

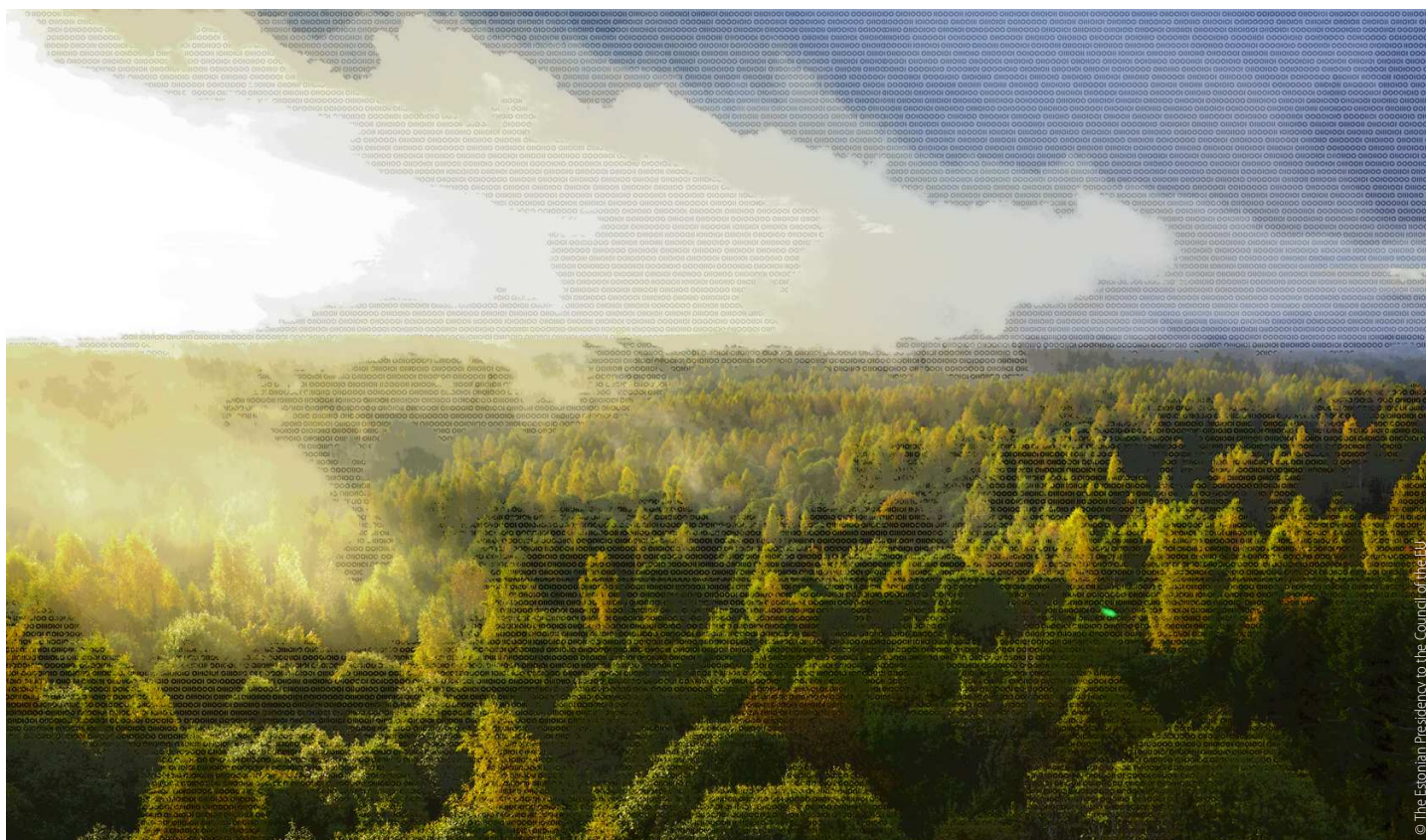


European Economic and Social Committee
Employers' Group

Newsletter

July 2017

The Estonian Presidency of the Council of the EU: EU TODAY AND TOMORROW



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Estonia will take over the Presidency in a situation where the EU and the eurozone economy have mostly recovered from the global economic crisis, where unemployment is relatively low and employment high. At the same time, productivity growth continues to be modest and income inequality has increased. Although the EU economy has recovered from the crisis, our global economic competitiveness has decreased and the EU's economic power in the world is forecast to wane further due to its ageing and declining population.

The political and economic context we operate in, both globally and in Europe, has changed and is much more uncertain and less predictable than before. Also, sadly, in the background of the Estonian Presidency, the Brexit negotiations are taking place.

The motto of the Estonian Presidency is “**Unity Through Balance**” and, indeed, finding the right balance in the EU, especially between its ambitions for **economic development** and the **social agenda**, is crucial. When setting its environmental goals, the EU should also place more importance on the need to ensure the EU's competitiveness.

The Estonian Presidency will focus on developing

- a **Europe with an open and innovative economy**,
- a **safe and protected Europe**,
- a **digital Europe with free movement of data** and
- a Europe that is **inclusive and sustainable**.

The priorities of the Estonian Presidency:

An open and innovative European economy means developing a business environment, which supports knowledge-based growth and competitiveness.

The free movement of goods, services, people and capital is absolutely fundamental to the proper functioning of the EU single market and its improved competitiveness.

The planning of EU legislation must recognise that a stable and predictable business environment is a precondition for investments. Starting a business must be quick and easy.

For instance, in Estonia, it takes about 20 minutes to register a company. With the help of our virtual **e-residency**, foreign nationals can also make use of this opportunity to register a business in Estonia (i.e. in the EU single market) and manage it from anywhere by using Estonia's electronic services.

We wish to see more of these smart e-solutions and public e-services also being introduced in the governing and management practices of the EU to make its processes more **transparent, simpler and faster**.

In addition to realising the full potential of the EU single market, the EU economy also needs new growth opportunities through better access to foreign markets. For these reasons, the European Commission must press ahead with free trade agreements and create these growth opportunities for our EU enterprises.

To improve the EU's competitiveness on a global level, more **investments** are required in **innovation** and in **developing citizens' skills** (including digital skills). Both EU manufacturing industry and its SMEs must focus more on the **automation** and **digitalisation** of their production and services. And, we need skilled labour for all this.

For **a safe and secure Europe**, it is important to continue the work on tackling the migration crisis and reforming the Common European Asylum System. But it is also crucial to support and strengthen relations with the Eastern partnership countries, not least by helping them develop their public e-services.

Estonia's and the Estonian employers' greatest expectations, however, are linked to the **European digital single market (DSM)** and **free movement of data**.

If the EU wants to benefit from technological advances, it has to make the digital single market work, which means that the free and secure cross-border movement of data within the EU has to become a reality. The free movement of data must come with guaranteed data protection. We need to agree who has what data rights (data ownership, access, sharing, liability). Unreasonable data location restrictions must be abolished. More efforts should also be directed towards cybersecurity and cooperation, including international cooperation in digital matters.

The EU has a long way to go in developing cross-border e-commerce and e-services directed to consumers, producers and businesses.

Estonian entrepreneurs and citizens know very well how much time and money can be saved by making use of e-government and public e-services. Estonian citizens greatly appreciate e-voting, electronic income declaration, digital prescriptions, e-school etc. E-Tax and E-Customs offer significant time savings for businesses. Not to mention e-residency, which, for example, allows somebody in Singapore to



establish a company in Estonia and carry out all legal procedures related to their company by using Estonian electronic services – imagine the savings in time and travel expenses!

A good example of cross-border data exchange is the Estonian-Finnish cooperation project on linking national information systems through the X-Road, which benefits the citizens and businesses of both countries by speeding up certain services.

The taxation of the smart economy must be done intelligently, without stifling innovation. Estonia would like to make a contribution in this area and has requested an explanatory opinion on the taxation of the sharing economy from the EESC.

To emphasise the importance of the completion of the DSM, the EESC Employers' Group will hold its seminar on "Advantages of the Digital Society" on 24-25 October in Tallinn.

As to an **inclusive and sustainable Europe**, we believe that it is important to find the right balance between the EU's economic, social and environmental goals. The EU must avoid initiatives that curb economic competitiveness, such as, for example, the amendments to the Directive on the Posting of Workers, which, in reality, restrict the free movement of services in the single market and jeopardise jobs in enterprises that export services.

The digitalisation of production/services, the advance of the sharing economy and the rapid evolution of classic employment relations all necessitate the updating of the EU social policy, but it should certainly not be done by just increasing social rights. The EU social sphere is already regulated by some 70 directives that set the minimum standards for social matters. The Pillar of Social Rights does, however, include also many important areas, such as promoting skills, education and lifelong learning and modernisation and sustainable financing of social insurance and pension systems.

The EU must continue with reform in order to boost its competitiveness, to ensure sustainable and more inclusive economic growth and employment, which are all prerequisites for improving the social and economic wellbeing of EU citizens. We must invest more in innovation and in the modernisation of education and training systems, as this is the only way to equip people with the skills (including STEM and digital skills) that the market requires and improve their employment prospects in the labour market, as well as to advance the global competitiveness of our companies. Lifelong learning, along with upskilling and reskilling, must become the norm!



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REFIT Platform:

IMPROVING REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

What does the REFIT Platform do and how is the EESC involved in it?

Bernd Dittmann: The Platform was announced as part of the Commission's 2015 Better Regulation Agenda and started its work in January 2016. It brings together representatives from the EU Member States and stakeholders from different backgrounds, and is chaired by Commission first vice-president Frans Timmermans. Our task is to develop recommendations for how to improve existing EU legislation, reduce the regulatory burden, and overcome implementation problems. I share the mandate consecutively with my colleagues Denis Meynent (Workers' Group), who is now taking over from me, and Ronny Lannoo (Various Interests' Group), and we together represent the interests of the EESC.

Could you briefly explain how the Platform works?

BD: The idea is to provide a bottom-up mechanism for improving EU law. Any citizen, company or Member State can make a proposal via the website *Lighten the Load – Have Your Say*. On the basis of these submissions we discuss opinions and develop recommendations. The opinions are then presented directly to Vice-President Timmermans and feed into the Commission's annual work programme (CWP). Last year we adopted 22 opinions, all but one of which were included in the 2017 CWP. The REFIT Scoreboard then describes the follow-up action and its progress.

Which priorities did you focus on during your mandate?

BD: The priorities were based on the input of the sections and focused on a number of simplification proposals e.g. the Construction Products Regulation, the Late Payment Directive, the Internal Market Information System, and stakeholder consultation mechanisms. In fact, the majority of submissions and resulting opinions concern issues directly or indirectly relevant to industry, most notably in the area of internal market policies, financial services, the environment and taxation. Thus the REFIT Platform is an important exercise in supporting our economic growth agenda through improvements to the regulatory environment for EU businesses.

Could you give us an example of opinions you worked on?

BD: An important example was a proposal for simplifying the Construction Products Regulation which will help to improve the functioning of European standards for construction products. In its opinion on financial reporting, the REFIT Platform identified the need to streamline reporting to various supervisory authorities so as to reduce unnecessary red tape for financial institutions. Another good example is the opinion on European Commission stakeholder consultation practices – a topic on which industry has become increasingly vocal of late. Drawing on the 2015 EESC opinion by Ronny Lannoo, representatives of trade unions,



consumers and industry in the REFIT Stakeholder Group drew up a joint opinion calling on the Commission to revise the way it consults the public. This is an important issue because it determines how the Commission gathers feedback and evidence from those working with legislation in the field, with a view to preparing new or evaluating current regulatory frameworks. The opinion received the full backing of Mr Timmermans and will feed into the ongoing review of the Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines and Toolbox and next year's evaluation of the Better Regulation system.

After completing your mandate, what is your bottom line on the Platform?

BD: I think that our participation in the Platform is a best-practice example for successful collaboration between the three Groups in the Committee. Furthermore, it increases our standing vis-à-vis the Member States and offers a real chance to contribute to more efficient legislation. Last but not least, it gives us the opportunity to help shape EU policy agendas by feeding into the CWP. This makes the added value of the Platform for the EESC and vice versa quite substantial.



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Dealing with a Dis-United Kingdom

It was never intended to be like this. Although the result of the referendum on 23rd June 2016 shocked political systems in and outside the UK, the governing Conservative party had a working majority in Parliament and an efficient process for replacing David Cameron, its disappointed and defeated leader.

So, on the afternoon of 13th July 2016 Theresa May became Prime Minister of the UK. She and her aides had fought a well-focused campaign for support amongst MPs as her higher profile rivals destroyed each other or self-destructed under pressure.

By the end of the day, members of an old guard that she detested were replaced or, where this was impossible, elevated to positions in which they were likely to fail. She promised stability and strong leadership and seemed set on delivering this. The fixed term Parliament Act would prevail, and there would be no election until May 2020, by which time the Brexit process would be largely concluded.

The problems with this analysis became apparent as the Departments charged with Exiting the EU or finding new International Trade deals, searched for staff with experience of matters not handled locally for more than 40 years. Select Committees took evidence on the problems to be resolved; think tanks added detail and politicians everywhere started to draw red lines. It took more than 8 months to 29th March 2017 before notification under Article 50 could be given. The waiting was over. Negotiations could at last commence.

Or perhaps they couldn't. On the 16th April, Theresa May announced, to the astonishment of many of her own party, that there would be an election on 8th June 'to reduce divisions in Westminster' and 'to choose strong and stable leadership ... to see us through the process of Brexit'.

As The Economist noted, it is unlikely that the reasons were as stated. It did seem however an opportunity to wipe out an increasingly pointless UKIP, severely damage Labour under a poorly performing Jeremy Corbyn, dilute the impact of her own anti-EU right-wing and, critically, to gain another two years in power before the next election, now not required until May 2022. With a strong lead in the polls over Labour, a projected majority of 80-100 seats, and just 6 weeks for campaigning, what could possibly go wrong?

Bizarrely, in retrospect, for the next 3 weeks, the answer was – nothing at all! Council elections across half the UK on 4th May showed strong swings to the Conservatives; UKIP lost 144 of its 145 seats; Labour did badly. All was going to plan – and 'purdah' rules, limiting the ability of civil servants to make commitments that might be unsustainable under a new government, gave brief breathing spaces to those trying to determine what 'Brexit means Brexit' might actually mean in practice.

And then, without warning, and for reasons still only partly understood, everything went very wrong. An election manifesto focusing on 'Theresa May and her team' written by her special advisers, was launched on 18th May and hastily withdrawn on 22nd May, after a surprise change to long term health care was labelled a 'dementia tax', seemingly aimed at her core older supporters.

A terrorist attack in Manchester that same night showed the vulnerability of young people in our society – and the need for politicians to be able to respond effectively as both leaders and human beings. The debate was clearly shifting away from Brexit – and Jeremy Corbyn was starting to emerge as the more human.

The launch of a revised manifesto on 30th May, 10 days before the actual election, was over-shadowed by a YouGov poll showing, in contrast to



other polls that week, the Conservatives losing seats and the outcome a hung parliament. 4 days later there was another terrorist attack, this time in London, again aimed at young people.

At 10.00 pm on the night of 8th June 2017, the exit poll suggested, to the shock, disbelief or jubilation of those listening, that YouGov had indeed got it right – and that the gamble of calling a snap election had failed spectacularly. It was going to be a long night for everyone involved.

By dawn it was clear that political landscape had changed dramatically. UKIP had lost its only seat – but critically its many supporters had reverted to both Labour and Conservative. The SNP was vulnerable in Scotland and had lost seats to Conservatives, Labour and LibDems. Smaller parties were squeezed. Both young and old had turned out to vote (nearly 69% of those eligible) and the share of the vote for both the main parties increased. The Conservatives held on to just 318 of the 650 seats at stake – insufficient for an overall majority. Labour, with only 262, somehow tried to believe that they had won.

Two weeks later, the final outcome remains unclear (and may have changed by the time this is published). With her political power ebbing away and few if any opportunities for coalition or to reshuffle her ministers, Theresa May has exercised her right to form a stable government with the support of the Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland, a socially conservative group with little in common with the Scottish conservatives upon whom she also depends. The Queen has read her speech setting out a reduced programme of legislation for the next two years, focusing on the bills necessary to ensure Brexit and to manage its outcome. Negotiations with the EU have started with few indications of what will happen next.

It is possible that Theresa May will regain authority, in and outside the UK, but no-one is betting on it. If a viable challenger emerges, she will be replaced without hesitation. For a competent, hardworking and caring person, it will have been a bruising experience. For her successor there is much to do. For everyone else, patience is still required.



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Businesses and consumers will win from an inclusive circular economy

On 31 May 2017 BusinessEurope launched the European Circular Economy Industry Platform (www.circulartory.eu) to showcase what small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and industry are doing on the circular economy and what challenges they face in becoming circular. Director General Markus J. Beyrer explains how the Industry Platform can complement the EESC's joint initiative with the European Commission on the broader Stakeholder Platform expected later this year.

Circular economy, you say?

The circular economy can be a difficult concept to grasp, because it is so broad and can mean different things to different people. In my view, it is about maintaining the value of the products that we use as long as possible, and the Earth's resources we use to make those products. For example, you can incinerate old smartphones but the economic value of doing so will probably be low. If instead they are designed in such a way that we can easily extract the raw materials that went into the phone, such as precious metals, then the economic payoff will be much higher.

What's the Circular Economy Industry Platform about?

The idea behind the Circular Economy Industry Platform came from the discussions that we had with our members on how to give more visibility to "on the ground" initiatives that industry takes towards circularity. We attended many conferences where businesses spoke on the circular economy, but often we saw the same "frontrunners" that kept showing what they were doing. All respect for these frontrunners, but I thought: "Why do I only keep seeing the tip of the iceberg? I want to see the rest as well!". I wanted to see more companies – big and small – from Member States all across Europe. Inclusiveness of all stakeholders and awareness raising about what the benefits of the circular economy are for consumers, businesses and the environment is vital in order to make the circular economy work in Europe: because it requires such a fundamental shift in the way our economy is organised, we need all citizens on board and to have their voice heard. That is how the idea of a platform came about, a web tool that showcases innovative ways in which SMEs and industry add to the circular economy in Europe. At the same time, it shows the challenges that these companies face when starting or scaling up their initiatives. We therefore want to make the platform a unique bottom-up initiative to share knowledge and expertise.

How can we work together with the EESC?

I understand that the Stakeholder Platform of the EESC and the Commission will be a collection of what is out there in terms of platforms for business, but also for civil society users, cities, academia and so on. In other words, it brings together existing information of all these stakeholders. In that sense, the Industry Platform that we created aims to become the main stakeholder to provide useful information on good practices and challenges by industry.

My team and I will work closely with the EESC in the coming months to help boost the functionality and publicity of the platforms in order to reach the maximum number of stakeholders. Only then can we have these important exchanges of good practices and help companies to fully incorporate circularity into their business models.

Why should companies engage?

We want to help companies of all sizes to get in touch with policymakers and with each other to build new initiatives. The Industry Platform allows you:

To showcase what your company is already doing on the circular economy. By showing the extent to which business is already engaged in this transformation process, you will help make EU policy fit-for-purpose.

To raise your concerns on barriers and obstacles. The analysis of common trends regarding barriers and obstacles that you and other companies face in becoming circular will help draw the attention of policymakers.

To make your voice heard on upcoming EU policy initiatives. By gathering your "on the ground" practical experiences, BusinessEurope will be in a stronger position to make the business voice heard in the European institutions.

To develop your network. The platform is a unique way for you to connect to other companies on the circular economy, either by being contacted by others because of your expertise or by being able to see what is happening elsewhere.

To access the EU / Brussels debate on the circular economy. Based on what we receive from you and others, BusinessEurope intends as much as possible to organise events, consultations and promotion of the platform and community participating in it.



The projects page showcases all the circular economy examples in one snapshot. The regulatory challenges are linked to the timeline page, which also shows upcoming events. Visitors are able to locate projects directly by the challenges they are faced with.

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Artificial intelligence AT THE SERVICE OF TRANSPORT

Artificial intelligence is expanding to the whole of society whether in terms of housing or manufacturing, healthcare or transport. The opportunities provided by technology are virtually unlimited. The essential question then remains whether we are prepared to face the opportunities and challenges brought by the new developments.

Advanced automation has been daily business in transport as it has been in industry for decades. Just think about autopilots in aviation and shipping, traffic control of trains or car driving supported by automation.

However, transport systems are continuously being developed further with regard to their interaction with man and the infrastructure. Virtual robots, i.e. software robots, play a central role here by enabling the increased use and connection of different information systems, allowing them to function as one interoperable unit. Driverless and unmanned vehicles, ships and airspace systems that are fully autonomous, i.e. that function independently, are the final step in this development.

Driverless cars are currently being tested by several car manufacturers. Driverless metros have already been introduced in many cities, driverless buses are close to introduction, and fleets of driverless trucks have also been tested in practice. The use of unmanned aircraft systems or drones is rapidly increasing and even remote-controlled and autonomous ships are being developed.

The basic structures are still based on people as the main actors, and the most remarkable implications for society will be seen only when fully autonomous and unmanned transport is a reality. Prognoses on when this will happen vary significantly. However, it is important to prepare for the future and make the necessary decisions in good time

A range of business opportunities

Robotisation brings about increased efficiency, productivity and safety for freight transport and logistics. New business opportunities also emerge for manufacturing and service industries. This holds true both for big companies and small and medium-sized enterprises, including start-ups.

Given that EU companies are leaders in many fields related to automation, robotisation of transport could well be an area where a competitive advantage could be developed. This however requires an encouraging and enabling business environment. Since much is happening outside the EU, the EU also has to step up its efforts in the fields of innovation, infrastructure and the completion of the single market, including adaptation of the legal framework to new operating conditions.

The robotisation of transport is primarily based on data management as in any other sector. From a business point of view, data can be considered as a production factor or raw material to be processed and refined to create



added value. To this end, the free flow of data is essential. Clarifications are however needed particularly for the management and use of data generated by sensors and smart devices.

To develop and gain experience in autonomous transport, experimentation with and piloting of new technologies and concepts must be facilitated. This requires functioning innovation and business ecosystems, adequate test-beds and an enabling regulatory framework. This in turn requires the authorities to adopt an approach that stimulates innovation instead of applying detailed rules and requirements that hamper development.

Robotisation does not remove the need for investments in basic transport infrastructure: roads, railways, harbours and airports. Besides these basic elements, an advanced digital infrastructure is needed, covering mapping and positioning systems, different kinds of sensors for data generation, hardware and software for data processing, and mobile and broadband connections for data distribution. Automated traffic management and control systems are also included under digital infrastructure.

Societal concerns have to be tackled

Artificial intelligence – especially with its learning capacities such as machine learning and deep learning – is the key enabler behind the developments in autonomous transport. It is, however, obvious that we cannot proceed successfully if the progress is solely technology-driven. Ideally, the development should be based on societal demand.

While robotisation of transport provides society with several potential benefits such as better accessibility and convenience for passengers, efficiency and productivity for logistics, improved traffic safety and reduced emissions, people also have many concerns.

Ensuring appropriate data protection and privacy is a prerequisite for trust and public acceptance. Increasing cybersecurity and tackling liability issues are also necessary in order to respond to new developments. Furthermore, there are concerns regarding the loss of jobs. However, while physical work and routine tasks diminish, there is increasing demand for highly-skilled cyber-professionals, as well as for those acting in practical human-robot cooperation systems.

All in all, the robotisation of transport touches the very heart of the EU's transport strategy. In addition to transport policy, the robotisation of transport entails prior adjustments in data, innovation, education, energy and industrial policies. The introduction of artificial intelligence also implies ethical aspects and must be kept under human command - not least in transport.



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Recruiting is an achievement – recruiting skilled staff is hitting the jackpot!

We have a desperate shortage in Slovakia of people with a secondary school technical education – and it is starting to be one of the biggest problems our economy faces. It is increasingly being discussed by the government, industry associations and companies themselves. There is even a debate going on about whether to back bringing in workers from abroad.

That is why, in May, Slovakia's Federation of Employers' Associations held a conference on the issue, which drew participants from government, schools, employers and trade unionists.

All agree that the situation in the Slovak education system needs urgently addressing and reform cannot be avoided. The disagreement comes, however, on what it should look like. Our view is that the state should continue to play a decisive role in evaluating schools' performance and should not hesitate to abolish or merge poor ones. Slovak vocational education needs competition to get it out of the doldrums and inject into it higher standards and momentum. Increasing the share of good quality private education, while maintaining the state's necessary supervisory mechanisms and getting firms more involved, will up the pressure on state schools to raise standards.

To be effective, however, we need to tackle not just the quality of education provided by state and private schools, but also completely overhaul the system of per-pupil funding for individual subjects. Per-pupil funding itself could remain, but the formula for calculating it would be simplified to favour those subjects that the labour market considers crucial – not just for today, but for the decade ahead.

Since spring 2015 we have had a new law on dual education. However, we can see from its adoption and implementation that the system was wrongly configured from the start and needs radical change. Dual education should as nearly as possible match what is involved in real jobs and serve solely to train true specialists genuinely equipped for the workplace. We think it absolutely vital to rethink the funding system and how it is calibrated. The law needs a number of systemic changes. One of these is creating a "virtual workplace environment". What we mean by this is putting in place all the elements, including premises, that pupils will later encounter when they actually start work and equipping these with state-of-the-art technology and facilities.



When comparing our system of dual education with that in Germany or Austria, employers criticise not least the poor funding arrangements and the small amount of practical subjects. The difference is mainly that there, when pupils start in the dual education system, they have almost no general academic subjects, so sufficient time and space can be created for practical subjects. Here, the law stipulates that pupils must do a compulsory amount of general courses. Employers do not think they have a problem providing training places. The problem is a lack of interest from the pupils' side in education that prepares for work.

Conference participants noted that preparation for the world of work is not about pupils getting a piece of paper, but about fostering their attitude to work. This can be only be done at school and not by retraining. As the chairman of the employers' board pointed out, there was no problem on the employers' side in providing enough training places. The problem is a lack of interest from the pupils' side in education that prepares for work. To his mind, experience with dual education had raised a number of problems. One of them was about careers advice and guiding children towards vocational training.

Employers would like to see the ministry of education doing more in terms of careers advice. Another problem employers found with dual education was the lack of incentive for smaller employers to come on board.

A lot of secondary vocational schools were wary of becoming part of the dual education system under the present law because any school doing so forfeits some of the per-pupil funding they need to operate. Under these circumstances, the reluctance is understandable.

A number of large companies have reacted to the unsatisfactory state of affairs in Slovakia by setting up their own training centres to provide them with the specialist workforce they need. They include Železiarne Podbrezová, Volkswagen Slovakia, Matador Group and Siemens.



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Study visit to the Port of Rotterdam

Gaining hands-on experience of the biggest, smartest, most sustainable and best connected logistics and industrial hub in Europe – this was the purpose of the visit by the members of the Transport Category to the Port of Rotterdam on 15 and 16 June.



After their normal meeting at EESC headquarters, where the highlight of the day was a heated debate on the new Mobility Package, the members of the Transport Category left the office to head towards the Port of Rotterdam. The first stop on their tour was the Port of Rotterdam Authority. Here Members were accompanied to the Harbour Coordination Centre where they could see in real time how maritime traffic control dealt with ships entering and leaving the biggest port in Europe.

Members were then given a presentation on the port itself and on the Port Authority. The Port Authority's core tasks were the development, management and exploitation of the port in a sustainable way and the provision of speedy and safe services for shipping. They also discussed some of the challenges facing the Port of Rotterdam, namely energy transition, ratification of the climate agreement, rapid application of new technologies, digitisation and robotics. While striving to be the smartest and most energy-friendly port in the world, the Port of Rotterdam was also endeavouring to safeguard its strategic position and be a key player in the management of global trade flows.

The second day of the study visit consisted of a guided tour of APM Terminal II, an opportunity to take a very close look at the highest standards in automated and environmentally sustainable terminal operations in Europe. The day continued with a tour of Maasvlakte 2, the new port extension designed to be a state-of-the-art automated facility with zero CO2 impact. Here members could see the fruit of one of the biggest civil engineering projects in the Netherlands, namely the construction of a new port and all its supporting infrastructure on reclaimed land.

Future of Europe

DEBATE DURING THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE EMPLOYERS' GROUP

"We need to relaunch the European project and give it fresh impetus" – these were the words of Jean Arthuis, French Member of the European Parliament, during the debate on the future of the EU and its institutional framework. The debate took place on 21 June during the extraordinary meeting of the Employers' Group.

According to Mr Arthuis, the Brexit referendum had clearly shown that Europe was unable to defend its own project in the eyes of its citizens, and this had to change. The best interests of the European public, including well-being, security and the Single Market, were paramount. In order to effectively deliver these, Member States had to take over even more competences from the EU level. The answer was, in his view, more Europe with the eurozone acting as the driving force for integration. The eurozone was the heart of the European edifice and had to be the catalyst for political integration, something that would call for amendments to the institutional structure of the EU.



"This discussion and the EESC resolution are just a small part of the EESC's overall involvement in the debate on the future of Europe", said Jacek Krawczyk, president of the Employers' Group. He reminded those present that the Committee had conducted discussions in 27 Member States and that the report gathering recommendations from these events would provide further food for thought. He underlined that the Employers' Group was willing to have an active role in the debate on the future of the EU and the future of the EESC.

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EmployersEESC

Print:
QE-AH-17-006-EN-C
ISSN 2467-4478
EESC-2017-59-EN

Online:
QE-AH-17-006-EN-N
ISSN 2467-4494

EN