

EESC calls for greater involvement of civil society in EU external action

Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, attended the EESC plenary session on 17 October 2018, engaging in a debate with members on the main external threats and challenges for the EU. EESC President Luca Jahier, highlighted the important role played by the EU as a major humanitarian aid donor, but also recalled that “civil society organisations are willing to be part of this effort”.

The plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) started with a debate with **Federica Mogherini**, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, on the topic *“External threats and challenges facing the European Union”*. President of the EESC, **Luca Jahier**, recalled the political instability of the European neighbourhood and regretted that the situation in the majority of countries in the Mediterranean region had not improved over recent years, despite the EU’s efforts: “The EU has had an important role as the major donor in humanitarian aid, but has also been caught between the necessity of a pragmatic political approach to managing migration flows and the necessity to defend core EU values such as human rights”.

However, **Mr Jahier** pointed out that “the EESC is well placed to witness positive aspects in this dark picture” and called for greater involvement of civil society in EU external action: “It is clear that the level of public support for ‘more EU’ is still high, and that civil society organisations are willing to be a part of this effort. That, Ms Mogherini, is a huge political asset in your hands”.

Priorities

Federica Mogherini presented the main external threats and challenges facing the EU and the overarching working lines of the European External Action Service (EEAS). Ms Mogherini underlined that “policies need to be rooted in society” and declared that EU external action has already experienced a shift “from a pure security angle to a global one which puts the focus on societies instead of institutions”. She also mentioned some priorities of the EEAS which, in her words, are also shared with the EESC:

- **Sustainable development**, with several proposals in the past few years such as the [External Investment Plan](#) and with a focus on the creation of quality jobs, a field where “trade unions and civil society organisations are essential partners, as social and economic rights are key to our action”;
- **Sustainable peace**, which means giving alternatives and opportunities to population in conflict countries;
- **Culture and cultural heritage**, not only as a part of the economy and to reinforce the sense of belonging of local population, but also to promote European soft power, “which is more important than hard power”;

- **Youth**, which is in the centre of EU external action because, in Ms Mogherini's approach, "we have to abandon the traditional paternalist stand and take into account young people's voice in the decision making today".

Federica Mogherini is convinced that "foreign policy can never only be about governments; it requires NGOs, civil society, businesses and trade unions".

EESC members appreciated Ms Mogherini's engagement in the EU external policy and the role she has played in the international scene. They discussed topics such as migration, trade, the relationship with the United States or the EU enlargement policy. In this particular field, **Ms Mogherini** showed her conviction that "the future of Western Balkans is in the EU". In the opinion of the High Representative "it will not be an enlargement, it will be a reunification, because they already belong to Europe, and also a return to EU roots: bringing peace and reunification where war was".