



*European Economic and Social Committee*

**REX/463**

**The new EU strategy on  
foreign and security policy**

Brussels, 28 April 2016

**OPINION**

of the

European Economic and Social Committee

on

**The new EU strategy on foreign and security policy**

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Rapporteur: **José María Zufiaur Narvaiza**

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On 21 January 2016, the European Economic and Social Committee decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion, under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, on

*The new EU strategy on foreign and security policy.*

The Section for External Relations, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 19 April 2016.

At its 516th plenary session, held on 27 and 28 April 2016 (meeting of 28 April), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 190 votes to 10 with 50 abstention.

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**1. Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1.1 The EESC agrees with the need to revise the current European Security Strategy (ESS) of 2003, in order to respond to the substantially altered international context. And, as consultative body to the European institutions and a representative of organised civil society (OCS), the EESC considers it vital that it is consulted in the process of drafting the new strategy, and that civil society is involved in a structured way. In the EESC's view, reviews of the global strategy should be carried out more frequently. For example, every five years, coinciding with the Parliament's and the Commission's terms of office.
- 1.2 The EU is facing crises, primarily involving social disintegration, interdependence, institutional weakness and the global nature of inequality. We have now entered an era where social exclusion is a key factor in conflicts, in which military intervention is clearly insufficient.
- 1.3 The increased volatility of geo-political and geo-economic competition and the persistence of some powers in dividing the world into spheres of influence impact on the European strategic model based on cooperation and positive conditionality, requiring the model to be adapted.
- 1.4 In the EESC's view, in such a complex international context, Europeans will only be able to defend their values and interests through closer coordination of objectives, policies and resources. European foreign policy begins at home, as the link between internal and external policies is inseparable.
- 1.5 European citizens will only shift away from the current feeling of disaffection and commit to the Union if the EU changes course and positions itself as a promoter of freedom, security and prosperity – as the defender of equality – in Europe and in the rest of the world.

- 1.6 It is imperative to strengthen European political integration in order to aspire towards sovereignty in a globalised world, to take decisions to revive enthusiasm for the European project, through a renewed social contract, and to address the democratic deficit.
- 1.7 Foreign policy and European security and defence policy, to which more resources should be allocated, require the use of more flexible working methods that are at the same time more coordinated between the Member States and the European institutions.
- 1.8 EU defence needs stronger coordination and joint planning, with a view to moving towards a European Defence Union. This requires increased funding and the development of the European defence industry, avoiding duplication in expenditure through pooling and sharing initiatives. In the same sense, better governance and a consistent institutional structure are also key, as is the promotion of large-scale joint projects. This is without prejudice to the transatlantic relationship and the close cooperation with alliances and bodies, such as NATO, which include most EU countries.
- 1.9 In the EESC's view, the priorities of the new Global Strategy should be the following: a) strengthening the accession path of candidate countries, particularly the Western Balkans, and stabilising the Eastern and Southern neighbourhood, including by responding to the flow of migrants and refugees; b) fostering a more capable, effective and visible Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) underpinned by a strong and more clearly defined European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB); c) strengthening an effective and reformed multilateral system for security, socio-economic and development governance; and d) promoting trade and investment. These priorities should also factor in two cross-cutting dimensions: sustainable development at large and the strengthening of civil society organisations.
- 1.10 With its traditional preventive and multilateral diplomacy the EU should be a regulatory, constructive power that promotes inclusive governance, committed to involving emerging economies in multilateral institutions.
- 1.11 The EU was created to consolidate peace in Europe and the main goal of its global strategy must be to maintain and promote peace. Security and defence policies, diplomatic activity and the role of civil society are crucial to achieving this goal.
- 1.12 Regarding the refugee crisis, in the EESC's view it is vital that the EU adopt a common refugee, asylum and immigration policy to be implemented by a European institution. This would ensure that the Member States assume their responsibilities on a joint, proportionate and mutually-supportive basis.
- 1.13 In the EESC's view, changes should be made to the system for granting European development funds, in order to make them more flexible, versatile and adapted to specific circumstances.

- 1.14 The series of trade mega-deals currently being negotiated or ratified are taking on, over and above their strictly commercial aspects, an indisputable geopolitical dimension. Addressing the geopolitical impact of this type of multilateral agreement, strengthening multilateral relations and avoiding tensions between trading blocs will be a key component of the future EU global strategy. And, insofar as these agreements affect people's way of life, it is essential, in the EESC's view, to meet the demands and concerns of civil society and the general public in this regard.
- 1.15 The EESC believes that it is vital to strengthen civil society and its activities and links that operate in parallel with diplomatic activity, in order to implement the EU's foreign and security policy. The EESC therefore advocates expressly including this component among the priority objectives of the CFSP.
- 1.16 We believe that the EESC, as a consultative body to the European institutions and a representative of all major civil society organisations in the EU Member States, is best placed to become a key EEAS partner for the EU institutions involved in the on EU foreign and security policy, particularly the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission.
- 1.17 To this end, the EESC proposes jointly exploring these priorities and a means of formalising cooperation between the EEAS and the EESC.
- 1.18 The EESC offers to assist the EEAS in carrying out an evaluation report on the participation of civil society in the EU's external policy.
- 1.19 We propose that the EESC hold a foreign and security policy audition every year, attended by the High Representative, bringing in the main European civil society organisations.

## 2. **A new context for the EU's external action**

- 2.1 The EESC points out that a strategy is required that includes all of the EU's tools for external action, including security and defence tools, within a coherent and updated overall framework. To achieve this, the objectives, priorities, interests and instruments of Europe's external action need to be overhauled, taking a comprehensive standpoint that breaks away from partisan approaches and national resistance and that boosts coordination and flexibility<sup>1, 2</sup>.
- 2.2 In spite of the major social advances in various areas included among the Millennium Development Goals, other aspects such as the West's loss of influence, the consolidation of new emerging powers and the growing impact of the information technologies, demographic trends and greater inequality are beginning to reveal a more complex global geopolitical context in which the progress of a model based on the rules and values of open society will be

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<sup>1</sup> See EESC opinion on *The external dimension of the renewed Lisbon Strategy* ([OJ C 128, 18.5.2010, p. 41.](#))

<sup>2</sup> See EESC opinion on *The new foreign and security policy of the EU and the role of civil society* ([OJ C 24, 28.1.2012, p. 56.](#))

met with greater resistance. This is true in the case of some multilateral institutions, which have not adapted to a new multipolar world. As a result, international standards are being eroded, while the relevance of geopolitics is being redefined. With a wider range of actors, including non-state actors and transnational companies, and the development of disruptive technologies, it is more difficult to set strategic agendas and manage complex environments.

2.3 The most immediate challenges facing the EU are: managing migration flows, securing the continent against terrorist threats and deterring possible military or cyber aggression against EU Member States. The other challenges, threats and dangers are now essentially global: climate change, migration, terrorism, financial and economic crises, tax evasion, organised crime, pandemics, humanitarian emergencies, etc. The Union has a role to play in all of them. The CFSP must become a much more effective tool than it currently is, in order to defend the interests of the Union and the Member States. This, in turn, is essential in order that the latter become significantly more involved in the EU's foreign and security policy. As stated by the HR/VP, "we need a strategy to protect proactively our interests, keeping in mind that promoting our values is an integral part of our interests".

2.4 Since the 2003 strategy, there have been two substantial structural changes:

2.4.1 Firstly, we are facing crises, primarily involving social disintegration and institutional weakness, interdependence and the global nature of inequality. Today, globalisation implies proximity, visibility and population density. Inequality has become a global parameter. It is this degree of social inequities that lies at the root of today's mass movements of people. This increasingly linked and extremely unequal world is a source of instability and insecurity. We have now entered the era of conflicts resulting from social exclusion, for which military intervention is clearly insufficient. We are facing a global social issue which must be recognised and addressed, as happened in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in European nation-states, and, at international level, with the pioneering Philadelphia Declaration in 1944. This will require regulatory, solidarity-based and cooperation policies.

2.4.2 Secondly geopolitical competition is once again on the rise, and not only in the European neighbourhood. We are shaped by our geographical location. The conflicts in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Libya and the Sahel, for example, affect us directly from the point of view of trade, jihadist terrorism, energy supply and the movement of refugees or migrants. This has an impact on the European policy model, based on cooperation and positive conditionality.

2.4.3 The statement in the existing strategy, that "the best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states" remains true. However, the strategy has highlighted several shortcomings: 1) generally speaking, this concept has not produced the expected results, except for a few cases closely linked to EU accession processes; 2) other narratives exist, based on particular readings of religion, such as the self-proclaimed Islamic State, or on a certain authoritarian nationalism, as in the case of Russia and China (major powers that directly influence the wider EU neighbourhood). These narratives have a concept of geopolitics based on spheres of influence; 3) often, the diversity between the countries with which the EU has attempted to establish partnerships has been ignored; 4) there has

frequently been a lack of consistency between EU discourse and the practical policies carried out; 5) it has not been sufficiently taken on board that democracy and the rule of law cannot be imposed from outside but must develop from within.

- 2.5 While defending its universal principles and values, the EU is called upon to adapt its strategy in order to promote them more effectively through what the EEAS has called "pragmatic idealism".

### 3. **Foreign policy begins at home**

- 3.1 It is universally accepted that foreign policy is an extension of internal policy. That is why, in order to be effective, they must seek the same objectives, be integrated, coordinated and not lack focus in their common key aspects. In the EESC's opinion, the two vital pillars of a comprehensive strategy for EU external policy are constructed at home.

3.1.1 The first of these is the basic element of the EU's attractiveness in the world: its way of life, based on freedom and human rights and the social cohesion among the whole population. It does not seem realistic to envisage a more structured, shared and effective EU foreign and security policy without tackling the increase in economic and social inequalities amongst its Member States, the weakening of its social model, the symptoms of a lack of solidarity and trust, the retreat to national boundaries, the difficulties in making joint decisions, the growing disaffection among the public or the rise of populist, xenophobic or Europhobic movements. It is crucial to strengthen European political integration, most likely through enhanced cooperation as provided for by the Treaties, in order to aspire towards sovereignty in a globalised world, to take decisions to revive enthusiasm for the European project, through a renewed social contract, and to put decision-making and democracy on the same footing.

3.1.2 The second pillar concerns greater European integration and the introduction of common policies and instruments for action in areas such as migration flows, energy supply, climate change, international terrorism, food security, trade policy, the fight against organised crime, an effective European investment and job creation plan, a European social dimension, and completing the internal market. European citizens will only shift away from the current feeling of disaffection and commit to the Union if the EU changes course and positions itself as a promoter of freedom, security and prosperity – as the defender of equality – in Europe and in the rest of the world.

3.2 In the EESC's view, improving the single market – industrial policy, the financial system, telecommunications and transport policy, digital technologies, defence industries – is a priority for the EU. Foreign policy should also address a growing number of concerns relating to other EU policies, including social, environmental, energy, digital, transport, economic and transport. Conversely, we need to define a long-term vision in which foreign economic policy is a central pillar for promoting trade and investment. In addition, a common energy policy is urgently needed, as is a common migration and asylum policy.

- 3.3 Faced with the new geostrategic configuration of the world, the EU has no choice but to build up its security and defence capacities. This will inevitably require a more integrated external policy - the Member States' importance is steadily diminishing at international level and acting together is advantageous to all - and implies dedicating more room to European defence policy. All this assumes a far broader understanding of security and defence than the use of force. But it also means making it clear that a defence policy is there to be used preventively: it has a deterrent function but is also intended to serve as an instrument of last resort, when vital interests and the responsibility to protect cannot be upheld in any other way. This requires more and better use of resources. Although it has 28 different military structures, the EU spends 40% of the amount the US spends on national defence. On top of this comes considerable duplication and an underdeveloped defence industry, among other factors, all of which points to the need for larger budgets and common planning and control instruments. EU governments and citizens must be aware that security, prosperity and freedom are inseparable. Greater strategic self-sufficiency for the EU in terms of defence must not, however, be incompatible or clash with the cooperative, trans-Atlantic relationship it has with alliances and bodies to which most of the EU countries belong, NATO in particular.
- 3.4 European defence policy should concentrate on two key areas: 1) current geopolitics dictate that the EU, as a supplier of security beyond its borders, should focus on the wider neighbourhood, together with supporting human rights and helping neighbouring countries to develop; and 2) contributing to the freedom of access to global public assets and to a rules-based international order.
- 3.5 Industry must play a major role in achieving strategic autonomy for the European Union. Its competitiveness is a value that goes far beyond the interests of the private sector. The fragmentation of the defence industry must be overcome; the success of this process is closely linked to the implementation of some key tools, such as the implementation of collaborative projects, the allocation of adequate funds for the upcoming Preparatory Action<sup>3</sup> and the establishment of a specific budget line in the next multiannual financial framework.
- 3.6 The idea that the stability of our real neighbourhood - our neighbours and our neighbours' neighbours - is essential for our own stability applies directly to the terrorist threat from the so-called Islamic State. It means, for example, that it is the EU's direct responsibility to help find a political solution to the war in Syria, because it involves taking action on one of the causes of the problem. It also involves improving coordination activities in counter-terrorism and intelligence. Stepping up the exchange of information between the Member States, even setting up a European intelligence service, should be an imperative. Furthermore, a global anti-terrorism strategy needs to be developed to analyse the causes of terrorism, prevent confrontation between religious views and, instead, encourage cooperation between communities with different beliefs in the fight against terrorist fanaticism. It is particularly important to support the Arab and Islamic world (the worst hit by the attacks of the misnamed

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In partnership with the European Defence Agency, the European Commission is preparing a Preparatory Action for CSDP-related research in the 2017-2020 period.

Islamic State) so it can react to this threat from within. Similarly, taking action against the sale and trafficking of arms or against sources of funding should be part of a European strategy to combat terrorism. Relations between civil society and our wider neighbourhood have a useful role to play in this endeavour.

3.7 External action should be made more flexible. Greater flexibility must not lead to fragmentation, but should be achieved by making full use of the tools provided for by the TEU and the TFEU. Constructive abstention by Member States when dealing with CFSP and CSDP matters in the Council therefore needs to be increased. In this context, with regard to strengthening international security, the EESC refers once again to the need to uphold particular foreign policy values, in particular respect for the Charter of the United Nations. However, when it is not possible to find a satisfactory solution using existing tools, ad hoc groups involving the High Representative or, if she is unavailable, other European institutional bodies, must be set up, so that the Union's foreign policy opportunities are not paralysed by the principle of unanimity. The Green Diplomacy Network (GDN), initially established to promote the integration of environmental objectives into the EU's external relations and which played an important role in mobilising and coordinating the EU's diplomatic action ahead of COP21, can serve as a model for other networks.

3.8 The EU should not wait for the next crisis to equip itself with greater external policy resources. Resources must match the objective and not fluctuate significantly according to immediate circumstances. Effective planning should identify those areas in which the Union is under-equipped. This would avoid the reactive behaviour that has characterised EU action over recent years when faced with various crises. The EU budget for external action, especially in the areas of humanitarian action, migration, development, education, counter-terrorism and diplomacy, and for strengthening organised civil society, needs to be increased.

#### 4. **Rethinking the role of the EU in the world**

4.1 The EESC believes that the new strategy will mean re-examining the EU's analysis of the international context and the role that it seeks to play in future. It is vital to find new narratives based on active involvement in equality between members of the public in terms of security, freedom and prosperity and it is important to highlight the EU's strengths. These include being the world's largest internal market, having an active trade policy, the most highly-funded development cooperation and humanitarian aid policy in the world, a way of life based on respect for the rule of law and democratic principles and a social model based on economic and social cohesion, and upholding a sustainable development model based on the fight against inequality and environmental protection, including strong climate policy objectives.

4.2 Lack of internal cohesion and political will have historically hampered the EU's role in the world. The EU does not aspire to be a superpower, but to project its power as effectively as possible. It must therefore focus on those areas where its action can bring added value and it can have the greatest impact, particularly in its neighbourhood and in international institutions such as the United Nations, IMF, World Bank or G20, where coordination between the



Member States is poor, limiting their ability to exert influence. The EESC therefore welcomes the Commission proposal of October 2015 for a unified representation of the euro area within the IMF and other international organisations.

- 4.3 The EU must continue with its traditional preventive and multilateral diplomacy, with a view to becoming a regulatory and constructive power. Defending an open, rules-based world order is a key element in the Union's identity on the international scene. As a major trade power, the EU benefits from a world that is connected in terms of energy, finance, cyberspace and sea routes (some 90% of the EU's external trade is by sea). Nuclear safety and energy security must stay in focus.
- 4.4 Cooperation must also continue with the various regional integration processes such as ECOWAS, ASEAN and Mercosur.
- 4.5 The EU should boost inclusive governance, promoting the involvement of emerging economies in multilateral institutions in order to relieve tensions peacefully and discourage the creation of alternative governance mechanisms or ones hostile towards the current mechanisms.
- 4.6 The EU must uphold its values and principles, the universality and indivisibility of human rights, the fight against the death penalty and violence against women and girls, and the protection of the rights of persons with different sexual identities (LGBTI). It must then base its foreign and security policy on its characteristic social model, which is the foundation of its security, freedom and prosperity.

## 5. **Greater involvement in a wider neighbourhood**

- 5.1 The current elaboration of the Global Strategy should clearly reflect the importance of Europe's Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods for Europe's own security and prosperity, and should provide the EU with greater impact and leverage on key developments in those areas, responding to and regulating the flow of migrants and refugees. These priorities should also factor in two cross-cutting dimensions: sustainable development and the strengthening of civil society organisations<sup>4, 5</sup>.
- 5.2 The wider or strategic neighbourhood (from the Sahel to the Gulf and from Central Asia to the Arctic) is the area of greatest significance not only for European external action, but for the internal dimension of the Member States. This area is currently experiencing radical social and institutional disintegration for a variety of reasons, such as armed conflict, forced population displacement, international terrorism, the collapse of state structures, corruption, organised crime, regression to authoritarian rule as in the case of Turkey, the assertiveness of

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<sup>4</sup> REX/458 – EESC opinion on *Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy*, adopted on 25 May 2016 (not yet published in the OJ).

<sup>5</sup> See EESC opinion on the *EU enlargement strategy* ([OJ C 133, 14.4.2016, p. 31](#)).

powers such as Russia, and hybrid and military aggression. This is accompanied by profound, long-term structural challenges with a powerful impact on the Union.

- 5.3 Faced with this disheartening scenario, the EU must take greater responsibility for improving the economic, social and security situation in its neighbourhood. The EU must not retreat from defending democracy, the rule of law and fundamental human and social rights - including freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining - in its neighbourhood: the support of local civil society, including the social partners, is key in this regard, as is ensuring they keep their independence.
- 5.4 The EESC welcomes the review of European Neighbourhood Policy and the recognition of a link between instability, poverty, inequality and lack of opportunities, which can increase vulnerability to radicalisation. In this respect, external action can generate synergies when security, development and trade are brought together. If this objective is to be met, it is crucial to do away with infringements of the right of association and the freedom of organisation of employers, workers and third-sector bodies. It is also important to strengthen early-warning tools to prevent possible future crises.
- 5.5 The EESC advocates keeping a close, but not narrow, focus on visa extension and liberalisation, in all cases depending on verifiable reforms.
- 5.6 Closely linked to this neighbourhood is the African continent, which, in the EESC's view, should be the second priority geographical region of the EU's foreign policy. This is not only because many of these challenges originate there, but also because of the possibilities for alliances that can contribute to economic development and global governance<sup>6</sup>. The Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030 and the Paris Agreement on climate provide clear opportunities to establish and strengthen partnerships with Africa.
- 5.7 In geopolitical terms, the stability of our wider neighbourhood also requires us to concern ourselves with the major powers which have most impact on it, particularly Russia and China. Russia's new assertiveness and the Chinese One Belt, One Road policy (OBOR — massive investment in connectivity infrastructure) makes it more necessary than ever for the EU to act with one rather than 28 voices with regard to these two powers.
- 5.8 Regarding the refugee crisis, in the EESC's view it is vital that the EU adopt a common asylum and refugee policy to be implemented by a European institution. This would ensure that the Member States assume their responsibilities on a joint, proportionate and mutually-supportive basis. The strengthening of channels for legal migration is crucial, both to meet demands for labour and refuge, and to meet the needs of migrants in the EU in view of its demographic decline, as well as to prevent human trafficking. Respect for international and EU law and a community response to the humanitarian crisis affecting those already on EU territory are also essential, as are greater resources to protect shared borders, search and

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<sup>6</sup> REX/455 – EESC opinion on the *Future of EU's relations with the ACP Group of countries*, adopted on 25 May 2016 (not yet published in the OJ).

rescue at sea, and the creation of a European Border and Coast Guard, as proposed by the European Commission.

## 6. **Boosting EU development policy**

- 6.1 The EU must align its internal and external policies with the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In its development policy, the EU should pay particular attention to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. The Paris climate change agreement has shown that the world is moving inexorably towards a green economy, a process in which the EU is playing a pioneering role.
- 6.2 The EESC welcomes the steps to redirect official development aid (ODA) towards the least developed countries (LDC), funding for the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, evaluation of the aid strategy for gender equality, the increase in the biodiversity protection budget and the EIB's undertakings in combating climate change, as well as the financial support for developing countries of USD 100 billion by 2020 pledged in the Paris Agreement.
- 6.3 The economic dimension of European foreign and security policy should be strengthened and should not be limited to trade. There is also a need to support training, innovation and entrepreneurship, as the stabilisation of our neighbours depends on their economic and social development. A development plan should be drawn up for countries such as Tunisia, Lebanon and Jordan, among others, in order to boost their economies. There are mutual opportunities in assisting third countries in making the transition to low-carbon economies, including by means of effective technology transfer and cooperation.
- 6.4 The EESC notes that climate change is a contributing factor to migration resulting from state fragility, insecurity and resource scarcity. The EU must support developing countries, notably the most vulnerable, and help them move directly to low-carbon economies and strengthen their climate resilience.
- 6.5 The EESC emphasises that, notwithstanding the current budgetary restrictions in many Member States, the aim of spending at least 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) on ODA must remain a priority. There is also a need to boost policy coherence for development (PCD) and promote coordination between the Member States and the EU institutions<sup>7</sup>.
- 6.6 It is crucial to involve a very wide range of actors in financing the sustainable development goals (SDG), including civil society and development finance institutions (DFI). Social partners should also be more closely involved in managing projects<sup>8</sup>.
- 6.7 In the EESC's view, changes should be made to the system for granting European development funds, in order to make them more flexible, versatile and adapted to specific

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<sup>7</sup> See the EESC opinion on *The European Union Development Policy "The European Consensus"* ([OJ C 24, 31.1.2006, p. 79](#)).

<sup>8</sup> See EESC opinion on *Financing development – the position of civil society* ([OJ C 383, 17.11.2015, p. 49](#)).

circumstances. This would require the introduction of arrangements such as the "framework agreements", operational grants, cascading subsidies, multiannual agreements, emergency funding or the implementation of the "toolbox", as defined in the Structured Dialogue<sup>9</sup>.

## 7. **The new trade and investment environment**

7.1 The EESC supports free trade, one of the pillars of the European Union itself. At the same time, it voices the need to take into account the asymmetries between negotiating parties and respect for fundamental labour rights, as well as environmental standards. At the same time, it continues to support the WTO's multilateral approach to trade rules. In the EESC's view, it is necessary to completely rethink the involvement, both consultative and real, of the organisations that are most representative of civil society in drawing up agreements<sup>10</sup>.

7.2 Over and above their strictly commercial aspects, these mega-agreements, such as the TPP, the CETA, the TTIP, the free trade agreements with Japan and India, and the RCEP are taking on an indisputable geopolitical dimension and attracting the growing interest of civil society, insofar as they concern rules and standards with a significant impact on its way of life. This is particularly important with regard to the impact on democratic decisions, the decisions of investor-state dispute settlement mechanisms and of legislative cooperation committees.

7.3 The challenge for the EU in this field is that, whilst geostrategic and economic opportunities are opening up, it is essential to guarantee European norms and standards, public services and the preservation of key areas of regulatory policy such as health, labour and environmental protection standards<sup>11</sup>. The opinion of the EESC, and of civil society, is in favour of investor protection being guaranteed by the ordinary courts or, failing that, by an independent international court set up by the United Nations. It is also in favour of the effective involvement of organised civil society in the agreements, which goes hand in hand with a policy of real-time transparency of information, both during the negotiations and in the decisions affecting civil society<sup>12</sup>.

## 8. **Strengthening civil society as a key element of EU foreign and security policy**

8.1 In the EESC's view, civil society is one of the building blocks of democracy. A civil society that enjoys freedom and rights, strong social partners, effective involvement in decisions, and institutional recognition is vital to achieve and consolidate democracy, prevent shifts towards authoritarianism, promote economic development, build peace, foster social cohesion, fight for equality in its various forms, to promote and enable a sustainable development model and

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<sup>9</sup> See EESC opinion on *Civil society involvement in the EU's development policies and in development cooperation* ([OJ C 181, 21.6.2012, p. 28.](#))

<sup>10</sup> Letter of Committee President Mr Malosse to Commissioner Malmström of 18/06/2015 conveying his assessment and recommendations on the advisory groups under the Association Agreements.

<sup>11</sup> EESC opinion on *Trade for All: Towards a more responsible trade and investment policy*. See page XX of OJ.

<sup>12</sup> See EESC opinion on *Investor protection and investor to state dispute settlement in EU trade and investment agreements with third countries* ([OJ C 332, 8.10.2015, p. 45.](#))

enrich the democratic institutional structure. It is also key to developing closer ties with civil society in other countries and regions of the world, creating a parallel to the diplomatic activity that is essential for strengthening global histories, cultures, beliefs and objectives.

8.2 The EESC therefore advocates expressly including this component among the priority objectives of the CFSP, using various means for this reinforcement such as the funds for cooperation and developing human rights; diplomatic activity and demands; genuine, effective involvement – consultative and not solely on a listening-only basis – of civil society in trade and/or association agreements, as an integral part of them and with powers relating to all areas; strengthening policies that aim to ensure that European businesses present in other countries or regions respect the ILO core conventions and develop corporate responsibility policies as supported by the EU.

8.3 To this end, the EESC believes that the CFSP must involve European organised civil society in setting and implementing its objectives and priorities. The EESC suggests that the role of civil society could be improved by:

- strengthening civil society in the European neighbourhood, with the aim of supporting stabilisation and democratisation processes;
- improving the identification of partners on the basis of criteria that are compatible with the European social model, specifically by recognising social partners on an equal footing;
- promoting instances of civil society participation, such as the ESCs;
- tackling the social dialogue deficit in the ENP countries;
- supporting the development of regional sectoral organisations, like those that already exist in areas such as the social economy, business organisations and trade unions, agricultural organisations, the promotion of female entrepreneurship, human rights, etc.;
- subjecting EU external action to greater supervision and follow-up by European civil society;
- ensuring that civil society is more effectively involved in trade, association and partnership agreements;
- supporting the creation of a climate favourable to the participation of third country civil society organisations in EU development policies;
- involving civil society in asylum and refugee policy where integration and overcoming xenophobic resistance are concerned;
- coordinating the involvement of the various elements of civil society – employers, trade unions, third-sector socio-economic organisations and NGOs – in a more structured, less assembly-based way.

## 9. **The role of the EESC**

9.1 We believe that the EESC, as a consultative body to the European institutions and a representative of all major civil society organisations in the EU Member States, is best placed to become a key partner of the EEAS and the European Commission in strengthening and

further developing an effective EU foreign and security policy. This assertion is backed up by its tripartite composition, its global outlook, its long-standing experience and its relations with civil society in other parts of the world, based for the most part on mandates derived through different types of international agreements signed by the EU: association agreements, strategic partnerships, free trade agreements, and agreements with candidate countries for EU accession<sup>13</sup>.

- 9.1.1 We propose that the EESC hold a foreign and security policy audition every year, attended by the High Representative, bringing in the main European civil society organisations.
- 9.2 The EESC believes it would be very positive to establish a strategic relationship with the EEAS, based on the conviction shared by both parties regarding the importance of civil society in the EU's external policy, particularly when implementing certain priority objectives. To this end, the EESC proposes jointly exploring these priorities and a means of formalising cooperation between the EEAS and the EESC.
- 9.3 The EESC could assist the EEAS in carrying out an evaluation report on the participation of civil society in the EU's external policy.
- 9.4 In connection with foreign and security policy, the EESC will step up its cooperation with United Nations organisations such as the ILO and FAO.

Brussels, 28 April 2016

The President  
of the  
European Economic and Social Committee

Georges Dassis

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<sup>13</sup> The EESC currently has 23 international structures monitoring international issues.