[EASO Network of Reception Authorities meets in Malta](#)

Taking stock of its achievements in 2017 and lining out its work programme for 2018, the EASO Network of Reception Authorities, met in Malta at EASO HQ on 6 and 7 March 2018.

24 national contact points and experts from 21 Member States were joined by representatives from DG Home of the European Commission, UNHR and EPRA (European Platform of Reception Authorities) to discuss the latest developments at national and European level in terms of provision of reception conditions to asylum seekers. Participants also received detailed information on training opportunities and needs for national experts, data collection and operational support provided by EASO to Member States.

The network discussed different methodological options for its first pilot exchange programme, to be run in May 2018 in cooperation with EPRA (European Platform of Reception Agencies) and EASO. Culminating in a workshop to be organised in Warsaw on 6 and 7 June 2018, this exchange programme will focus on the theme of "Prevention measures and sanction regimes in reception centres – Reduction and withdrawal of material reception conditions in practice". It will involve a group of four member states working together through field visits in a mutual support scheme aiming to foster the exchange of knowledge and good practices while actively contributing to build the capacity of host countries in precise aspects of policies and practices. The initial results of this scheme will feed into the Warsaw workshop.

Finally, the participants discussed its priorities for the second semester of 2018 during breakout sessions. Two strong topics of interest emerged from the discussions and will guide the work of the network (exchange programme, new practical tools, and thematic workshops) for the year to come: provision of information to asylum-seekers and monitoring and assessment of reception conditions.

The next plenary meeting of the Reception Network will take place in Brussels in December 2018.

[EESC backs Commissioner Ansip's outline of forthcoming Artificial](#)

[Intelligence strategy](#)

EESC rapporteur on Artificial Intelligence (AI) Catelijne Muller says the strategy, as outlined by Commissioner Ansip to the EESC's plenary on March 15, fully meets the Committee's call for the European Union to take global pole position in determining the framework for the responsible development and deployment of AI.

Ms Muller said the [announcement](#) made by Commissioners Ansip, Moedas and Gabriel on 9 March to set up an expert group on AI was warmly welcomed by the EESC, as it fully took on board the requests put forward by the EESC nine months before in its [own-initiative opinion](#), which called for:

- a pan-European ethical code for AI to make sure that the development of Ai is in line with EU values and fundamental rights;
- a European AI infrastructure to foster the sustainable development of AI;
- checks on laws and regulations to see whether they are fit for purpose in an AI era;
- innovation in AI to be boosted, especially AI for the common good.

"I think Europe really took a global pole position at this point", said Ms Muller, "Yesterday Steven Hawking died. Hawking warned us that AI could be the best or the worst thing that humanity has ever invented. He also said: 'all of us should ask themselves what we can do now to reap the benefits of AI and avoid the risks. This is the most important conversation of our time.' I am convinced that Europe has decided not only to join this most important conversation of our time, but to lead it, and I am proud of that."

Commissioner Ansip described the state of play of the **digital single market** in Europe and reviewed the Commission's most important initiatives to make it a reality. Among them, the **abolition of roaming** surcharges, the forthcoming **portability of digital content** – enabling people to access their legally bought music, movies, TV series, e-books, audiobooks, etc. also when travelling to another EU Member State –, and the abolition of unjustified **geo-blocking** with regard to tangible goods and services bought online but consumed locally, like hotel accommodation, car rentals, tickets, etc. The **general data protection regulation**, which is to come into force in May, would also help harmonise rules for all players.

Others important building blocks were still to come in the areas of **telecoms**, the **e-privacy regulation** and **cybersecurity**.

However, Commissioner Ansip emphasised, **fragmentation** remains a major hurdle to the development of the digital single market and consequently AI, and the **cost of non-Europe in the digital single market** is huge. According to an analysis prepared by the European Parliament, it could amount to EUR 415 billion a year.

"It is important for all players to have harmonised rules because while big

global players can navigate these 28 different sets of rules, for our start-ups and SMEs, it is practically impossible to understand those 28 sets of rules, and if we continue with this fragmented digital Europe we will send a very simple message to our people, especially our start-ups: stay at home or go to the US if you want to scale up", said the Commissioner.

Global service providers like Amazon, Google, Facebook, etc. have large parts of the market in Europe too, which enable them to collect huge quantities of data to teach their computers, commented Commissioner Ansip. "But what about our own European start-ups? They have no access to data".

Speakers in the debate emphasised to the Commissioner the importance of ensuring a fair transition for workers. While the Commissioner was very optimistic on the outcome of the AI revolution for the labour market, arguing that progress always created more jobs than it destroyed, members insisted that the transition, when traditional jobs disappeared and new occupations had not yet emerged, needed to be managed appropriately.

All agreed that **lifelong learning** must become a reality now more than ever to help everyone find their place in tomorrow's labour market though new skills for new jobs. "In preparing for Artificial Intelligence, do not forget to invest in human intelligence", was President Dassis' closing message to the Commissioner.

[Indicative programme – Foreign Affairs Council of 19 March 2018](#)

[EU supports Lebanese security sector with €50 million](#)

This package includes €46.6 million for promoting the rule of law, enhancing security and countering terrorism until 2020 and €3.5 million in support of airport security.

High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission Federica **Mogherini** made the [announcement](#) during today's Rome II Ministerial Meeting on support to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) in Rome. She said: *"Lebanon can count on the European Union's longstanding partnership in facing its current challenges, from humanitarian aid to development cooperation, but also on economy and security. With this new package, the EU reconfirms its support to the Lebanese security sector and the strengthening of Lebanon's institutions, which are crucial to ensure the stability, security and unity of the country, for the benefit of the Lebanese people and of the entire region".*

The new package is part of the EU's overall and longstanding support to the security sector in Lebanon where the EU has invested more than €85 million across the entire sector since 2006. EU activities have included support to the Lebanese security forces' capacity building, integrated border management, civilian oversight, as well as the mitigation of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear threats and mine action. In 2018, the focus is placed on integrated border management and countering terrorism.

Background

The €46.6 million commitment to support Lebanon in promoting the rule of law, enhancing security and countering terrorism until 2020, funded under the [European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI)](#), aims at supporting the security and justice sector in Lebanon.

The €3.5 million measure, adopted under the [Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP)](#), specifically aims at securing Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport against illicit trafficking and the threat of terrorism. It will provide training for relevant agencies working at the airport under civilian authority, and allow for the improvements of existing security infrastructures.

In November 2016, the European Union and Lebanon adopted [Partnership Priorities](#) for the period 2016-2020, which set up a renewed framework for political engagement and enhanced cooperation. The Partnership Priorities include security and countering terrorism, governance and the rule of law, fostering growth and job opportunities, and migration and mobility. They were agreed in the context of the [revised European Neighbourhood Policy](#) and the [EU's Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy](#).

[What is not allowed in the real world, must also be a no-go in the virtual world](#)

EESC calls on Commission to fight violent and discriminatory online content more effectively

The EESC acknowledges the Commission's Communication *Tackling Illegal Content Online – Towards and enhanced responsibility of online platforms* as a first and useful step but is not satisfied with its scope. It therefore calls on the Commission to establish programmes and effective measures to provide a stable and consistent legal framework for the efficient removal of illegal content.

The EESC also considers the cases of illegal content mentioned in the Communication as too narrow and proposes to review and catalogue them in order to achieve greater inclusiveness rather than limit them to the explicitly mentioned ones (terrorism, xenophobic speech, child sexual abuse material). For instance, malicious defamation and dissemination of material that violates human dignity or contributes to gender violence should also be included.

"Spreading illegal content must be nipped in the bud", said **[Bernardo Hernández Bataller](#)** when presenting his opinion on **[Illegal content/online platforms](#)**, adopted at the EESC plenary on 14 March 2018.

This is why the EESC also proposes to pay special attention to the development, processing and dissemination of purely informative content which appears – at a first glance – legal but is hiding illegal.

The focus should also be extended to anything that relates to mega data and the benefits that online platforms obtain by exploiting this data.

Illegal content is a complex and cross-cutting issue that needs to be tackled form a range of perspectives:

"Firstly, it is important to assess the impact of illegal online content and secondly, we need to harmonize the way it is dealt with in the legal

framework of the Member States. When we talk about the adoption of criteria and measures, the starting point must be that what is forbidden in the real world must also be forbidden in the virtual world. We need to put a stop to illegal and inhuman content," explained the rapporteur.

"Publishing illegal content, hate speech or incitement to terrorism is not a peccadillo. In order to avoid, combat and remove such material, we need to strengthen the measures. This is also important in order to protect minors", said Mr Bataller.

Given the impact that digital platforms already have on our daily life and the risks they pose, it is essential to have clear and harmonised legislation all over Europe. "We need a healthy mix between regulatory measures and self-regulatory measures", emphasised Mr Bataller.

The EESC believes that online platforms themselves should provide users with the tools to display fake news and thus make other users aware that the veracity of the content has been put into question.

Due to the potential consequences of too much concentration of economic power, the economic growth of some digital platforms also deserves increased vigilance.

Last but not least, the EESC believes that for a more coherent approach the E-Commerce Directive, the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive and the Directive on Misleading and Comparative Advertising should be revised.