations in programming and implementing ‘Rebuild-Ukraine’ will improve its social dimension, particularly regarding the situation of people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups as well as the green transition.



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1. EESC opinion SOC/731, <https://europa.eu/ITDM9xG>
2. EESC opinion SOC/726, <https://europa.eu/!9FYVmT>
3. EESC opinion SOC/723, <https://europa.eu/lqKDHX8>
4. EESC opinion ECO/579, <https://europa.eu/lgHbd3X>
5. European Commission, PR, <https://europa.eu/twprTGy>

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LAST PLENARY SESSION

European Council President Charles Michel calls for the creation of European Geopolitical Community at the EESC Plenary Session

In May, President of the European Council **Charles Michel** participated in the EESC plenary debate on “European responses to strengthen our economies and societies against the background of the current geopolitical context”.

Opening the debate, EESC president **Christa Schweng** referred to the devastating consequences of the ongoing war for the Ukrainian people and the soaring food and energy prices, underlining the importance of achieving the green and energy transition with the involvement of organised civil society. She stressed: “United we must face the consequences of the war in Ukraine and the geopolitical challenges ahead. It is high time to explore using frozen Russian assets in the post-war reconstruction”.



Charles Michel © EESC

Charles Michel proposed a **new approach to enlargement negotiations**. According to Mr Michel, “a solution would lie in a gradual and progressive integration during the accession process”. When a country meets the necessary standards in a given sector or reaches certain

benchmarks it would benefit from European programs and funding.

Mr Michel also talked about the creation of a **European Geopolitical Community**, whose aim would be “to forge convergence and deepen operational cooperation to address common challenges: peace, stability and security on our continent”.

Several Members of the Civil Society Organisations’ Group took the floor in the ensuing debate.



Séamus Boland © EESC

Séamus Boland, president of the group, underlined that the EU needed emergency measures to alleviate the high prices faced by consumers and to reduce energy dependency, while massively increasing the tariffs on Russian energy and remaining united around European values.

Arnaud Schwartz said that the **European Green Deal**¹ was Europe’s roadmap for peace and sustainability. He proposed accelerating and strengthening its implementation in order to increase solidarity with the most vulnerable inside and outside the EU.

João Nabais saw an opportunity



João Nabais © EESC

in the globalisation of the Russian economy to bring peace, meaning that firm sanctions needed to be imposed. He reminded that sanctions would also have a negative effect on those who impose them and highlighted in this context the need for **solidarity** between Member States that were more and less dependent on Russian energy supplies.

To achieve a strong and resilient European society, **Christian Moos** invited the EU Council to endorse the proposals of the **Conference on the Future of Europe**². In addition, he stressed: “Ukraine can only defend its freedom if the Council does not bargain with but defends our **fundamental rights and values**.”

Krzysztof Stanislaw Balon, who was rapporteur for the **EESC opinion on the 8th Cohesion Report**³, pointed out that cohesion policy should respond to the geopolitical situation, especially in fostering the role of the social economy, by deepening the partnership principle and preparing Ukraine for EU membership.

A video recording of the plenary debate is available at: <https://fb.watch/dp-phGOSk7/>.

Recovery will succeed only if European civil society is systematically involved

During its last plenary session, the EESC held a debate on “Recovery and Resilience” with **Valdis Dombrovskis**, executive vice president of the

European Commission for an economy that works for people. The debate was linked to the adoption of the **EESC resolution**⁴ “Involvement of Organised

1. European Commission, A European Green Deal, <https://europa.eu/!Tr74bn>

2. Conference on the Future of Europe, <https://futureu.europa.eu/>

3. EESC opinion ECO/579, <https://europa.eu/!gHBd3X>

4. EESC resolution, <https://europa.eu/!7VTCdK>

Civil Society in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans – How can we improve it?”, for which the Civil Society Organisations’ Group Member Luca Jahier was one of the rapporteurs.

EESC president **Christa Schweng** acknowledged that the **Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF¹)** is a step in the right direction for making Europe more resilient and autonomous. She nevertheless called for a **better involvement of civil society organisations (CSOs)** in the reforms set out in the National Resilience and Recovery Plans (NRRPs²) to improve “the quality, the transparency and the implementation of new policies”.

Valdis Dombrovskis underlined the need to maintain stability, strengthen resilience and lay the ground for a solid fiscal position in order to address any future shocks and to support the economy in coping with higher energy prices and other



Valdis Dombrovskis © EESC

consequences of the war. “We plan to give the EU a more reliable, secure and sustainable **energy supply**, cutting our dependence on Russian fossil fuel imports. To get there, we depend on the support of social partners and civil society as a key link between Europe’s people and its institutions”, Mr Dombrovskis stated.

Presenting the EESC resolution, **Mr Jahier** reported on the **findings of the consultations** carried out by the EESC between October 2021 and April 2022 across all Member States: “We have



Valdis Dombrovskis © EESC



Luca Jahier © EESC

seen improving CSO involvement in the implementation and monitoring of national resilience and recovery plans, with good practices in some countries. **More has to be done** for transparency, accountability and increased success in investments and reforms.”

In the debate following the presentation of the resolution, various other Members of the Civil Society Organisations’ Group took the floor.

President **Séamus Boland** also stressed the importance of involving CSOs from the planning stage of the NRRPs. “Europe’s recovery and resilience must go hand in hand with more effective civil society participation, greater youth involvement and a revision of priorities, so as to better take into account the new geopolitical realities in which the EU finds itself. There is a major danger that by ignoring poverty and the consequences of energy hikes, we will effectively ignore large portions of EU citizens and therefore endanger the Union”, he warned.



Sif Holst © EESC

Sif Holst stressed the role of civil society in creating a resilient and inclusive society. “An important element is to secure a seat at the table for groups such as persons with disabilities”, she said.

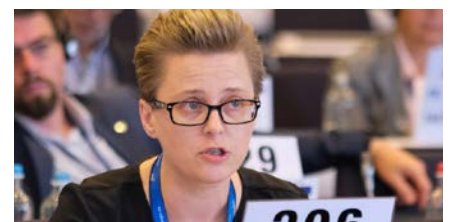
Elena Calistru emphasised the importance of making the RRF as effective, inclusive and open as

possible, and ensuring that such an instrument remains available in the future. However, she reiterated that this can only be done by involving CSOs in the co-creation and implementation of the Plans.



Elena Calistru © EESC

In the same line, **Justyna Kalina Ochędzan** stated that the digital and green transition could only be successful if “we give the opportunity to implement it in everyone’s house, lives and minds”. Moreover, Ms Ochędzan believed that adequate financial support for CSOs needed to be ensured, given their important role in finding solutions in crisis situations.



Justyna Kalina Ochędzan © EESC

A video recording of the plenary debate is available at: <https://fb.watch/dp-qdO-WnR/>

1. European Commission, Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), <https://europa.eu/!jt78Jr>
2. European Commission, National Resilience and Recovery Plans (NRRPs), <https://europa.eu/!wYRggt>

OVERVIEW OF RECENT WORK

The last EESC plenary session took place on 18 and 19 May. The EESC plenary adopted 25 opinions and 1 resolution, 10 of which were drafted by Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group. A list of the recent work can be found below.

Cristian PÎRVULESCU (RO), rapporteur, [SOC/712](#)¹ Initiative to extend the list of EU crimes to all forms of hate crime and hate speech

Giuseppe GUERINI (IT), rapporteur, [INT/972](#)² Social economy action plan

Giuseppe GUERINI (IT), rapporteur, [INT/981](#)³ State aid / health and social services

Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL), rapporteur, [SOC/696](#)⁴, The role of Civil Society Organisations as guardians of the common good in the post-pandemic recovery and reconstruction of EU societies and economies

Krzysztof Stanislaw BALON (PL), rapporteur, [ECO/579](#)⁵ 8th Cohesion Report

Krzysztof Stanislaw BALON (PL), rapporteur, [SOC/710](#)⁶ Security Union package/Schengen package

Luca JAHIER (IT), rapporteur, [EESC resolution](#)⁷ "Involvement of Organised Civil Society in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans – How can we improve it?"

Małgorzata Anna BOGUSZ (PL), co-rapporteur, [SOC/716](#)⁸ European Union Drugs Agency

Maurizio MENSI (IT), rapporteur, [SOC/711](#)⁹ Digitalisation of cross-border judicial cooperation

Simo TIAINEN (FI), rapporteur, [TEN/778](#)¹⁰ REPowerEU: Joint European Action for more affordable, secure and sustainable energy

The complete texts of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee's [website](#)¹¹.

The **next EESC plenary session** will take place on 13 and 14 July 2022. For more information on the upcoming plenary session please visit our [website](#)¹².

A list including **all new work appointments** of Civil Society Organisations' Group Members is available on the Committee's [website](#)¹³.

1. EESC opinion SOC/712, <https://europa.eu/!94T97K>
2. EESC opinion INT/972, <https://europa.eu/!NJdcdV>
3. EESC opinion INT/981, <https://europa.eu/!Gk9pjh>
4. EESC opinion SOC/696, <https://europa.eu/!HvKkmH>
5. EESC opinion ECO/579, <https://europa.eu/!gHBd3X>
6. EESC opinion SOC/710, <https://europa.eu/!TMDqnY>
7. EESC resolution, <https://europa.eu/!7VTCdK>
8. EESC opinion SOC/716, <https://europa.eu/!WdGcDW>
9. EESC opinion SOC/711, <https://europa.eu/!wrfXht>
10. EESC opinion TEN/778, <https://europa.eu/!BGDKwm>
11. EESC opinions, <https://europa.eu/!wF86wY>
12. EESC plenary sessions, <https://europa.eu/!Dg84qG>
13. EESC, New work appointments – May 2022, <https://europa.eu/!9mFwON>

WHAT IS EESC OPINION NAT/839 ALL ABOUT?

An interview with the rapporteur for the [EESC opinion NAT/839](#)¹⁴ on an "EU Long-term vision for rural areas"

Lidija Pavić-Rogošić (HR)

Director, Croatian civil society organisation "Sustainable Community Development" (ODRAZ)



Lidija Pavić-Rogošić © EESC

What are the three main findings of this opinion?

The EESC broadly welcomes the [Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas](#)¹⁵ that needs to be inclusive, widely understood, inspiring and deliverable. Proposals for an action plan, including a Rural Pact for engaging actors at EU, national, regional and local levels to support the vision are also welcomed, as are

those for the establishment of a Rural Observatory and a rural proofing mechanism.

We noted that it is unclear what the implications of the design and content of the Commission's new Common Agricultural Policy ([CAP](#)¹⁶) and CAP strategic plans for each Member State would be for the long-term vision. The Commission should ensure consistency and added value between

the CAP and other policies.

We also stressed that a lot would depend on the acceptance of all Member States, regions and local communities

14. EESC opinion NAT/839, <https://europa.eu/!4XkXfW>

15. European Commission, A long-term vision for the EU's rural areas, <https://europa.eu/!TH39QH>

16. European Commission, Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), <https://europa.eu/!Hm73rt>

How could these issues be addressed? What are your three main recommendations?

The EESC believes in a more integrated, but equitable, place-based approach to tackling the imbalances in the economic and social wellbeing of urban and rural citizens, and achieving [SDGs](#)¹⁷. We stressed that more ongoing engagement with and empowerment for local rural/urban participation and civil society is needed for the vision to

be fully understood and inclusive.

More Commission departments should demonstrate their holistic commitment to the vision. The Council, each Council Presidency, European Parliament, the Committee of Regions and the EESC itself all have roles to play, as do civil society

organisations and networks, in order to deliver on this vision. Otherwise, inconsistent delivery could lead to further imbalances.

For us, the obvious key to the delivery of the vision, is a fully funded action plan with clear targets and dates for transparent measurement.

After the opinion was adopted, what did you do to promote the opinion and make civil society's voice heard? What are the next steps of your work?

Together with colleagues, I actively promote our opinion through various informative channels and through collaboration with representatives of European networks dealing with rural development.

The EESC is participating in the preparation of a high-level [Rural Pact conference](#)¹⁸ in June 2022, and has contributed to the co-design of the Rural Pact to ensure that local voices are heard and that the long-

term vision can be successfully implemented. The Committee will continue to play a strong role in supporting the animation of the Rural Pact, and will also contribute to the work of the European Network for Rural Development's¹⁹ (ENRD) new Thematic Group on Rural Proofing.

I hope that I will be able to participate in the next European Rural Forum and present our opinion. I also plan to organise an outreach activity in Croatia

in October 2022 to inform Croatian rural stakeholders on the vision and Rural Pact, with the involvement of EESC and [ERCA](#)²⁰ Members.

17. United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), <https://sdgs.un.org/fr/goals>

18. European Commission, Rural Pact conference, <https://europa.eu/!8myRNv>

19. European Network for Rural Development, <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/>

20. European Rural Community Alliance, <http://www.ruralcommunities.eu/>

UPCOMING EVENTS

17/06/2022 – Meeting of the EESC's Associational Life Category

20/06/2022 – Conference of the EESC's Consumers and Environment Category

05/07/2022 – Meeting of the EESC's Social Economy Category

07/07/2022 – Extraordinary meeting of the Civil Society Organisations' Group in Gdańsk, Poland



For more information, please visit our website: <https://europa.eu/!RWtHxk>



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