

Grand Départ of the Tour de France – EESC discusses clean mobility and welcomes journalist Alberto Toscano: we can all contribute to a fairer society



Cycling and human values were honoured at the debate on clean mobility organised by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and its TEN section on 3 July 2019. On the eve of the “Grand Départ” from Brussels of the 2019 Tour de France, the house of Europe’s civil society welcomed Alberto Toscano, author of the book on the incredible story of Italian cycling champion Gino Bartali during the fascist regime.

A bike for a fairer society

“The good is done, but it is not said. And certain medals hang on the soul, not on the jacket,” used to say **Gino Bartali**, the Italian cycling champion whose incredible story was told in the book “A bike against Nazi barbarism, the incredible destiny of the champion Gino Bartali” by journalist **Alberto Toscano**. Gino Bartali always opposed the Mussolini regime and, by hiding

confidential documents in his bike, saved the lives of hundreds of Jews in Italy during the Holocaust. He was a discreet hero. Even once the Second World War was over, he never talked about this story.

“This book shows a person’s commitment to the Jews people – hence to tolerance and an open society, which are foundations of peace. Peace should never be taken for granted,” pointed out the EESC President, **Luca Jahier**. “Antisemitism is right now on the rise and this is unacceptable. This book helps us not to forget our history as a basis for moving towards a more just and open society, and shows the contribution everyone can make,” he added.

On the same page was **Mr Toscano**, who warned: “Those who are attacking Europe today should think of the lessons drawn from the war that are, or were, part of their own family’s memories. This is certainly not a good reason to accept everything that Europe does, but it is a great reason to avoid destroying everything.”

Cycling, an example of sustainable mobility

Cycling is a sport that is often associated with fundamental human values, but is, first and foremost, a clean mode of transport. “Cycling – and green mobility – are in line with the focus on sustainable development of my presidency,” indicated **Mr Jahier**.

The Committee has always been very active in this field, promoting environmentally friendly policies and the use of public transport, but also focusing on cycling and walking for the individual wellbeing. “We were at the forefront of raising awareness of the need to do more on urban mobility and we highlighted the potential of cycling, which has now become one of our priorities,” declared **Pierre Jean Coulon**, President of the Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN).

Clean mobility for a sustainable future

“Accessible, clean and available energy and transport are necessary for the life of Europeans,” highlighted **Mr Coulon**, who made it clear that the challenge was twofold. On one hand, it is extremely important for people to change their habits. We have to shift from an individual to a collective mindset and tap into the potential of public transport and new forms of mobility, such as carpooling and electric vehicles. On the other hand, the political authorities have to facilitate this shift, for example by making it less bureaucratic and more affordable. “Clean energy and mobility are the future of Europe,” he maintained.

These topics were discussed during the debate on clean mobility, which also included, among the speakers, **Philippe Close**, mayor of the city of Brussels and **Christophe Najdovski**, deputy mayor of Paris. The focus was on action taken at local level, as regions and local communities often play a key role in promoting sustainable policies and in innovation.

Clean mobility for a healthier planet and healthier people. “We need to

strengthen the voice of “normal” people, as the President of the Italian Republic Sergio Mattarella said, those who work on a daily basis for the good of others, of our society,” concluded **Mr Jahier**. “These are the people we should be talking about. *Forza buoni!*”

Background

For further information on the work carried out by the EESC’s TEN section, please consult our [website](#).