



ECO

Brussels, 5 February 2026

To the members of the Section for  
**Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion**

The secretary-general of the European Economic and Social Committee is pleased to enclose the

## MINUTES

of the 244th meeting  
of the

**Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion,**

held at the Committee building in Brussels  
on

**5 February 2026**

The Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO) held its 244th meeting at the Committee building in Brussels from 10:36 to 16:42 on Thursday 5 February 2026. The session was chaired by the section president, **Elena Calistru**.

During the morning session, the section held a public debate entitled **Bulgaria, welcome to the euro area! – Embracing the common currency in a changing world**. Please refer to **Annex 1** to the minutes (EESC-2026-00388-00-00-ANN-REF) for a detailed report on this public debate. The video recording of this debate and presentations can be consulted on the webpage of the event.

The afternoon session started with a debate with **Strategic Foresight & Policy Priorities, European Commission, with the aim of providing input to the Commission for its upcoming strategic foresight report focused on the future of the EU in a changing world**. Please refer to **Annex 2** to the minutes (EESC-2026-00388-01-00-ANN-REF) for a detailed report on this debate.

1. The agenda was adopted (EESC-2025-04320-00-02-CONV-TRA).

2. The minutes of the 243rd meeting, held on 7 January 2026 (EESC-2025-04320-00-00-PV-TRA), were approved.

3. The section discussed and adopted the following opinions:

**ECO/688 – 2026 European Semester – Autumn Package**

Referral

COM(2025) 955 final

EESC-2025-03794-00-00-PA-TRA

Rapporteur: **Luca Jahier (IT-III)**

Adopted unanimously by 66 votes.

**ECO/695 – Revision of the tobacco taxation Directive**

Referral

COM(2025) 580 final

COM(2025) 581 final

EESC-2025-02514-00-00-PA-TRA

Rapporteur: **Matteo Borsani (IT-I)**

Adopted by 57 votes to 8 with 3 abstentions.

**ECO/689 – The Island Dimension in EU Policies**

Exploratory opinion requested by the Cypriot presidency

EESC-2025-03398-00-00-PA-TRA

Rapporteur: **Ioannis Vardakastanis (EL-III)**

Adopted unanimously by 56 votes.

**ECO/690 – EPP0 and OLAF access to VAT information at Union level**

Referral

COM(2025) 685 final

## DISCUSSIONS ON ADOPTED OPINIONS

Discussion	Points raised	Amendments	Vote
<p><b>ECO/688</b> 2026 European Semester – Autumn Package</p> <p>Referral COM(2025) 953 final</p> <p>EESC-2025-03794_00 00-PA-TRA Rapporteur: Lucia Jahier (IT-III)</p> <p><b>Members:</b> – Marco Wagner – Theo Timmermans – Javier Duiz Ortiz – Philip von Brockdorff – Sjoerd Patonik</p> <p><b>European Commission:</b>  <b>(DG REFORM)</b></p>	<p><b>By the rapporteur:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 2026 European Semester Autumn Package strives with Europe market by geopolitical turbulence, technological revolution and profound demographic shifts.</li> <li>The EESC's 18 recommendations could be summarised in five political priorities:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>investment at scale. Europe cannot compete, innovate, or protect its citizens without more investment.</li> <li>deep and integrated capital markets. The fragmentation of EU financial markets is a barrier to growth.</li> <li>strengthened economic and social governance. We call for a revised Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure, a Strengthened Social Scoreboard, improved debt sustainability analysis, and innovative well-being indicators.</li> <li>human capital as strategic infrastructure. We welcome the new recommendation on human capital.</li> <li>European defence cooperation embedded in a fiscal and strategic EU framework.</li> </ol> </li> <li>Finally, the European Semester must be democratically accountable, transparent and anchored in broad and active societal participation.</li> </ul> <p><b>By members:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regarding point 1.8 and the social scoreboard, what does "streamlining" refer to?</li> <li>Financial supervisory authorities do not currently view competitiveness and growth as part of their mandate and this is important in order to strike the right balance between financial stability and supporting the European economy in moving forward.</li> <li>Simplification is necessary; however, the core challenge in the EU remains the lack of investment. In addition, the EU needs to invest seriously in artificial intelligence and its ethical use.</li> </ul>	No amendments	<p>Opinion adopted: 66 for, 0 against, 0 abstention</p>

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EESC-2025-04282-00-00-PA-TRA  
Rapporteur: Justyna Kalina Ochędzan (PL-III)  
Adopted by 32 votes with 1 abstention.

Please find in annex below the detailed report of the discussions.

#### 4. Organisation of the section's new work

##### 4.1 New opinions

No new opinions

##### 4.2 New delegation

	GROUP I	GROUP II	GROUP III
<b>EUROFI High Level Seminar - Cyprus 2026</b>	BLESE, Rihards (LV) ROBYNS DE SCHNEIDAUER, Wautier (BE)	BARRERA CHAMORRO, Maria del Carmen (ES) WOLFF, Romain (LU)	CALISTRU, Elena (RO) LIBERT, Thierry (FR) SCHAFFENRATH, Martin (AT)

##### 5. Upcoming events

- 25 February 2026 - public debate on Cohesion Policy 2028-2034: A New Fund, a New Framework, a New Role for Civil Society?
- 10 March 2026 – public hearing Supplementary pensions to the benefit of EU citizens, in the framework of the opinion ECO/695

6. Date of the next meeting: **Wednesday 25 February 2026 – 10:30 - 17:30, JDE 62**

Discussion	Points raised	Assessments	Votes
	<p><b>Points raised</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Capital Markets Union remains incomplete and significant structural barriers persist, particularly in the areas of insolvency, taxation and supervision. The EU needs to pursue policy measures to ensure adequate funding and the role of the EIB and national development banks, under the coordination of the European Commission, could be essential.</li> <li>A concrete social scoreboard is necessary while building on the indicators proposed by the Joint Research Centre (JRC). Competitiveness, productivity and the social model do not contradict each other, but they are mutually reinforcing.</li> <li>By the Commission representative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>welcome the opinion, as it resonates with the main messages of the Autumn Package. This Semester cycle marks the end of the recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and lays the groundwork for the next Substantial Financial Framework (MFF).</li> <li>The Competitiveness Compass remains our main framework. Regarding the competitiveness coordination tool, it is still under development, but we will ensure that it operates in tandem with the European Semester.</li> <li>As regards the regional dimension, in the Spring Package, you can expect an assessment of reform and investment needs at regional level, with a strong focus on productivity.</li> <li>Concerning stakeholder engagement, we are committed to ensuring the strongest possible level of involvement.</li> <li>On housing and the scaling-up of innovation and digital activities, you can expect robust analysis and targeted recommendations in the Spring Package.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Replicates of the rapporteur: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Autumn Package marks the beginning of a process that becomes increasingly complex and structured within EU economic governance. The European Semester, together with the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs), is expected to become a bridge to the next MFF.</li> <li>Regarding the Social scoreboard, our position is clearly set out in recommendations 1.4 and 1.5. We call for greater clarity on the role of the Social scoreboard and for the JRC report to become the basis for a new, unified set of indicators linked to a performance-based MFF.</li> <li>The US Venture Capital Market is based on a unique federal authorisation system. The EU should follow a similar approach by establishing a single</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		

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Discussion	Points raised	Assessments	Votes
<p><b>Discussion</b></p> <p><b>Members:</b> Florian Marín José Manuel Recio Ramo Antonio García del Riego Marinya Matheva Adriane Gahleitner Athanasios Loupasidis Gonçalo Leão Xavier</p> <p><b>European Commission:</b> (DG TAXUD)</p>	<p><b>Points raised</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>modernisation framework across all 27 Member States under a unified legislative regime.</li> <li>Education is a core element. We therefore welcome the Commission's proposal on human capital and hope it will have a clear impact on the CSRs.</li> <li>By the rapporteur: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>support the aim to raise minimum excise duty rates - taxes levied on specific goods;</li> <li>support the broadened list to include e-cigarette liquids, chewing and nasal tobacco, nicotine pouches, other nicotine products, and raw tobacco</li> </ul> </li> <li>By members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>importance for facilitating the change the tobacco industry and socio-economic impact;</li> <li>economic dimension and on its impact on the rural areas (small producers);</li> <li>inclusive dialogue is necessary for this transition;</li> <li>support for the opinion, warning of the dangers of proposing excessive tax;</li> <li>this is a smart regulation, need to fight illicit trade;</li> <li>possible negative impact of the EESC proposal (health sector view);</li> <li>this is taxation proposal, it has good and important factors;</li> <li>support for opinion;</li> </ul> </li> <li>By the Commission representative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is Commission proposal that covers all main objectives of the Commission - reasonable rates, progressive rates for certain products;</li> <li>recognised that VMS are in very different situations;</li> <li>stresses the importance of protecting young people</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>No amendments</p>	<p>Opinion adopted - 57 for, 8 against, 1 abstentions</p>
<p><b>Discussion</b></p> <p><b>Members:</b> Athanasios Loupasidis Hanna Markhuba-Knyvilka Kyrillia Heller-Jorge Viola Fries</p>	<p><b>Points raised</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>recognises that there is a need for a systemic approach</li> <li>believes that EU islands must no longer be treated as peripheral territories but as front-line regions for Europe's sovereignty;</li> <li>calls for the establishment of a dedicated Union strategy for islands (Islands Pact);</li> <li>calls for a specific legislative framework (Islands Act);</li> <li>asks the effective implementation of an insolvency clause</li> </ul>	<p>No amendments</p>	<p>Opinion adopted - 56 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions</p>

EESC-2026-00188-00-00-PV-MTR (EN) 6/12

ANNEX

ATTENDANCE LIST

List of members			
Mr/Ms	Present	Absent	Apologies
ALBU, Laura	X		
ALEXISIEVA, STOYANOVA, Daniela (Rule 87 from DIMITROV, Pamen)	X		
ANDERSSON, Knister	X		
ARGYRIDES, Panikos (Rule 87 from MATSAS, Andreas)	X		
ATTARD MONTALTO, Jackie			X
AZKUNAGA HERNANDEZ, Eider (Rule 87 from ESPELT ALBA, Roser)	X		
BALDZENS, Edits	X		
BARRERA CHAMORRO, Maria del Carmen	X		
BARRROS VALE, Paulo	X		
BÄUMLER, Christian	X		
BÉGUINET, Christophe	X		
BIEGON, Donnika			X
BILOUX, Stéphane (Rule 86.2 from GUERINI Giuseppe - ECO(689)			X
BLÉ, David (Rule 87 from BRISHOUAL, Rachel)	X		
BLISE, Richards	X		
BOGDAN, Luka	X		
BOJIC, Mirica	X		
BONJEAN, Marie-Charles	X		
BORSANI, Marco	X		
BRATIS, Dimitrios	X		
BRISHOUAL, Rachel			X
BULK, Marijijn		X	
BYRNE, Peter			X
CALISTRU Elena, Alexandra	X		
CAMISA, Cristian		X	
CHAMPAS, Paraschos		X	
CHARRY, Philippe (Rule 86.2 from BÉGUINET, Christophe - ECO(605)	X		
CONTRASTO, Emilio			X
DABU, Adelina	X		
DANDEA, Petru Sorin	X		
DARABAN, Daniela-Raluca	X		
DEBAY, Pascal (Rule 85.3 from EISCHEN, Veronique)	X		

Discussion	European Commission:	Future related	Amendments	Vote
<p>EEESC-2025-01596-00-00194-TRA Rapporteur: Ileana Vardoulas (EL-111)</p> <p>EECO/690 EPP0 and OLAF access to VAT information at Union level Referal COM(2025) 685 final EEESC-2025-04282-00-00194-TRA Rapporteur: Justyna Kalina Ochodziej (PL-111)</p>	<p>TOG REGUL*</p> <p>European Commission: COG TAKUB*</p>	<p>By members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcomes the opinion for islands: demographic and climate-related constraints such as isolation, rising sea high transport and energy costs, housing pressure, labour shortages, improving connectivity and infrastructure in island territories is essential for territorial cohesion;</li> <li>• there are also islands on lakes and not only in archipelagos</li> <li>• By the Commission representative: details to the EEESC for the strong support and the recommendations for the islands;</li> <li>• there will be a distinct islands strategy before Summer;</li> <li>• a call for evidence will be launched in the beginning of March;</li> <li>• islands are important and face structural challenges</li> </ul> <p>By the rapporteur:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Commission supports the Commission proposal that provides a legal basis for the exchange of information and access to VAT data, enhancing the EU's ability to combat fraud;</li> <li>• fraudulent transactions totalling €12.7 billion, approx. €2.5 billion in VAT loss (based on a 20% VAT rate);</li> <li>• stressed the importance of fighting VAT fraud</li> </ul> <p>By the Commission representative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reducing VAT Gap is essential;</li> <li>• extensive criminal networks require improved information exchange at the EU level</li> </ul>	<p>No amendments</p>	<p>Opinion adopted: 39 for, 0 against, 1 abstention</p>

ŠKORJA, Grzegorz	X			
SIPKO, Juri	X			
SMOLE, Jože (Rule 86.2 from ANDERSSON, Kristian - ECO/605)		X		
STILLER, Klaus-Peter	X			
SVENTEK, David	X			
TAMIKVAITIS, Vilius	X			
TEDER, Reet	X			
TIMMERMAN, Theo	X			
IZOTZE, Zoi	X			
VALENTIN, Olivier		X		
VARDAKASTANIS, Ioannis	X			
VASK, Kaia	X			
VERNICOS, George			X	
VILELA Pires, Helder Jorge	X			
VON BROCKDORFF, Philip	X			
VORBACH, Judith		X		
WAGENER, Marco	X			
WEBER, Irina			X	
WOLFF, Romain			X	
YIAPANIS, Anastas (Rule 86.2 from CHAMPAS, Panagiotis - ECO/689)		X		
YILDIRIM, Ozlem (Rule 87 from LIBAERT, Thierry)	X			
ZARINA, Katrina	X			

#### European Commission

SG REFORM	ECO/688
DG TAXUD	ECO/605
DG REGIO	ECO/689
DG TAXUD	ECO/690
DG ECFIN	Bulgaria debate
SG	Debate on strategic foresight

#### Secretariat of the European Economic and Social Committee

ECO/605, ECO/690
Debate on strategic foresight
Bulgaria debate
ECO/689

DEOUBARA, Jason		X			
DE LEEUW, Rudy		X			
DIAMANTOPOULOS, Konstantinos		X			
DIMITRIADOU, Savroula		X			
DIMITROV, Plamen				X	
DOZ ORRI, Javier		X			
EISCHEN, Veronique				X	
ESPULT ALBA, Roser				X	
GARCIA DEL RIEGO, Antonio		X			
GEISEN, Norbert		X			
GOBINŠ, Andriš		X			
GOTZ, Nadia				X	
GUERINI, Giuseppe		X			
HADINOŠ, Miroslav				X	
HAKEN, Roman		X			
HANŽEVACKI, Marija				X	
HARTMAN RADOVA, Jana (Rule 86.2 from SVENTEK, David - ECO/688)			X		
HEIMBACH, Sabine				X	
HELLAM, Mall		X			
HENDRICKX, Luc		X			
HIDVÉGHINÉ PULAY, Brigitta		X			
HOLST, Sif		X			
JÄKERÖJENEN, Eeva-Liisa (Rule 86.2 from MINCHEVA, Mariya - ECO/689)			X		
IOANNIDIS, Athanasios		X			
JAHIER, Lucea		X			
JANKOWSKI, Rafał Bogusław (Rule 86.2 from BALDZĘNS, Emilia - ECO/605)				X	
KINDBERG, Merte		X			
KOMORÓCZKI, István (Rule 85.3 from BYRNE, Peter)		X			
KRUPAVICIENE, Kristina		X			
LAMPERGER, Daniel			X		
LE BRETON, Marie-Pierre (Rule 85.3 from ATTARD MONTALTO, Jackie)		X			
LÉFÈVRE, Christophe		X			
LEITÄNE, Katrina		X			
LIBAERT, Thierry				X	
LOBO XAVIER, Gonçalo		X			
MACHYVA, Emil		X			
MALLIA, Stefano		X			
MARIN, Florian		X			

MARKKULA-KIVISILTA, Hanna		X			
MATIAS, Andreas				X	
MAVROMMATIS, Manthos				X	
MCKEOWN, Patricia			X		
MCLOUGHLIN, Michael		X			
MILTOVIĆA, Baiba (Rule 85.3 from BIJOUX, Stéphane)		X			
MINCHEVA, Mariya		X			
MISSLBECK-WINBERG, Christiane			X		
MOÑE, Andrea		X			
MOUSOUROUJIS, Konstantinos (Rule 86.2 from DIAMANTOPOULOS, Konstantinos - ECO/689)			X		
MURRESAN, Marinel Dănuț		X			
MULTI, Paolo (Rule 87 from ROTTIGNI, Marco Elio)		X			
O'CONNOR, Jack		X			
OCHEDZAN, Justyna Kalina		X			
OSTROWSKI, Krzysztof		X			
PALMIERI, Stefano		X			
PASCHALIDES, Leonidas (Rule 87 from MAVROMMATIS, Manthos)		X			
PATER, Krzysztof		X			
PENTTINEN, Markus		X			
PIERU, Pieris				X	
PIEROTTI, Christian		X			
PISTOJNIK, Alida		X			
POCIVAVEK, Jakob Kristof		X			
POLACZEK, Jan (Rule 87 from JANKOWSKI, Rafał Bogusław)		X			
POLYMERPOULOS, Vasilios		X			
POTTER, Jean-Michel (Rule 85.3 from HEIMBACH, Sabine)		X			
QUARFVUJEG, Winand			X		
REHSE, Sebastian		X			
REHLIKA, Johannes				X	
ROBYNS, Wauter		X			
ROCHE RAMO, José Manuel (Rule 86.2 from YARDAKASTANIS, Ioannis - ECO/605)		X			
ROMELE, Linda (Rule 85.3 from CONTRASTO, Emilio)		X			
ROTTIGNI, Marco Elio				X	
ROUSINOVA, Zornitsa		X			
SAGRAMOLA, Sabrina		X			
SCHAFFENRATH, Martin		X			
SCHWANNECKE, Holger			X		