

# The Western Balkans Civil Society Forum demands a renewed impetus for the EU's enlargement policy



The 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the Western Balkans Civil Society Forum, which took place in Tirana on 16 and 17 April, concluded with a call for the next Commission to maintain the Western Balkans enlargement policy as one of its priorities in the interest of both the region and of the EU.

More than 180 representatives of civil society organisations from the Western Balkans and the EU took part in the event, organised by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) with the support of the European Commission and the Regional Cooperation Council.

**Luca Jahier**, President of the EESC, observed in his opening speech that *the enlargement, and in particular the spread of the EU's democratic values and legal standards to the Western Balkans region, is in the interest of both our partners from the region and of the EU.*

Deputy Minister **Sokol Dedja** added that *regional cooperation is not only intergovernmental cooperation, but also between societies* and praised the EESC for the important role it plays in increasing public support for EU enlargement.

Director **Angelina Eichhorst** (European External Action Service) emphasised that *CSOs are key to fostering stronger commitment from political leaders and societies towards a change in political culture, towards more democracy, transparency and the rule of law, towards more sustainable economies.*

According to Ms **Majlinda Bregu**, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, *citizens of the Western Balkans believe that civil society is the most functional body that can hold the governments accountable.*

## **Freedom of expression, trade and youth**

One of the major concerns expressed in the Forum was the **shrinking space for civil society** in a number of countries in the region. Participants emphasised in the final declaration that “freedom of expression and free media are prerequisites for establishing solid democracies” and condemned the attacks on civil society organisations (CSO) by representatives of governments and government-funded media. It was also agreed that national Economic and Social Councils should play an important role in the implementation of economic programmes. Collective bargaining, as a key mechanism for creating a fair and sustainable wage system and combating the gender pay gap, was strongly supported.

Trade issues were also discussed by the participants, who insisted on the

need for further integration of regional economies by lifting all unjustified barriers imposed on imports of goods and services and attracting private investments through a favourable and more predictable business environment.

Regarding youth-related policies, the final declaration encouraged the authorities of the Western Balkans partners to invest “considerably” in quality as a way to reduce youth unemployment, but also to ensure that young people are better integrated in the Western Balkans, as this was the only way to “mitigate their tendency to emigrate”.

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## March 2019 – Annual inflation down to 1.4% in the euro area – Stable at 1.6% in the EU

The **euro area** annual inflation rate was 1.4% in March 2019, down from 1.5% in February 2019. A year earlier, the rate was 1.4%. **European Union** annual inflation was 1.6% in March 2019, stable compared to February 2019. A year earlier, the rate was 1.6%. These figures are published by **Eurostat**, the **statistical office of the European Union**.

[Full text available on EUROSTAT website](#)

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## February 2019 – Euro area international trade in goods surplus €17.9 bn – €2.7 bn deficit for EU28

### **Euro area**

The first estimate for **euro area** (EA19) exports of goods to the rest of the world in February 2019 was €183.3 billion, an increase of 4.4% compared with February 2018 (€175.6 bn). Imports from the rest of the world stood at €165.4 bn, a rise of 4.0% compared with February 2018 (€159.0 bn). As a result, the **euro area** recorded a €17.9 bn surplus in trade in goods with the rest of the world in February 2019, compared with + €16.5 bn in February 2018. **Intra-euro area** trade rose to €160.3 bn in February 2019, up by 3.4% compared with February 2018.

[Full text available on EUROSTAT website](#)

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## New ACP-EU partnership: EU discusses future EU-Caribbean relations

Today's discussions form part of broader regional consultations and are focused on the Caribbean's specific needs and priorities for the coming years. The outcome will guide the negotiators' work in creating a tailor-made EU-Caribbean partnership within the future ACP-EU agreement.

Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development Neven **Mimica**, who is the EU's chief negotiator said: *"Today's discussions confirmed a shared vision for the future and a good understanding of the pressing challenges we need to tackle together. In this spirit, the EU's relationship with the Caribbean will deepen under our future ACP-EU agreement and open up fresh opportunities"*.

Professor Robert **Dussey**, the ACP's chief negotiator, Chair of the Ministerial Central Negotiating Group, and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Africa integration of Togo, said: *"These regional consultations proved to bring valuable perspectives on this region's priorities to our talks. Productive exchanges between the two parties will contribute enormously to the current negotiations for the new post-Cotonou Agreement, and especially to those which will begin on the Caribbean Regional Protocol. Today's meeting follows the consultation held in Samoa with our ACP Pacific partners in February. The Africa consultation is due to take place soon in Eswatini."*

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica, Kamina **Johnson-Smith**, added: *"Within the framework of the ongoing ACP-EU post-Cotonou negotiations, the Government of Jamaica is pleased to host the regional consultations for the Caribbean and to have the opportunity to jointly explore with our EU partners some of the urgent issues related to our developmental aspirations."*

### **Background**

The Cotonou Agreement currently governing ACP-EU relations is due to expire in 2020. Negotiations on a new ACP-EU partnership were launched in New York on 28 September 2018 in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly.

The two first series of talks mainly focused on the common foundation at ACP-EU level. This contains the values and principles that bring the EU and ACP countries together. It also indicates the strategic priority areas that the two sides intend to prospectively work on together. In the future agreement, on top of the foundation there will be three action-oriented regional pillars to focus on each region's specific needs. Through the future partnership, EU and ACP countries will seek closer political cooperation on the world stage. Together, they represent more than half of all UN member countries and unite over 1.5 billion people.

**For more information**

[Q&A on the future EU-ACP partnership](#)

[Press release – New ACP-EU Partnership: EU and Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific Leaders intensify the regional talks in Samoa](#)

[EU Negotiation directives](#)

[ACP Negotiation directives](#)

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## **EIOPA identifies areas for improvement in the supervision of Prudent Person Rule compliance by institutions for occupational retirement provision**

- *Peer review examined supervisory practices of national competent authorities in their assessment of how institutions for occupational retirement provision invest their capital in the best interest of their members and beneficiaries*
- *A risk-based approach or a risk-based approach complemented with quantitative limits is more effective than a compliance-based approach*
- *Supervisory practices are determined by legislative frameworks, types of scheme and the maturity of the pension industry*
- *The review resulted in 27 recommended actions for 19 NCAs in 16 countries*

Today, the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA) published the findings of its peer review examining how national competent authorities (NCAs) ensure that institutions for occupational retirement provision (IORPs) comply with the Prudent Person Rule.

The review considered the basis for the interpretation of the Prudent Person Rule, legal and regulatory frameworks, information gathered for assessment, assessment methods and supervisory actions taken. The review was conducted among 27 NCAs from 24 European Economic Area countries.

Institutions for occupational retirement provision should invest their capital in the best interest of members and beneficiaries, i.e. prudently. The IORP Directive therefore requires these institutions to adhere to the Prudent Person Rule and lists a limited number of investment rules that must be respected by all IORPs.

This report presents the findings of the peer review, including identified best practices and recommended actions.

The review found that supervisory approaches are largely determined by the manner in which the Prudent Person Rule is embedded in national legislation. Supervisory approaches also vary according to type of scheme (defined benefit or defined contribution) and maturity of the pension industry.

NCA's that have adopted a risk-based approach or a prudent person plus approach, i.e. a risk-based approach complemented with quantitative limits, use more sophisticated tools and perform their supervisory activities in a risk-based and forward-looking manner.

NCA's using a compliance-based approach can enhance their supervision by including risk-based and forward-looking tools in their supervisory practices.

Areas requiring action from NCA's were related supervisory structures and resources, information gathering methods, application of the look-through methodology and supervisory assessment of issues related to the Prudent Person Rule.

EIOPA will assess the NCA's' compliance with the recommended actions and continue its work to improve supervisory practices in this area at European level.

A shorter [Executive Summary](#), the [full report](#) and the [peer review methodology](#) can be obtained via EIOPA's website.

## **Background**

The European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA) regularly conducts peer reviews of supervisory practices, working in close cooperation with national competent authorities (NCA's) to strengthen supervisory convergence and the capacity of NCA's to conduct high-quality and effective supervision. Peer reviews are conducted in the context of EIOPA's oversight work on the basis of the Methodology for Conducting Peer Reviews. NCA representatives form part of the peer review team.

The scope of this peer review covered only those NCA's with IORPs operating in their country during the reference period.

The reference period of this peer review was 2014 – 2016 under the IORP Directive. As the implementation of the IORP II Directive does not substantially alter the rules for the Prudent Person Rule, the analysis in this report remains valid following the introduction of the IORP II Directive.

The [mandate for 2019 of the Review Panel](#) can be obtained via the following link to EIOPA's Website.