

The WhiteDoveWay, a path of peace across Europe



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has adopted in its March plenary session on 20 March, an opinion proposing an EU-led global peace-building strategy which includes the creation of the WhiteDoveWay, a path of peace from Northern Ireland to Nicosia, to promote dialogue, reconciliation and conflict prevention following in the initial footsteps of the sixth century Irish pilgrim Columbanus.

The European Union was built on a mission of peace for which it won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. This has allowed many new generations of Europeans to be far removed from the reality of war. Now the time has come for the EU, the greatest peace project in modern history, to become a global leader building peace in Europe and the world. This is the main message of the own-initiative opinion [The WhiteDoveWay – Proposal for an EU-led global peace-building strategy](#) that will be adopted by the EESC. As stated by **Jane Morrice**, rapporteur of the opinion, *the EU has a moral obligation, above and beyond geopolitical or economic interests, to find ways to protect the lives of innocent victims caught up in conflict, particularly children.*

To this aim, the EESC urges the EU to create and finance a new Global Peace-building Strategy that would include as a main feature the creation of the

WhiteDoveWay, a path of peace stretching 5 000 km across Europe, from Northern Ireland to Nicosia, capital of Cyprus. This route would follow in the footsteps of Columbanus, the sixth century Irish pilgrim described by EU founding father **Robert Schuman** as the patron saint of all those who seek to build a united Europe who travelled from Ireland to Italy.

The WhiteDoveWay would go beyond the original route and would pass through territories profoundly touched by war and conflict, such as the Western Front, South Tyrol and the Balkans, linking people and places along the way. The proposal includes the setting up of Peace Centres and branches to northern, eastern, central and southern Europe so walkers can select routes to visit as many sites as they see fit.

A cultural route accessible to all

The EESC proposal also includes an online portal creating a virtual reality and interactive experience with audio-visual components from each site that would be used as an educational tool to teach peace-building in schools throughout the EU. To this end, the EESC calls for the creation of an EU WhiteDoveWay task force to initiate consultations with local and regional partners and other established routes such as the [WesternFrontWay](#) and the cultural route proposed by the Friends of Columbanus. This task force would also be in charge of establishing closer collaboration with international organisations such as the United Nations, UNESCO, OSCE and the Council of Europe and preparing the logistics for a path from Ireland to Cyprus.

The initiative proposed by the EESC includes the creation of European Centres for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and Nicosia and learning hubs connecting strategic sites along the WhiteDoveWay, as well as the recognition by the EU of the White Dove symbol as the “trademark” for all EU peace projects and increased obligation on peace projects to publicise EU support. As pointed out by **Jane Morrice**: *By providing a route map for an EU-led Global Peace-building Strategy, modelled on the EU PEACE Programme in Northern Ireland and the border counties, alongside a physical and virtual peace trail for travellers, the WhiteDoveWay will serve as a beacon showing a way to live, learn and connect in an increasingly globalised world.*

To achieve these goals, the EESC recalls that every euro invested in peace saves EUR 7 in defence and urges the EU to prioritise peace-building in its proposals for the new EU budget (MFF 2021-27). The new EU budget should not only focus on conflict prevention, and greater coherence and cohesion between internal and external trade, aid, development and security policies but also secure and increase resources on cultural diplomacy, peace journalism and intercultural dialogue.

The opinion also underlines the need for more structured involvement of civil society at all levels of decision-making as a key element for the success in the implementation of the strategy, with a special focus on women and youth.

According to the EESC opinion, the new budget should reflect the success of ERASMUS and place greater emphasis on Information, Communication and Education (ICE) strategies, particularly the use of both traditional and

social media to engage citizens at every level in the EU peace building effort.

In **Jane Morrice's** words: *Using the White Dove symbol to signpost the direction of travel, the WhiteDoveWay would not only be a legacy to EU peace-building throughout the world but also a new vision for the EU and a message of hope in increasingly challenging times.*