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28.4.2026

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Connecting Europe Facility for the period 2028-2034, amending Regulation (EU) 2024/1679 and repealing Regulation (EU) 2021/1153

(COM(2025) 547 final)

(C/2026/1971)

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Legislative procedure	EU Law Tracker
Referral	Council of the European Union, 19.9.2025 European Parliament, 6.11.2025
Legal basis	Articles 172(1), 194(2) and 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
European Commission documents	COM(2025) 547 final Summary of COM(2025) 547 final
Section responsible	Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society
Adopted in section	12.12.2025
Adopted at plenary session	22.1.2026
Plenary session No	602
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	163/0/1

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) welcomes the recognition of the need for investments, in particular the urgent need to strengthen the EU's resilience and improve security. However, funding is insufficient. Therefore, an increase in CEF III funding to at least 100 billion must be ensured. In addition, CEF funding should be linked to the fulfilment of European value creation criteria, as well as social and environmental criteria. Shorter supply chains are a sensible goal to pursue, for geopolitical reasons.

1.2. The Committee considers it appropriate to include, in the next programming period, investments extending beyond the EU, through the expansion of TEN-T corridors to candidate countries. Nevertheless, projects within the EU must remain the main focus of funding.

1.3. According to the proposal, the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) should focus even more strongly on cross-border investments. While this direction is desirable in itself, investments implemented within a single Member State should not be entirely excluded, where such investments meet the needs and objectives of the CEF and are significant for TEN-T and TEN-E. Removing infrastructure bottlenecks seems to be particularly important in these projects. It will therefore be necessary to strengthen coordination mechanisms at various levels in order to avoid gaps and overlaps between different projects.

1.4. The proposed CEF regulation does not specify eligibility criteria, which are expected to be defined at the call stage. The EESC therefore proposes clarifying which projects will be prioritised, at least at the level of the working programme. It is expected that preference will be given to projects enabling the urgent development of the EU's capacity to build resilience and preparedness against threats, including from hostile states. Therefore, the target for climate-related expenditure under CEF 3 should be reassessed in a way that enables this.

1.5. The future CEF abandons the so-called 'cohesion envelopes', which granted preferential access to funds for countries covered by the cohesion policy. It is expected, however, that similar mechanisms will still exist to address existing gaps in infrastructure connections and observed development needs, appropriately targeted through the CEF. The EESC therefore proposes that a possible solution could be earmarking a pool of funds which would serve the aims stated in the CEF regulation and enable the CEF project started to be completed. This pool could, for example, be ring-fenced within National Regional Partnership Plans (NRRP). Furthermore, the EESC proposes that, at least at the level of the work programme, it should be specified which projects will be given priority, that the funding criteria should be linked to social and environmental criteria and that European added value should be ensured. Moreover, the EESC proposes to reassess whether Member States with a GNI below 90 % of the Union GNI will be able to implement projects, given that the regulation proposes to reduce the co-financing rate to 75 % of the project value.

1.6. The EESC wishes to draw attention to the fact that, according to the draft regulation, the role of the CEF Committee is to be reduced. The EESC calls for maintaining its current role. At the same time, it is expected that civil society organisations, including social partners, will be included in the Committee.

1.7. It is necessary to introduce procedures for mid-term and ex-post evaluation of expenditures implemented through the CEF. The regulation also fails to specify the monitoring rules for the CEF.

1.8. It will be important for the CEF to support projects aimed at securing critical infrastructure. This is particularly important in cohesion recipient countries and regions bordering Russia and Belarus, which are openly hostile towards EU countries.

1.9. It is necessary to seek solutions that simplify the application process and accelerate the disbursement of the funds in view of the need to accelerate implementation of the investments, especially those that directly contribute to building the EU's resilience and autonomy.

1.10. Moreover, the new CEF should guarantee funding for the entire scope of the selected project. This will ensure its full implementation and the achievement of its goals.

1.11. Furthermore, the Commission should identify mechanisms that will ensure the necessary continuation of projects already underway, so that, despite the changing criteria, they can be continued and completed with the guaranteed budget.

1.12. In the EESC's view, CEF 3 should also support investments in safe and secure parking networks which will give transport sector workers decent rest conditions. It is desirable to increase the focus of the CEF on achieving social objectives.

1.13. The EESC calls for public investment in strategic infrastructure – particularly in projects of common European interest (PCI/PMI) – to be exempt from fiscal rules. Only in this way can Member States secure the national co-financing needed and accelerate the transformation.

1.14. With regard to the implementation of the hydrogen backbone and the further development of the EU hydrogen market, the EESC considers it important that the support for investments needed to build hydrogen infrastructure, including storage capacities, will be available.

2. EXPLANATORY NOTES

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.1

2.1. Due to significant geopolitical challenges, the expiry of NextGenerationEU and, in view of the planned expansion and modal shift targets, spending on the CEF must be increased.

2.2. It is particularly important to make urgent and significant efforts to build the EU's resilience and preparedness to respond to emerging threats, especially from hostile countries such as Russia and Belarus.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.3

2.3. It seems that cross-border cooperation should not be an end in itself. The key should be the recognition of networks. As long as a given project is significant for a network, support for it should be considered. The practice of transnational agreements used so far has been appropriate and has helped the network to gradually 'come together'.

2.4. Therefore, the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs) should remain complementary, and not substitutive, to CEF support for national sections of the infrastructure.

2.5. Projects implemented in local and urban areas may be particularly important. The preamble to the draft regulation mentions that 'The Union should facilitate projects in disadvantaged, less connected, rural, insular, coastal, peripheral, congested, outermost or isolated regions so as to enable access to the Trans-European energy and transport networks while bringing benefits to the entire Union in terms of security, competitiveness and social, economic and territorial cohesion'.

2.6. Particular attention must be paid to the multimodal solutions and reinforcement of the transmission grids. They should be included in the funding priorities of the next CEF, as they directly enhance the functioning of the entire system.

2.7. Incorporating cities will play an important role in achieving the goals related to the implementation of the 431 sustainable urban mobility plans. Support for public transportation is of the utmost importance.

2.8. Furthermore, the appropriate focus on dual-use infrastructure projects will often mean that such projects are implemented on selected sections where the so-called 'bottlenecks' referred to in the document exist.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.4

2.9. Considering that the CEF will be oriented towards large-scale investment projects, larger Member States with greater administrative capacity may have an advantage when there is no clear eligibility criteria at the very beginning.

2.10. The preparation and development of all necessary documentation will be crucial. The later the stage at which detailed goals and operational requirements are defined, the more difficult the position of entities with weaker administrative capacities will become.

2.11. The EESC recommends considering financial support for project preparation activities, such as feasibility studies, technical design and capacity-building measures, to ensure equitable access to funding.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.5

2.12. In order to ensure territorial cohesion and full use of the single market, the programme should prioritise investments in regions with significant infrastructure gaps, particularly with regard to missing links in the TEN-T core network and insufficient capacity in energy transportation networks.

2.13. Special support should be dedicated to cohesion recipient countries and regions neighbouring third states hostile to the EU and its allies.

2.14. Supporting such investments will contribute to strengthening the internal cohesion of the Union, improving accessibility and increasing the competitiveness of all regions.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.6

2.15. This will ensure greater transparency in decision-making processes related to CEF implementation.

2.16. Involvement of civil society and social partner organisations will guarantee that decision-making processes related to CEF activities are transparent and can be monitored.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.7

2.17. Evaluations should be carried out taking into account the views of organised civil society, including social partners. The draft regulation does not specify any evaluation requirements.

2.18. Organised civil society and social partners represent a unique source of information on the situation at various levels, including local communities referred to in the draft regulation. Therefore, cooperation with and attention to the voice of NGOs and social partners is crucial to ensure that projects deliver high social and economic added value.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.8

2.19. CEF 3 must reflect the changing environment and the numerous risks that can be identified and against which European infrastructure must be protected. Priority must be given for the protection of energy infrastructure in border Member States, especially distribution and transmission grids.

Arguments in support of recommendation 1.9, 1.10 and 1.11

2.20. Applying and implementing projects supported by the CEF is considered difficult and rather complicated. Therefore, a number of solutions should be considered to simplify and thus accelerate the implementation of projects.

2.21. One of the obstacles is that, due to the regulatory requirements involved in the application process, CEF funding decisions are made just before the construction phase. It is perceived too late and this can result in the cancellation of the project, if a co-financing decision is not secured.

2.22. Moreover, the European Commission should consider the simplification of the methodologies and processes for selecting Projects of Common and Mutual Interest without neglecting important objectives and obligations. At the moment, the procedure is considered to be too complex and involves too many administrative steps which cause uncertainty and limit clarity.

2.23. Furthermore, the CEF should guarantee funding for the entire scope of the selected project. Splitting a project prolongs its implementation and may even result in the part of the project that does not have secured financing not being completed.

2.24. Furthermore, it is very important that projects that have already been started can be continued, regardless of changing regulations related to the CEF.

Arguments in support of the recommendation 1.12

2.25. European road infrastructure does not provide enough spaces for drivers to take mandatory breaks and overnight rest periods. This has a direct impact on road safety. Safe and secure parking spaces are essential to improving working conditions for drivers and to making the driver profession more attractive.

2.26. It is necessary to take into account a number of social criteria which shall be pursued through the CEF, such as quality employment, retention of personnel, improvement of working conditions and achieving better gender balance by attracting and retaining female job seekers.

Arguments in support of the recommendation 1.13

2.27. The 2015 Commission Communication on making the best use of flexibility within the existing rules of the Stability and Growth Pact (COM(2015) 12 final, 13 January 2015) clarifies that certain investments may be temporarily excluded from the structural adjustment path towards the Medium-Term Objective (MTO). Eligible areas for this 'investment clause' include EU co-funded projects, in particular Trans-European Networks (TEN-T) and projects co-financed by the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), the Cohesion Fund, Horizon 2020 and others. Member States should be incentivised to fund projects of high Union value. Therefore, this regulation shall include a clause that clearly states that national fundings engaged for projects co-funded by the CEF shall be excluded from the Maastricht criteria.

Arguments in support of the recommendation 1.14

2.28. It is important, firstly, for transit agents to bear an appropriate share of the costs of the pipeline infrastructure. In addition, pipelines that are in the common European interest should also be funded, at least in part, by common financial resources. Support such as that currently provided through the PCI list should therefore be expanded. Furthermore, funding should be made available at an early stage in project development to increase the chances of raising market-based funding. Socio-ecological conditions must be respected here.

3. PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Amendment 1

linked to recommendation 1.1

Article 4(1)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
The indicative financial envelope for the implementation of the Programme for the period 2028-2034 is set at EUR 81 428 000 000 in current prices.	The indicative financial envelope for the implementation of the Programme for the period 2028-2034 is set at EUR 100 000 000 000 in current prices.

Reason

See arguments in support of recommendation.

Amendment 2

Linked to recommendation 1.1

Article 4 (2)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
The distribution of the amount referred to in paragraph 1 shall be indicatively as follows:	The distribution of the amount referred to in paragraph 1 shall be indicatively as follows:
(a) EUR 51 515 000 000 for the specific objectives on transport and military mobility referred to in Article 3(2), point (a);	(a) EUR 63 264 000 000 for the specific objectives on transport and military mobility referred to in Article 3(2), point (a);

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
(b) EUR 29 912 000 000 for the specific objectives on energy referred to in Article 3(2), point (b).	(b) EUR 36 736 000 000 for the specific objectives on energy referred to in Article 3(2), point (b).

Reason

See arguments in support of recommendation.

Amendment 3

linked to recommendation 1.11

Article 4(4)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
Appropriations may be entered in the Union budget beyond 2034 to cover the expenses necessary and to enable the management of actions not completed by the end of the Programme.	Appropriations may be entered in the Union budget beyond 2034 to cover the expenses necessary and to enable the management of actions not completed by the end of the Programme. Actions started prior to the entry into force of this Regulation may be prioritised and completed regardless of the objectives specified therein.

Or Article 4 (5)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
The financial envelope referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article and the amounts of additional resources referred to in Article 5 may also be used for technical and administrative assistance for the implementation of the Programme and of the sector-specific guidelines in Regulation (EU) 2024/1679 or Regulation (EU) 2022/869, such as preparatory, monitoring, control, audit and evaluation activities, corporate information technology systems and platforms, information and communication activities, including corporate communication on the political priorities of the Union, and all other technical and administrative assistance or staff-related expenses incurred by the Commission for the management of the Programme.	Actions started prior to the entry into force of this Regulation may be completed regardless of the objectives specified therein. The financial envelope referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article and the amounts of additional resources referred to in Article 5 consequently may also be used for technical and administrative assistance for the implementation of the Programme and of the sector-specific guidelines in Regulation (EU) 2024/1679 or Regulation (EU) 2022/869, such as preparatory, monitoring, control, audit and evaluation activities, corporate information technology systems and platforms, information and communication activities, including corporate communication on the political priorities of the Union, and all other technical and administrative assistance or staff-related expenses incurred by the Commission for the management of the Programme.

Reason

See arguments in support of recommendation.

Amendment 4

linked to recommendation 1.3

Add a new point after Article 4(2)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
	<i>Member States eligible for funding from the Cohesion Fund may apply for funding from this Programme exclusively for projects that are significant for the transport and energy networks.</i>

Reason

See arguments in support of recommendation.

Amendment 5

linked to recommendation 1.3

Article 9(2)(a)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
2. In award procedures under direct or indirect management, one or more of the following legal entities may be eligible to provide or to receive Union support:	2. In award procedures under direct or indirect management, one or more of the following legal entities may be eligible to provide or to receive Union support:
(a) entities established in a Member States;	(a) entities established in a Member States, <i>including local authorities;</i>
(b) entities established in an associated third country;	(b) entities established in an associated third country;
(c) international organisations;	(c) international organisations;
(d) other entities established in non-associated third countries where the funding of such entities is essential for implementing the action and contributes to the objectives laid down in Article 3.	(d) other entities established in non-associated third countries where the funding of such entities is essential for implementing the action and contributes to the objectives laid down in Article 3.

Reason

See arguments in support of recommendation.

Amendment 6

linked to recommendation 1.13

Add a new point after Article 9(10)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
	<i>National funding engaged for projects co-funded by the CEF shall be granted a temporary deviation from the MTO of the concerned Member State or from the adjustment path towards it, according to the Commission Communication on Making the Best Use of the Flexibility within the Existing Rules (COM(2015) 12 final).</i>

Reason

See arguments in support of recommendation.

Amendment 7

linked to recommendation 1.5

Amend Article 10(6)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
For works relating to the specific objective referred to in Article 3(2), point (a), the amount of Union financial support shall not exceed 50 % of the total eligible cost. The co-financing rate for actions taking place in Member States with a per capita GNI of less than 90 % of the Union GNI, the amount of Union financial support shall not exceed 75 % of the total eligible cost.	For works relating to the specific objective referred to in Article 3(2), point (a), the amount of Union financial support shall not exceed 50 % of the total eligible cost. The co-financing rate for actions taking place in Member States with a per capita GNI of less than 90 % of the Union GNI, the amount of Union financial support shall not exceed 85 % of the total eligible cost.

Reason

See arguments in support of recommendation.

Amendment 8

linked to recommendation 1.10

Add new point after Article 10(9)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
	<i>It shall be possible to implement a measure that covers all stages of implementation within a single project. In this case, the level of support shall not exceed 50 % of the total eligible costs. The rules/provisions on support for less developed regions set out in paragraphs five to eight (of this Article) shall apply mutatis mutandis.</i>

Reason

See arguments in support of recommendation.

Amendment 9

linked to recommendations 1.2 and 1.10

Add new point after Article 10(9)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
	<i>A dedicated Project Preparation Facility for candidate countries shall be established under the Connecting Europe Facility in order to support feasibility studies, technical design, permitting processes, experience exchange and administrative capacity building.</i>

Reason

See arguments in support of recommendations.

Amendment 10

linked to recommendations 1.5, 1.8, 1.12

Add new point after Article 12(3)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
	<i>When adopting work programmes, the Commission shall give particular consideration to projects of common interest and related actions that support projects aimed at securing critical infrastructure, particularly in regions bordering Russia and Belarus, resilience and preparedness as well as projects improving and enhancing environment protection. Moreover, the CEF shall promote goals related to social infrastructure and to improving working conditions in the transport sector.</i>

Reason

See arguments in support of recommendations.

Amendment 11

linked to recommendations 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5

Add new points after Article 12(4)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
	<i>5. In order to provide equal access, transparency and predictability, and to enhance the quality of the projects, the Commission shall adopt, by 13 October 2028, the first multiannual work programmes. These first multiannual work programmes shall include the timetable of the calls for proposals for the first three years of the CEF, their objectives and indicative budget, as well as a prospective framework covering the entire programming period.</i>
	<i>6. The multiannual work programmes shall explicitly define the eligibility conditions for candidate countries and the modalities of their participation in cross-border projects under the TEN-T and TEN-E, including the digitalisation of border management, multimodal logistics and energy interconnections.</i>

Reason

See arguments in support of recommendations, in particular recommendation 1.4.

Amendment 12

linked to recommendation 1.7

Add new article after Article 14

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
	Evaluation 1. Evaluations shall be carried out in a timely manner so that their results can be fed into the decision-making process. 2. An interim evaluation of the CEF shall be carried out once there is sufficient information available about the implementation of the CEF, but no later than four years after the start of implementation of the CEF. 3. At the end of the implementation of the CEF, but no later than four years after the end of the period specified in Article 1, the Commission shall carry out a final evaluation of the CEF. 4. The Commission shall submit the conclusions of the evaluations, accompanied by its observations, to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, requesting an assessment and conclusions from these institutions.

Reason

See argument in support of recommendation.

Amendment 13

linked to recommendation 1.6

Article 15(3)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
Where reference is made to this paragraph, Article 4 of Regulation (EU) No 182/2011 shall apply.	Where reference is made to this paragraph, Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 182/2011 shall apply.

Reason

See argument in support of recommendation.

Amendment 14

linked to recommendations 1.6 and 1.7

Add 15(6)

Text proposed by the European Commission	EESC amendment
	<i>Representatives of the European Economic and Social Committee participate in the meetings of the committee as observers.</i>

Reason

See arguments in support of recommendations.

Brussels, 22 January 2026.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Séamus BOLAND
