



*European Economic and Social Committee*

Brussels, 7 May 2010

## **PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

**28 AND 29 APRIL 2010**

### **SUMMARY OF OPINIONS ADOPTED**

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The plenary session took place on 28-29 April 2010. The Wednesday sitting was attended by **Mr Maroš Šefčovič**, vice-president of the European Commission, responsible for interinstitutional relations and administration, who presented the Commission's work programme, as well as by **Commissioner Dacian Cioloș**, responsible for agriculture and rural development, who spoke about the future of the common agricultural policy after 2013.

The following opinions were adopted at the session:

## **1. THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY**

- *The Community agricultural model: production quality and communication with consumers as factors of competitiveness*

**Rapporteur:** Mr Carlos Trías Pinto (Various interests – ES)

**Reference:** Exploratory opinion – CESE 649/2010

### **Key points:**

The EESC has on a number of previous occasions affirmed its commitment to sustainable development as a means of achieving environmental, economic and social development in the European Union. This commitment could strengthen the Community agricultural production model, revising the current concept of quality, which focuses on traditional qualitative aspects inherent in the product (flavour, appearance, size, etc.), to include other criteria relating to the production context, such as social, environmental, health, safety and animal welfare aspects.

This new quality framework is what will enable European products to stand out from those from other countries, as they already comply with many of the aspects mentioned due to the regulations imposed by the EU and the Member States, which are much stricter than in other producer countries. The problem lies in the fact that consumers are unaware of most of the aspects that are regulated, which means they do not take them into account when purchasing products.

To date, the main source of product information for consumers has been the label. Although labelling plays a key role in ensuring that information is transparent, there is an increasing number of voluntary or mandatory references that appear in this limited space, that could make the messages difficult to discern and understand.

Moreover, agricultural products have one important specific feature: their high rotation on shelves, due to the seasonality of products and the variability of the provider throughout the year or even the season.

On the basis of these factors, the EESC proposes conducting a study on the potential benefits of ICT to improve consumer information, particularly those benefits which could be useful during purchases, as it is usually on the shop floor that the consumer makes the decision to buy.

**Contact :** Mr Arturo Iñiguez  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 87 68 – email: [arturo.iniguez@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:arturo.iniguez@eesc.europa.eu))

• ***Strengthening the European agri-food model***

**Rapporteur:** Mr José María Espuny Moyano (Employers – ES)

**Co-rapporteur:** Mr Carlos Trías Pinto (Various Interests – ES)

**Reference:** Exploratory opinion – CESE 648/2010

**Key points:**

The European agri-food model falls within a framework of sustainability, taking into account its economic, environmental and social aspects. In recent years, particularly with the last reform of the CAP, far-reaching legislative provisions have been included in key areas such as:

- increased food safety and traceability;
- organisation of organic production, integrated production, more environmentally-friendly practices and the protection of the environment in general;
- application of various provisions relating to animal welfare, for all products;
- stepping up of social and worker protection measures.

However, to achieve this model, major efforts have been – and will continue to be – required from Community operators in terms of both agricultural production and processing. It does not seem logical, therefore, that its implementation should bring to light various shortcomings that could undermine its very existence.

The first of these shortcomings relates to food safety and the compliance of imports (foodstuffs, feed, animals and plants) with Community regulations. In Europe, experience has shown that it is necessary to maintain high levels of health protection both for consumers and for animals and plants, and this has resulted in new standards being established, with the entry into force of Regulation (EC) 178/2002 which lays down the principles of Community food law. However, the legislator focussed on setting down the obligations for Community operators, while obligations for imported products were left to one side. Today, according to data from the European Food Safety Authority, over one third of food warnings registered in the internal market originate outside the EU. The second problem facing EU producers and industry players is that this lack of balance in the Community market is undermining their ability to compete with imported products. The requirements imposed by the EU model significantly increase production costs.

**Contact:** Mr Arturo Iñiguez  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 87 68 – email: [arturo.iniguez@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:arturo.iniguez@eesc.europa.eu))

## 2. COMMON FISHERIES POLICY

### • *Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (Green Paper)*

**Rapporteur:** Ms María Candelas Sánchez Miguel (Employees – ES)

**References:** COM(2009) 163 final – CESE 645/2010

#### **Key points:**

The main conclusion set out in the Commission's Green Paper on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is that the current CFP has not solved the problems raised in the previous reform in 2002. The changes made have had no tangible effect on problematic issues such as excess fleet capacity, overfishing and reduced catch sizes. The Commission states that the aim of the new reform proposal is to rectify the "piecemeal, incremental" nature of previous reforms.

The EESC recommends that the measures which are adopted protect jobs and safeguard territorial cohesion, and that the strategic objectives maintain a balance between the economic, social and environmental pillars, guaranteeing and promoting responsible and sustainable behaviour throughout the fisheries chain.

The following points would need to be examined in greater depth in the future reform of the CFP:

- establishing a differentiated regime for small-scale fleets;
- including a section on social issues that harmonises fishermen's working conditions;
- improving market conditions and commercial practices;
- ensuring the CFP dovetails with marine environment policy, which also requires more and better research that is applicable to fisheries policy;
- fully integrating the CFP into the framework of international organisations (the UN, FAO).

**Contact:** Mr Arturo Iñiguez  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 87 68 – email: [arturo.iniguez@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:arturo.iniguez@eesc.europa.eu))

- ***Building a sustainable future for aquaculture***

**Rapporteur:** Mr José María Espuny Moyano (Employers – ES)

**References:** COM(2009) 162 final – CESE 646/2010

**Key points:**

The EESC is concerned that the competitiveness of aquaculture in the EU is being undermined by an unsuitable regulatory framework. European aquaculture must return to a pattern of sustainable growth that enables it to meet demand for nutritional, healthy, safe aquatic products.

With the growing occupation of coastal areas, it is important to step up the search for synergies between compatible activities, including environmental protection. The scarcity of areas devoted especially to aquaculture is one of the main reasons for the stagnation of the sector in the EU. The EESC recommends improving and streamlining processes for granting authorisations and licences for fish farms, and making procedures simpler and more flexible in order to reduce authorisation times.

The EESC expresses its concern that current point-of-sale labelling of aquatic products is insufficient and prevents consumers from making responsible, informed purchases. This is borne out, for example, in the difficulties that consumers face in recognising EU-farmed aquatic products as opposed to imports, and in distinguishing fresh aquatic products from defrosted ones.

The EESC is concerned by the fact that imported aquatic products do not meet the health standards imposed in the EU. The different criteria applied with regard to the traceability requirement are particularly worrying, as this is a key factor in food safety.

**Contact:** *Mr Arturo Iñiguez Yuste*  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 87 68 – email: [arturo.iniguez@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:arturo.iniguez@eesc.europa.eu))

### 3. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

- *GDP and beyond. Measuring progress in a changing world*

**Rapporteur:** Mr Josef Zbořil (Employers – CZ)

**References:** COM(2009) 433 final – CESE 647/2010

**Key points:**

The EESC welcomes the Commission's communication and the initiatives it outlines. The Committee points out that we are still at an early stage of this journey and choosing the right instruments and benchmarks and integrating them into the management of key policies and strategies will be no easy matter.

Drawing up a comprehensive index of quality of life and social solidarity will be difficult. The Commission should identify this area as the focal point of the whole project and start with pilot projects immediately.

The EESC welcomes the Commission's endeavours to extend national accounts to environmental and social issues. A legal framework for environmental accounting is due to be proposed at the beginning of 2010. The social indicators in the national accounts are not yet being used to the full. The EESC is ready to play a part in assessing the vital changes and will promote their acceptance by civil society.

The Commission should aim to include some of the new measures in the 2020 strategy as well as in the Sustainable Development Strategy. And it should aim to have a framework in place by 2011 on the basis of which it could develop clear proposals for comparable action on a global scale in time for the World Summit on Sustainable Development that the UN has convened for 2012.

**Contact:** Ms Annika Korzinek  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 80 65 – email: [annika.korzinek@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:annika.korzinek@eesc.europa.eu))

## 4. SOCIAL POLICY

- *New trends in self-employed work: the specific case of economically dependent self-employed work*

**Rapporteur:** Mr José María Zufiaur Narvaiza (Employees – ES)

**References:** Own-initiative opinion – CESE 639/2010

### **Key points:**

The opinion recommends that:

Means of drawing up an accurate statistical picture of economically dependent self-employed work in the European Union should be developed.

Studies permitting detailed analysis of national experiences in the area of economically dependent self-employed work should be promoted.

The issue of economically dependent self-employed work should be integrated explicitly into the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs, in ways to be determined.

The European social partners should be encouraged to include economically dependent self-employed work in their work programmes, at cross-sectoral and sectoral level. The joint analysis of European social partners published in October 2007 illustrates how important the issue of professional status is for those involved in the European social dialogue. In this context, it could be helpful to assess the opportunities for developing links between the European social partners and organisations (particularly national bodies) representing independent workers.

The aspects common to the definitions of employed persons in the different EU Member States should be identified, not least on the basis of the information and analyses gathered as a result of the above recommendations. Such an approach would be useful not only to help ensure the proper application of the existing European Labour Law Directives but also to gain a better insight into the increases in cross-border employment in Europe. It would also make it possible to obtain the information needed to gain a better understanding of what economically dependent self-employment work might cover. Before any attempt is made to gain a better insight into self-employed but economically dependent work, a clear, accurate definition of employees needs to be established.

**Contact:** *Mr Erik Madsen*

(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 90 39 – email: [erik.madsen@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:erik.madsen@eesc.europa.eu))



• *Education for inclusion: a tool for fighting poverty and social exclusion*

**Rapporteur:** Ms María Candelas Sánchez Miguel (Employees – ES)

**Reference:** Exploratory opinion – CESE 641/2010

**Key points:**

The EESC welcomes the decision to devote 2010 to redoubling efforts to eradicate exclusion and poverty and highlights the importance of using education and training as effective tools for achieving these goals.

On the basis of the concept of education for inclusion, the EESC recommends that the EU and the Member States undertake to revise education policies, their content, approaches and structures and the allocation of resources. The reasons to choose inclusive education are:

- educational, because it requires a quality education system accessible to all from early infancy;
- social, because education must help change mentalities, helping to build societies that are free of exclusion, prejudice and discrimination, and
- economic, because it helps to increase competitiveness in the face of new economic challenges and new labour market demands.

Within the EU, discussions on the recognition of outcomes of non-formal education have been ongoing for many years. Although these discussions have not yet culminated in consensual agreements at EU level, non-formal education is gradually being recognised as being of help in accessing the labour market. The EESC considers it useful for the EU to look at this aspect in the light of education for inclusion and consequently recommends:

- collecting information on the existing institutional and technical provisions and proposing the establishment of indicators for measuring the potential benefits of recognising non formal education;
- reviewing the models for recognising the outcomes of non-formal education to identify the most egalitarian, effective and beneficial, particularly for the socially excluded;
- encouraging the exchange of successful experiences between the Member States;
- engaging social partners, concerned civil society organisations as well as representatives of both formal and non formal education institutions in this process.

The EESC has pointed out in previous opinions that quality public education for all is a tool that promotes equality and social inclusion.

Finally, the EESC recommends that, without losing sight of coherence with the political priorities already defined, the actions to take forward should serve as a driving force for more daring and

ambitious commitments in this area, taking in the widest possible range of institutions and social players.

The conference being held by the EESC from 20 to 22 May 2010 in Florence on Education to fight social exclusion is a good example of this vision. It will be based on a cross-cutting approach and will bring together a large number of relevant actors.

**Contact:** Mr Erik Madsen  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 90 39 – email: [erik.madsen@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:erik.madsen@eesc.europa.eu))

## 5. ASYLUM AND IMMIGRATION

- *Minimum standards for third country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection (recast)*

**Rapporteur:** Mr Cristian Pîrvulescu (Various Interests – RO)

**References:** COM(2009) 551 final/2 – 2009/0164 (COD) – CESE 642/2010

### **Key points:**

The Committee endorses the objectives set by the Commission with a view to completing the Common European Asylum System (CEAS); it would highlight, however, the disparity between the objectives set at EU level and practices at national level, which could be exacerbated by the economic crisis and its ensuing social and political effects.

The Committee believes that revising the directive could help create a much more suitable legislative and institutional basis for ensuring a high and consistent level of support to persons seeking international protection.

The Committee warns, however, that also in the case of this EU policy, there is a risk that excessive rhetoric and declarations of good intent may strip the values upheld by the EU of any meaning. Therefore, in the second phase of implementing this policy, in which the co decision procedure applies, legislative conditions should be put in place that enable real access for asylum seekers to the labour market and to training programmes.

The Committee underlines the importance of recognising the role played by civil society in general, and particularly by NGOs specialised in the field of asylum and asylum-related issues concerning refugees, and calls for them to be granted full access to all the procedures and places relevant to their work. However, it stresses the fact that these NGOs cannot take over the role and responsibilities of governments in this field.

The Committee notes with concern that national and EU practices relating to the expulsion of people who may need international protection lack the transparency that could lend them legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens of the countries concerned and the international community.

The Committee believes that the various budgetary constraints ensuing from the economic crisis should not lead to a reduction in the level and quality of protection received by beneficiaries.

The Committee supports the objective of enhancing the content of international protection by recognising qualifications and facilitating access to vocational training and jobs, as well as to integration facilities and accommodation.

**Contact :** Mr Pierluigi Brombo  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 97 18 – email: [pierluigi.brombo@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:pierluigi.brombo@eesc.europa.eu))

- ***Minimum standards on procedures in Member States for granting and withdrawing international protection (recast)***

**Rapporteur:** Mr Antonello Pezzini (Employers – IT)

**References:** COM(2009) 554 final – 2009/0165 (COD) – CESE 643/2010

**Key points:**

The EESC welcomes and endorses the Commission's work on bringing the Asylum Procedures Directive into line with the suggestions made in the Green Paper<sup>1</sup> and the Policy Plan<sup>2</sup>.

The EESC considers that cultural, legal, administrative and cooperation processes involving the Member States and third countries should be launched in order to build a Europe of asylum within the social Europe.

It is essential that applicants be able to express themselves in their mother tongue during asylum application procedures and that they be guaranteed free legal aid at all stages.

Rejections of applications for international protection must be explained with clear reasons and must include information on the possibilities for appeal, including procedures and timeframes.

Expulsion measures must in any case be suspended pending the outcome of any appeals.

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2007) 301 final.

<sup>2</sup> COM(2008) 360 final.

The EESC considers that Member States should do all they can, including by pooling relevant experience, to enable asylum seekers to work, train and take part in cultural activities, within an appropriate social environment.

The EESC believes that the principle of non-return (non-refoulement) must remain firmly in place and that there is a need to agree on a way of expanding the range of people eligible for international protection: women suffering abuse, vulnerable people, environmental refugees, etc.

The EESC argues that a sense of shared responsibility must be enhanced within the Member States.

**Contact :** Mr Pierluigi Brombo  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 97 18 – email: [pierluigi.brombo@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:pierluigi.brombo@eesc.europa.eu))

## 6. TRANSPORT

- *The European shipbuilding industry – dealing with the current crisis*

**Rapporteur:** Mr Marian Krzaklewski (Employees – PL)

**Co-rapporteur:** Mr Enrique Calvet Chambon (Cat. 1 – ES)

**Reference:** Own-initiative opinion – CESE 644/2010

### **Key points:**

The European Economic and Social Committee is very concerned at the profound crisis affecting the EU shipbuilding industry, characterised by a lack of new orders, major problems in financing existing orders, overcapacity and irreversible jobs losses. As a result of the crisis, there is a need for a joint European strategy for the future of the EU shipbuilding industry and coordinated action by Member States. The first elements of this strategy should be defined and implemented no later than mid-2010 and should address the following: stimulating demand, financing, ensuring employment measures and countering the absence of a level playing field.

In the absence of an international agreement at the OECD, however, the EU must take direct and decisive action to protect the European shipbuilding sector from unfair competition.

The Committee calls on the Council, the Commission and the Parliament to ensure that, as a matter of strategic priority, Europe seeks to maintain the critical mass that is required for shipbuilding and repair in Europe. Member States should pool their efforts to take joint action at European level with a view to enabling the sector to survive the crisis, with temporary short-term measures that take account of the sector's characteristics.

The EU must also address the problem of the long-term financing of the shipbuilding sector. To this end, a European financing instrument for shipbuilding should be set up with the EIB. Industry, policy-makers and the EIB must explore how to make EIB funds for the promotion of "green technologies" and clean transport available to the shipbuilding sector.

As regards employment policy in the sector, for the duration of the crisis in the sector, the public authorities must put in place common European frameworks for short-time working arrangements with a view to ensuring a level-playing field in Europe and protecting workers.

**Contact:** Ms Aleksandra Wieczorek

(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 93 89 - email: [aleksandra.wieczorek@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:aleksandra.wieczorek@eesc.europa.eu))

- ***Connecting Africa and Europe: working towards strengthening transport cooperation***

**Rapporteur:** Mr Jan Simons (Employers – NL)

**References:** COM(2009) 301 final – CESE 650/2010

**Key points:**

In its opinion, the EESC states the need for closer cooperation between the EU and Africa within the framework of a partnership with equal rights and obligations.

Infrastructure and transport systems are prerequisites for social, economic and regional integration, thus for employment opportunities, access to care and education.

The EESC approves the development of an EU-Africa action plan and recommends setting up a joint committee to follow-up implementation. As regards the action plan, the Committee recommends that priority be given to combating corruption and piracy in Africa. Furthermore, the plan should involve the economic and social partners who participate in the implementation of the Cotonou Agreement and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union.

When allocating EU funds, one of the requirements should be that local, officially registered workers from the African Union benefit from the implementation

Interoperability and comodality should be the guiding principles. Social, environmental and safety considerations should be paid particular attention.

The construction and expansion of effective road infrastructure should result in the trend towards urbanisation being reversed dynamically.

It is essential to ensure good traceability and monitoring of how the funds are spent.

Given the action taken by China in Africa, the EESC considers that efforts should be made to develop a trilateral partnership between the EU, China and Africa, with one requirement being that any work and tenders must support "African employment opportunities".

**Contact:** *Mr Sébastien Occhipenti*  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 84 24 – email: [sebastien.occhipenti@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:sebastien.occhipenti@eesc.europa.eu))

## **7. REGIONAL POLICY**

- ***EU Contributions to International Fund for Ireland***

**Rapporteur-general:** Mr Michael Smyth (Various Interests – UK)

**References:** COM(2010) 12 final – 2010/0004 (COD) – CESE 638/2010

### **Key points:**

The EESC notes that the Commission's proposal for a Regulation governing the European Union's contributions to the International Fund for Ireland (period 2007 to 2010) has been now based on Articles 175 and 352(1) of the TFEU, giving the Parliament co-legislative powers in this matter and thus complying with the decision of the European Court of Justice of 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2009 in case C-166/07.

The EESC approves the aforementioned proposal.

**Contact:** *Mr Marco Thyssen*  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 84 11 – email: [marco.thyssen@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:marco.thyssen@eesc.europa.eu))

## 8. EXTERNAL RELATIONS

### • *The role of civil society in EU-Montenegro relations*

**Rapporteur:** Ms Vladimíra Drbalová ( Employers – CZ)

**Reference:** Exploratory opinion – CESE 651/2010

#### **Key points:**

The EESC calls on the Government of Montenegro to engage in further consultations on EU affairs with civil society organisations. The EESC recommends the following concrete actions:

- Transparency. Appointment procedures for NGO representatives to the Parliamentary National Council for EU integration should be defined in line with clear and transparent criteria, based on competence.

The same recommendation should apply to the proposed Governmental Council for cooperation with NGOs, where the NGO representatives should not be appointed by the Government; the Government's role should be confined to verifying the eligibility criteria.

- Fiscal framework. Tax regulations for NGOs should be clearly specified.
- Consultation. Civil society organisations should be more effectively included in public debates on draft laws in order to contribute to the process of aligning Montenegrin legislation with EU standards and best practices. The Social Council should be used as a more effective tool for consulting and informing the Social Partners, in order to address the entire range of relevant economic and social concerns.
- Trade Union representativeness. The law currently under discussion must create a legislative framework establishing transparent and non-discriminatory criteria for the representativeness of trade union organisations in order enable a plurality of trade unions in the country.

The EESC further recommends that the European Commission (EC) take the following measures:

- apply new indicators in the monitoring process, – one for the development of civil society and a second one for social dialogue – in order to help ensure that civil society is better and more effectively involved in the pre-accession process;
- support for civil society partnerships and capacity development should be stepped up and civil society organisations should feature more prominently in IPA programming.

As soon as Montenegro is granted candidate country status, the EESC , with the help of the other EU institutions, will set up an EU-Montenegro Civil Society Joint Consultative Committee in order to facilitate and monitor Montenegro's progress towards EU membership.

**Contact:** Mr Aurélien Juliard  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 99 69 – email: [aurelien.juliard@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:aurelien.juliard@eesc.europa.eu))

## 9. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

### *R&D Programme – Baltic Sea*

**Rapporteur-general:** Mr Daniel Retureau (Employees – FR)

**References:** COM(2009) 610 final – 2009/0169 (COD) – CESE 637/2010

**Contact :** Ms Magdaléna Carabin Belorova  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 83 03 – email: [magdalena.carabinbelarova@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:magdalenacarabinbelarova@eesc.europa.eu))

## 10. FINANCE AND REGULATION

### • *Alternative Investment Fund Managers*

**Rapporteur:** Mr Angelo Grasso (Various Interests – IT)

**References:** COM(2009) 207 final – 2009/0064 (COD) – CESE 631/2010

#### **Key points:**

Whilst generally welcoming the proposal, the EESC:

- stresses that despite the fact that certain types of alternative fund have undoubtedly helped to increase leverage and risks in the financial system, this sector was not the source of the main risks to the stability of the financial system in the crisis;
- agrees on a clear and effective regulation of AIFM (managers) and also AIF (products);
- thinks that the issue of the de minimis thresholds for the exemption from regulation doesn't make much sense. All AIFM should be registered, provided that the kind of information they must give and the rules they must comply with are scaled to their size and risks;
- endorses the fixing of a leverage cap which however should be designed to avoid any pro-cyclical effect;



- hopes the undertaking of Commissioner Barnier for a European passport extended also to the outside EU managers may be a solution to the central point of dispute on the offshore funds.

**Contact:** Ms Roxana Maliti  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 87 49 – email: [roxana.maliti@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:roxana.maliti@eesc.europa.eu))

- **Accessing credit: abusive practices**

**Rapporteur:** Mr Mario Campli (Various Interests – IT)

**Reference:** Own-initiative opinion – CESE 633/2010

**Key points:**

The EESC believes that the creation of a single, transparent, complete regulatory framework for access to credit is essential. It calls on the Commission to look at the best way of removing the gaps in the current regulatory framework.

The EESC makes the following suggestions and recommendations:

- establishing supervisory authorities for unfair commercial practices;
- extending the European rapid alert system (RAPEX) to placing of toxic products on the European financial and credit market;
- establishing a specific rule for supervision of the activities of professionals in the sector;
- defining requirements relating to registration of the various financial and credit intermediaries in a European network of national registers;
- introducing appropriate ranges of "certified" or "standardised" credit products on the European market;
- introducing common European procedures and rules concerning credit intermediaries, overindebtedness and combating usury;
- strictly regulating the issue of credit cards, to prevent predatory behaviour encouraging overindebtedness;
- promoting and supporting civil society initiatives to ensure clear, comprehensible information.

**Contact:** Mr. Luís Lobo  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 97 17 – email: [luis.lobos@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:luis.lobos@eesc.europa.eu))

## 11. EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

- *European Foundation Statute*

**Rapporteur:** Ms Mall Hellam (Various Interests – EE)

**Reference:** Own-initiative opinion – CESE 634/2010

**Key points:**

The own-initiative opinion sets out some reflections and proposals on the development of a European Statute adapted to foundations, and proposes guidelines which could govern such a Statute.

Such a European Statute should provide the most cost-effective solution for addressing cross-border barriers and thereby stimulating foundation activities across Europe.

In this context, the EESC urges the Commission to present a proposal for a Regulation on a European Foundation Statute which should be an essential instrument to bring citizens at the heart of the internal market and bring Europe closer to the people. It can serve as a new mechanism to support European public good and citizen actions, and address major European socio-economic concerns and pressing needs in numerous fields.

In order to make it effective and attractive, the new statute will have to provide clear and comprehensive rules regarding setting-up, operations and supervision and have a genuine European dimension. It will make cross-border operations, donations and cooperation smoother by providing an efficient management tool for public-benefit purposes, while offering a recognised European label.

**Contact :** *Mr Luís Lobo*  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 97 17 – email: [luis.lobos@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:luis.lobos@eesc.europa.eu))

## 12. EUROPEAN UNION LAW

- *Monitoring the application of Community Law (2007)*

**Rapporteur:** Mr Christoph Lechner (Employees – AT)

**References:** COM(2008) 777 final – CESE 632/2010

**Contact :** *Ms Claudia Drewes-Wran*  
(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 80 67 – email: [claudia.drewes-wran@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:claudia.drewes-wran@eesc.europa.eu))

• ***Intellectual property rights in the internal market***

**Rapporteur:** Mr Daniel Retureau (Employees – FR)

**References:** COM(2009) 467 final – CESE 636/2010

**Key points:**

The EESC:

- endorses the Commission proposals, although it is critical of the lack of transparency with regard to the ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement).
- regrets that the Commission has not taken account of the World Intellectual Property Organization's (WIPO) "Internet treaties", i.e. the Copyright Treaty (WCT) and the Performances and Phonograms Treaty (WPPT).
- rejects the idea of any special set of rules for the exercise of copyright on the internet, and which could infringe an individual's privacy. Instead, it advocates active education and training measures for consumers, especially young people.
- supports the proposal to establish an EU Counterfeiting and Illegal Copies Observatory and the rapid information exchange network.
- Considers it essential to harmonise European criminal law, while ensuring respect for the principle of the punishment fitting the crime. This principle should also be applied to the crime of selling illegal copies on the internet.
- advocates, essentially for orphan works, a harmonised system for the registration of copyright and related rights.

**Contact:** Ms Amelia Munoz Cabezon

(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 83 03 – email: [magdalena.carabinbelarova@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:magdalena.carabinbelarova@eesc.europa.eu))

## **13. HEALTH AND CONSUMER PROTECTION**

• ***Enforcement of the consumer acquis***

**Rapporteur:** Mr Jorge Pegado Liz (Various Interests – PT)

**References:** COM(2009)330 final – CESE 635/2010

**Contact :** Mr Luís Lobo

(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 97 17 – email: [luis.lobo@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:luis.lobo@eesc.europa.eu))

• ***Solidarity in health: reducing health inequalities in the EU***

**Rapporteur:** Ms Ágnes Cser (Employees – HU)

**Co-rapporteur:** Ms Renate Heinisch (Various Interests – DE)

**References:** COM(2009) 567 final – CESE 640/2010

**Key points:**

The principle of HIAP (Health In All Policies) should become a reality in all EU policies and the Commission should evaluate and check its measures, if all policy areas contribute to a high level of health protection and reduction health inequalities.

The EESC supports the importance of the Member States and the Commission agreeing on a set of comparable indicators and measurable targets within a relevant timeframe and urges the Commission and the Member States to develop new indicators to monitor health inequalities and a methodology to audit the situation in the Member States.

The EESC calls on all Member States to participate in the Commission's plans to improve the data and knowledge base and the mechanisms for measuring, monitoring and reporting health inequalities.

Creating a pattern of overall economic and social development, leading to greater economic growth and better social justice, as well as greater solidarity, cohesion and health should be addressed as a priority in the Europe 2020 Strategy.

The Committee urges the Commission and the Member States to deploy the necessary resources to combat all social inequalities particularly in terms of education, urban planning and purchasing power.

Efforts to combat health inequalities in rural areas must be stepped up, particularly in view of the challenges presented by demographic change.

The Commission should evaluate the impact of existing European platforms and fora (nutrition, alcohol, etc.) on vulnerable groups.

The Committee invites the Commission and the Member States to reconsider the series of EESC recommendations made in the past opinions relating to health and social issues.

**Contact:** Ms Ewa Kaniewska

(Tel.: 00 32 2 546 81 17 – email: [ewa.kaniewska@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:ewa.kaniewska@eesc.europa.eu))