



# Europe III

The voice of Group III  
Various Interests  
April 2015

## ECONOMIC GROWTH AND SOCIAL PROGRESS IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS



### 'Making Democracy Work at the Local Level: Ensuring Sustainable Growth and Progress in Latvia' Riga, 25 March 2015

"Whether we are talking about combatting depopulation in rural areas, creating employment through social enterprises or focusing on community-led development, the message is the same. We need to build up local capacities, mobilise the grassroots and civil society organisations, propose innovative and integrated approaches and build up alliances and networks. Above all, we must empower local organisations and give them ownership of the process". With these words the Various Interests Group launched its conference in Riga on 25 March, a large-scale event entitled 'Economic Growth and Social Progress in Rural and Urban Areas'. In the country which was famous in the 12th Century as a trading crossroad, the 'Route from the Vikings to the Greeks', or from Scandinavia to Byzantium, our Group had the opportunity to engage directly with local civil society organisations.



(On the left) Group III member and Member of the Latvian Parliament, Armands KRAUZE (LV) and Luca Jahier, chairing the opening session

The date that we chose for our conference coincided with two important events. Firstly, the Latvian commemoration of the mass deportation of its citizens by the Soviets in 1949. Secondly, the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, which established the European Economic Community. It is within this context of both national and

European historical events that we sought to address key issues in Latvia. Firstly, the challenges facing the country, notably in the aftermath of the economic crisis. Secondly, we explored novel instruments to enhance the prosperity of the country and to encourage social cohesion, for example, the potential of the social economy and of social enterprises. Finally, we examined how to strengthen the role of civil society and how to improve dialogue with the European Institutions. These subjects go to the heart of the work of the Various Interests Group over the last five years and also reflect the cumulative richness of expertise and knowledge within our Group.



Roman HAKEN (CZ)  
Member of the  
Various Interests Group

"In Riga, we saw that CLLD – Community Led Local Development, being something new in regional policy, is not well enough known at local level, at national level in some Member States and in the platforms that could underpin the approach. To help implementation of the new CLLD instrument in European policies, a detailed evaluation and analysis needs to be drafted of how a particular Member State has approached it, including recommendations for effective implementation. This will also give rise to a study with examples of best practice as well as accounts of failures to be avoided in future. The EESC is keen to take part in drafting such a study together with the relevant departments of the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council and the Committee of the Regions. This study could serve as a launch-pad to set up CLLD inter-groups as inter-institutional platforms."

As the conference addressed a broad scope of subjects and actors, I found that what really links these topics together, is the concept of participatory democracy and active citizenship. It is the idea that civil

society and citizens need to take ownership of the process, they need to be engaged and active throughout. Why is this the case? Firstly, as the Treaty on the EU makes institutional provisions for dialogue with civil society and citizens, in Article 11 of the Treaty. So there is a legal obligation for the EU to consult civil society and citizens. But there is also a very pressing reason which touches on the lives of all of us, namely: the economic crisis.



Gunta ANČA (LV)  
Member of the  
Various Interests Group

"The conference sought answers to the question of how to live in Latvia after a severe economic and social crisis. Although often - in addition to present positive developments, we talked also about the less successful cases, it was a chance to see the reality of different situations in Latvia. We will never be able to make our country better if we do not understand the specific things that should be changed. Moreover, it would be difficult to improve our situation if we do not learn from already existing European experiences and are not going to count on European solidarity."

Europe today has almost 24 million unemployed people, with sky-rocket rates of youth unemployment, the highest in the developed world. In November of last year, the President of the European Commission, Mr Juncker, referred to these 24 million unemployed as the '29th State of the EU'. He continued by saying that the principal objective of the EC should be to reverse this reality.

Unfortunately, in most of Europe, the economic crisis of 2008 has been the worse even than that of the Great Depression of 1929. It has resulted in a serious identity crisis for Europe and the revival of prejudices that we thought had been overcome.

Today's Europe is one of increasing divisions between its people, between North and South, with the rise of populist, anti-European, anti-Islamic and anti-Semitic movements. It is a Europe whose citizens do not trust the institutions. The Europe of today is also one which in my opinion has lost its sense of direction. Let us hope that the new Commission of President Juncker will be able to redeem the situation. But today, we have a Europe which is 'reacting' instead of being 'proactive', a Europe which is 'facing' or looking at its problems but not really grappling them. In the 1950s European integration was driven by a 'dream' of peace and reconciliation.



Ariane RODERT (SE)  
Vice-President of the  
Various Interests Group

"The Riga meeting successfully brought together civil society stakeholders to share challenges and opportunities facing Latvia. This was clearly demonstrated during the panel on social economy, which showed that initiatives and solutions are emerging. But to fully capture these and to grow this sector, policy makers must create a tailored eco-system for social economy which also aims to support and preserve its models. It also struck me that despite different models of social economy across member states the sector faces similar challenges; recognition of its models and concepts, access to suitable finance and further discussion on better access to public procurement."

Again in the 1990s it was driven by the aspirations of a social Europe, of EMU, of reunification after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Iron Curtain... We were always moving 'forward'. Today, I fear that Europe is defining itself and advancing only in reaction to external factors, rather than driving its own agenda. For example,

# ED

Editorial



Luca JAHIER (IT)  
President of the Various  
Interests Group

<sup>1</sup> Inaugural speech of Mr Luca Jahier, President of the Various Interest Groups of the EESC, Riga, 25 March 2015

the European Energy Union is in my view largely a reaction to the dangers of energy security and climate change. Today, we are too much 'defenders' rather than 'openers', too much 'stayers' rather than 'movers'.



**Andris GOBIŅŠ (LV)**  
Member of the  
Various Interests Group

"Thanks a lot to the Group III leadership and members to making this event in Riga a success. The panel of Communication as a tool for change clearly showed the needs and possible synergies for civil society linking national and EU level work and experience. Can we afford to focus only on some and narrow issues –no as a slight mistake e.g. in energy sector make take needed investment out of social or education spheres. I think, that the conference was very good in showing these links and, partly following up also on the big NGO Forum on Participation, taking part in Riga 2-3 March with a great support of the EESC Liaison group and others.

My utmost thanks for the Group III event goes to Gunta, who took responsibility for most things in relation with the Conference! And of course to Luca, Pavel, Armands and the Group III Secretariat."

It is precisely for these reasons that we, civil society, need to invest not only in our future prosperity, but also in social cohesion and in participatory democracy. It is imperative that we rethink how to revive the sense of belonging and identity, how to rebuild trust and that we rediscover the solidarity

that defined the European project. These are not only my personal beliefs, but they are also enshrined in the EU Treaties and reiterated by our political leaders. Not only does Article 3 of the Treaty on the European Union state that the EU should balance economic efficiency with equity, social and territorial cohesion.



**Ask ABILGAARD LØVBJERG (DK)**  
Member of the  
Various Interests Group

"We, as disability community, need to get used to the fact that many issues of relevance for persons with disabilities are regulated at EU level, but not necessarily the traditional issues within disability policy, such as social protection, access to health systems and inclusive education. On the other hand, EU policy-makers clearly need to recognise and act on the fact that EU regulation has an impact on the lives of persons with disabilities, in particular in the areas of access to the digital society, access to mainstream goods and services, e.g. domestic appliances and on line supermarkets, and protection against discrimination. The leaders of Latvian disability organisations have influence of the positions of the European disability movement on equal terms with other members of the disability community."

But in addition, the conclusions of the meeting of the Council in June 2014 stipulated that the EU is 'A Union that empowers and protects all citizens'. The question is how to move from theory to action and results?



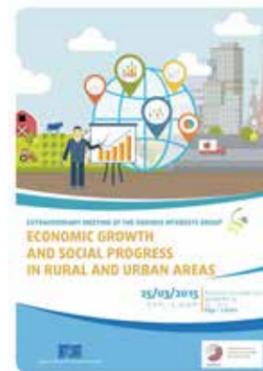
**Richard ADAMS (UK)**  
Member of the  
Various Interests Group

"The meeting in Riga will have inspired all those who attended by conveying a powerful sense of commitment by Latvian civil society groups to playing a full part in the life of the country. 'Making it possible' sums up the attitude – whether for groups enlarging the contribution made by those with disabilities – new employment opportunities for older citizens or holding the government to account and encouraging greater public engagement."

I would like to end this Editorial by stating that 'human and social progress', which is the ultimate aim of any political endeavour, is the responsibility of all of us. It is the responsibility of every civil society organisation and every citizen, not only politicians and institutions. I firmly believe in a Europe which both empowers and protects its citizens and local communities. A Europe which respects the principle of subsidiarity and which finds solutions for better social outcomes! Indeed, during our conference in Riga, three words struck me the most: 'Inspiring', 'Grassroots' and 'Demand-driven'. Inspiring, because of the energy, dedication and enthusiasm of all the local actors and initiatives. 'Grassroots', as it is at the community level that we can find sustainable and profitable solutions where citizens are the main actors. 'Demand-driven', as we have heard of fast

and tailored solutions for economic growth and social cohesion in Latvia. However, to bring all of the above to fruit, we need effective participation, social innovation, ambition and creativity. As was mentioned at the conference by Mr Andris Piebalgs, former EU Commissioner and Advisor to the Latvian President, "solidarity, freedom, tolerance and democracy" are the values of the EU which continue to drive the European project. However, it is imperative that Europe captures the essence of what citizens care about and to take action on at affects their daily lives. Today, we need a Europe which respects the principle of subsidiarity and which finds solutions for better social outcomes!

**Let us jointly strive for a new European 'dream'. Let us dream together!**



The programme and speeches and presentations can be read here: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-economic-growth-social-progress>



A Keynote address was given by Andris Piebalgs Former EU Commissioner and Advisor to the President of Latvia



Group III Members visiting the Latvian Parliament



Group III Members visit to Jūrmala

#### Quote of the month...



"Ever tried...ever failed. No matter. Try again...fail again...fail better."

**Samuel Beckett (1906 -1989)**

Irish avant-garde novelist, playwright, theatre director and poet  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel\\_Beckett](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Beckett)

## Highlights of the March 2015 EESC Plenary Session

### Group III members co-ordinating the work on new opinions

Mr Eric PIGAL (FR) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "Taxation – Cross-border rulings" - ECO/381.

Mr Roberto CONFALONIERI (IT) is the President of the study group for the opinion on: "EU Strategy for the Alpine Region" - ECO/3821.

Mr Cristian PÎRVULESCU (RO) is the President of the study group for the own-initiative opinion on: "Engaged universities in shaping" - SOC/542.

Mr Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER (ES) is the President of the study group for the exploratory opinion on: "Women and Transport" - TEN/573.

Mr Cristian PÎRVULESCU (RO) is the Co-Rapporteur for the opinion on: "Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy" - REX/447.

Mrs Grace ATTARD (MT) is the Rapporteur for the Information Report on: "Situation of Women in the Euro-Mediterranean Region" – REX/448.



The full listing of membership of the study groups for the new work may be consulted here: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.group-3-new-study-groups>

## Group III Members in the Spotlight playing a key role

### BOOSTING INNOVATION FOR A BETTER SOCIAL OUTCOME AT THE GATHERING IN SCOTLAND

**the gathering 2015**  
25 & 26 February · SECC, Glasgow

On February 25 Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) hosted The Gathering in Glasgow. The Gathering is an annual event organised by SCVO for people working in the third sector to network to showcase their work

and learn from each other. The Gathering consisted of over 100 exhibitors and a parallel programme of over 60 workshops, seminars and training sessions.

The EESC was invited to host a seminar based on the Milan Declaration, sharing the EESC work in the area of social innovation. Group III President, **Luca Jahier** and Vice-President, **Ariane Rodert**, presented the backdrop for and the key recommendations in the Milan Declaration followed by a dialogue with the participants. It was clear from the debate that the Scottish reality mirrors other European countries and that these complex societal challenges call for new and innovative solutions. The Third Sector in Scotland is recognised as being highly socially innovative and the Scottish participants and the exhibitors shared examples. The debate also discussed the link to the European level and review of Europe 2020.

This seminar was a pre-cursor to a full-day conference SCVO and EESC will deliver in Scotland in May 2015 when a large Group III delegation will meet policy makers and civil society organisations in Edinburgh.

More information:

<http://gatherscotland.org.uk/events/boosting-innovation-for-a-better-social-outcome/>



On 2 and 3 March Civil Society was mobilised to assist to the NGO-Forum in Riga under Latvian Presidency. For that the CSO members of the Liaison Group had constituted a working group which – together with Andris Gobiņš – prepared a “Roadmap for the implementation of the Articles 11 (1) and 11 (2) of the Treaty of the European Union. The aim of the work is, based on the opinion presented by Luca Jahier 3 years ago, to re-launch the process of setting

a frame and standards for civil dialogue on European issues at European, national, regional and local level. The hope is that the Latvian Presidency would include elements of the roadmap in the Council conclusions at the end of their term and inspire the EU and the new Commission in particular on this issue. Progress has been made, but there is still confusion between dialogue, communication and consultation. At least Commission VP Dombrovskis together with EESC President Malosse and the Latvian Prime Minister opened the Forum and expressed their commitment to Civil Dialogue.

Following the achievement of the common roadmap, the next phase will be on implementation and the next step shall be the Civil Society Day at EESC in June 2015 before the end of the Latvian Presidency. After having been mobilised, it is now time to remain attentive and to underline that if the challenge of the new Commission is to improve legislation, civil dialogue is not the small item, it is key improve policy making by ex-ante and ex-post Impact assessment by and together with civil society and its representatives.

The further information and the full programme can be read here: <http://europeanmovement.eu/event/ngo-forum-riga-2015/>

The Roadmap can be found here: [http://www.sif.gov.lv/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=9524:Riga-notiks-NVO-Forums-%E2%80%93-RIGA-2015&catid=14:Jaunumi&Itemid=186&lang=en](http://www.sif.gov.lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9524:Riga-notiks-NVO-Forums-%E2%80%93-RIGA-2015&catid=14:Jaunumi&Itemid=186&lang=en)



Dilyana SLAVOVA (BG)  
President of the NAT Section  
Member of the Bureau of the Various Interests Group

### FEEDING THE PLANET, ENERGY FOR LIFE

“Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life” is the core theme of Expo Milano 2015. This common thread runs through all the events organized both within and outside the official Exhibition Site. Over this six-month period (starting on 1 May 2015), Milan will become a global showcase where more than 140 participating countries will show the best of their technology that offers a concrete answer to a vital need: being able to guarantee healthy, safe and sufficient food for everyone, while respecting the Planet and its equilibrium. In addition to the exhibitor nations, the Expo also involves international organizations, and expects to welcome over 20 million visitors to its 1.1 million square meters of exhibition area. A platform for the exchange of ideas and shared solutions on the theme of food, stimulating each country’s creativity and promoting innovation for a sustainable future, Expo Milano 2015 will talk about mainly on the problems of nutrition and the resources of our planet. The idea is to open up a dialogue between international players, and to exchange views on these major challenges which impact everyone.

Expo Milano 2015 will provide an opportunity to reflect upon, and seek solutions to, the contradictions of our world. On the one hand, there are still the hungry (approximately 870 million people were undernourished in the period 2010-2012) and, on the other, there are those who die from ailments linked to poor nutrition or too much food (approximately 2.8 million deaths from diseases related to obesity or to being overweight in the same period). In addition, about 1.3 billion tons of foods are wasted every year. For these reasons, we need to make conscious political choices, develop sustainable lifestyles, and use the best technology to create a balance between the availability and the consumption of resources.

Reflection on the Expo theme becomes a time of sharing and celebration, involving conferences, events and performances, enhanced by the presence of the mascot “Foody” and the cheery characters who accompany him. Every aspect and every moment of, as well as every participant at, Expo Milano 2015 define and move forward the chosen theme: Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life.

The EESC Section for Agriculture, Rural Areas and Environment is going to have its Section Meeting on 4 June 2015 in the EXPO and all members of the NAT Section are going to visit the exhibition on 5 June 2015. The NAT Section plans to present its Food Waste Project and to send a number of members to participate in the events during the EXPO.

Join us in Milan. Learn more and have fun!



Reine Claude MADER (FR)  
Member of the Bureau of the Various Interests Group  
Spokesperson for the Consumers & Environment Category at the EESC

### NEW TRENDS IN CONSUMPTION

As part of the activities organised for European Consumer Day, on 16 March 2016, some 200 people gathered at the invitation of the EESC to discuss the theme of collaborative consumption. It was noted that this concept is being reproduced in different areas, is growing in scope and is becoming increasingly professional. While goods and services continue to be exchanged free of charge between individuals in a user-friendly manner that raises no particular issues, the system’s economic governance, based on the use of call centres, does raise issues that need to be addressed. Thus, in the course of the day, on the basis of speakers’ contributions, a comprehensive inventory was drawn up of services (such as car sharing, private home rentals, etc.), mostly using platforms that are now paying (Airbnb has a turnover of USD 10 billion...). It became clear from the discussion that this shift away from the sharing economy needs rules, as it cannot remain in a position of legal uncertainty that simply prevents certain traders from dabbling in the grey zone.

More information on the event can be found here: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-consumer-day-2015>

## Overview of our Members' Work in the EESC

At its plenary session on 18-19 March 2015 the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted the following opinions for which Group III members were Rapporteurs or Co-Rapporteurs.



**Michael SMYTH (UK) – ECO/374** "EU strategy and action plan for customs risk management: tackling risks, strengthening supply chain security and facilitating trade" (EESC opinion 7287/2014)

The EESC welcomes the Investment Plan for Europe and appreciates the change of tone away from austerity and fiscal consolidation. The Commission now acknowledges that there is a lack of investment and of aggregate demand and that the financial sector is still not able to play a full role in boosting growth.

The Investment Plan is a step in the right direction but it does face a number of serious questions about its size relative to Europe's huge investment needs, about the high degree of leverage expected, about the potential flow of suitable investment projects and about the Plan's timescale.

There is uncertainty about whether a pipeline of projects can be developed that offer returns that attract institutional investors. The EESC believes that, across many project classes, public investment gives better value for money for present and future taxpayers. There is concern, therefore, that in its desire to crowd in private investment the Plan may result in suboptimal outcomes.

The Plan proposes that contributions to the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) from Member States will not be included in budget deficit calculations and this is to be welcomed. This does however beg the question as to why ongoing strategic public infrastructure expenditures are not treated in the same way.

The EESC believes that it is time to recognise that Europe needs a sustained public investment programme in order to regain growth, jobs and prosperity. Strategic public investment such as that envisaged in the Plan which underpins present and future economic development should be incentivised by a more benign European fiscal framework.



**PAVEL TRANTINA (CZ) – NAT/633** "Youth Employment Initiative – pre-financing" (EESC opinion 1246/2015)

In this opinion, the EESC:

- welcomes the efforts of the European Commission to substantially increase the initial pre-financing for the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI);
- agrees with the Commission about the need to adjust the Parliament and Council regulation on the European Social Fund in line with the proposal that was put forward;

- is convinced that this initiative should encourage Member States to prioritise the fight against youth unemployment in their national budgets. Bureaucratic procedures should neither prevent the efficient delivery of the 6 billion euros allocated to the Youth Employment initiative, nor slow down any other initiatives aimed at efficiently combatting current youth unemployment;
- considers the YEI to be an opportunity to review the future of work in Member States – public employment services must become much more pro-active, better synergies between education and training and actors of the labour market must be created, young people must be adequately and promptly informed about their rights and opportunities;
- strongly encourages the involvement of organised civil society in the design and monitoring of the national YEI programmes on a partnership basis. It is convinced that involving the social partners will ensure the consent of large parts of the population and thus social stability;
- calls on the European Commission to closely monitor the challenges to the implementation of the YEI and especially to the Youth Guarantee. The monitoring process should not only be based on quantitative analysis but also on more qualitative indicators.

NOTE: The complete texts of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee's website:  
<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.opinions-search>

## News from Group III

**Group III is pleased to welcome three new members, two of whom are from Ireland and the third from Italy.**



**John BRYAN** was the 13th President of the Irish Farmers' Association and began his four-year term on January 12th 2010. During his time as president he also served as a member of the Bord Bia Board of Directors, Chairman of the meat and livestock committee and as a Vice-President of COPA with responsibility for trade.

John Bryan served as Chairman of the IFA National Livestock Committee from 2004 to 2008. During that time he undertook two visits to Brazil to highlight the lack of standards in that country's beef production. The EU Commission subsequently imposed a ban on Brazilian beef. John also served as Chairman of IFA Kilkenny. John replaces Padraig Walshe, who has resigned from the Committee.



**Cillian LOHAN** has replaced our former member Siobhán Egan, who resigned from the Committee. He is an Environmental Scientist and the CEO of the Green Economy Foundation.

Originally, this NGO worked exclusively on forestry issues. Forest policy in Ireland was promoting unsustainable practices. An aggressive afforestation programme set a target of covering 17% of the country in trees by 2035. The policy for how this was to be achieved was set out in a government document called *Growing for the Future* (1996). The focus on planting large monocultures of non-native sitka spruce designed for clearfell has led to a range of environmental and social failing of the forest policy in Ireland. The role of his organisation, when founded, was to campaign for a robust, inclusive sustainable forestry programme. They campaign for mixed species broadleaf forests, cognisant of the need for a commercial return, while protecting biodiversity.

As the Green Economy Foundation, Cillian now leads an NGO that focuses on job creation through the environment. They are a leading organisation working on the sustainability of Ireland's ambitious growth plans for the agrifood sector. Cillian's expertise has been utilised to coordinate the NGO sectors input to the greening of the Irish economy, including specific areas like resource efficiency and green public procurement.



**Flora GOLINI** replaces our member Mr Rossitto, who sadly passed away some months ago. She was already a GR III Delegate in the CCMI and has a lot of experience in the Committee. She is a CIU Board member and is a representative of the Confederazione italiana di unione delle professioni intellettuali (Italian confederation of intellectual professions) (CIU). Ms Golini is the CIU representative on the technical committee of the national fund for lifelong learning for corporate employees, middle managers and managers (Fondazienda). She is also a Lawyer specialising in EU policies and procedures to obtain EU funding for training, high-tech, renewable energy and SMEs.

## Culture, Art and European Identity'

On Wednesday 18 March 2015, we welcomed a guest speaker at our group meeting. **Paul DUJARDIN** is Director of the Palais de Beaux Art, otherwise known as BOZAR, in Brussels, which under the stewardship of Mr Dujardin has developed into a world class cultural and artistic centre, welcoming more than 1 million visitors annually. In view of the exceptional contribution of Mr Dujardin to the Belgian cultural scene, the Federal government amended its legislation, enabling Mr Dujardin to continue in his role for a third consecutive term.



At our meeting on 18 March, the Director of Bozar was invited to speak on the topic 'Culture, Art and European Identity'. In his intervention, he highlighted that in Europe today, we need strategic images of Europe which go beyond the Euro and we need narratives on the continent's cultural diversity, which is one of its greatest assets. He stressed that the European cultural model is one of dialogue, respect, responsibility and inclusivity. Europeans can share the same 'space', without sharing the same ideas, but today in Europe we need an open debate on our common European values. Mr Dujardin ended his presentation by noting that Artists are Ambassadors for Europe, who can contribute to the local narrative and build bridges with politicians.

For the full text of the presentation of Mr Paul Dujardin, please see the website of the Various Interests Group at: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.group-3-news>

## JUST FOR A LAUGH

Remember when people had diaries and got mad when someone read them? Now they put everything online and get mad when people don't.



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