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Building Tomorrow: Addressing Europe's Construction Sector Challenges: EU Social Partners & Civil Society's Inputs

FIEC, EFBWW and EU experts summoned at the EESC to discuss potential solutions for the main challenges faced by the construction industry namely the housing crisis, the labour shortages and the forthcoming revision of the Public Procurement Directives and subcontracting.

On 24th June, amidst the spreading **housing crisis**, and with the aim to explore ways to address the main challenges impacting the construction industry, the European Economic and Social Committee (**EESC**) - in cooperation with the European Construction Industry Federation (**FIEC**) and the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (**EFBWW**) - hosted the conference "*Building Tomorrow: Addressing Europe's Construction Sector Challenges - Social Partners & Civil Society's Inputs*".

3 lines of debate to identify challenges and solutions

Organised around **3 panel discussions**, the debate hosted FIEC and EFBWW representatives to share the views of the employers on the following key issues:

- ***Affordable housing***
- ***Labour shortages***
- ***Revision of Public Procurement Directives and abusive subcontracting***

Moderated by Laurențiu Plosceanu, EESC Vice-President and FIEC Vice-President for Communication & Enlargement, and opened by EESC President, Oliver Röpke, the roundtable included interventions by the European Commission, the European Labour Authority (ELA) and the European Parliament. All speakers agreed that a coordinated EU-wide approach to affordable, sustainable and decent housing is necessary, as well as a strategic focus on housing, productivity and appropriate financing instruments in the next **Multiannual Financial Framework** (MFF). Abusive subcontracting and its negative impact on fair competition and workers' rights were also mentioned several times during the event as one of the major challenges of the construction industry. Addressing these challenges, and under multiple perspectives, requires shared commitment and action from the EU institutions, national governments, local stakeholders, and a strong social dialogue between social partners at both national and European level.

Towards a resilient construction sector to the benefit of all

Strong convergence was expressed on the main messages, despite different views on how to manage complex issues in the most effective manner. Speakers stressed that the EESC is no doubt one of the best platforms to provide the opportunity to keep the discussions ongoing.

The first panel highlighted how challenges in housing construction can be tackled through innovative construction methods, government incentives and streamlined regulation. The second panel discussed on how project delay and higher costs can be dealt through improving working conditions and investing in training programmes. It also illustrated the importance of the *EU Social Dialogue* for improving the competitiveness of the industry and the close cooperation between the sectoral partners, FIEC and EFBWW, representing the employers and the workers respectively. The aim is to help identifying suitable solutions with a bottom-up approach. The interventions recalled the added value of common actions (such EU co-funded projects jointly undertaken by the 2 federations), and the results achieved together, particularly, the "[*Joint Declaration on Labour and Skills Shortages*](#)".

"The housing crisis is one of the most pressing challenges Europe faces today, and the construction sector has a key role to play. However, labour shortage in the sector is a reality. If there are no hands to build and renovate, no solution is possible to solve the crisis. Any answer considered must be accompanied by strong social dialogue and measures to protect construction workers: quality jobs, direct employment and good working conditions are essential to retain and attract more workers. This is not hard to get: limit subcontracting, ban intermediaries in posting, and on public procurement: abolish the 'lowest price option', and make the application of collective agreements mandatory", remarked **Nina Kreutzman**, President of the EFBWW Standing Committee Building.

Finally, the third session called for strengthening the fight against illegal practices, in particular in subcontracting, an increased use of the *"most economically advantageous tender"* in the award of public contracts and a better enforcement of the existing provisions, in order to protect workers and ensure fair competition.

"Without a competitive and resilient construction sector in Europe, all the other developments in the energy, dual and water infrastructures, defence, medical infrastructure etc. will be under a huge question mark!", said VP **Laurențiu Plosceanu** on the vital impact of our industry not only on the EU GDP, but also on people's daily lives and safety. The construction industry is more than just building houses and infrastructure. It is about working to foster the EU economy competitiveness and provide a key contribution to reach the sustainability targets.

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FIEC represents, via its 32 national member federations in 27 countries (24 EU & Norway, Switzerland, and Ukraine), construction enterprises of all sizes, i.e., small, and medium-sized enterprises as well as "global players", carrying out all forms of building and civil engineering activities. Visit [website](#).

EFBWW represents the trade unions in construction, wood, forestry, and building materials in Europe. Visit [website](#).