



European Economic and Social Committee contribution to the Commission's 2018 Work Programme

5 July 2017



European Economic and Social Committee



European Economic and Social Committee

Brussels, 6 July 2017

RESOLUTION

**The European Economic and Social Committee's contribution
to the Commission's 2018 work programme**

1. **Creating a positive narrative for the EU**

- 1.1 The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) stresses the importance of the year 2018 as the last fully operational year for the current Commission – as well as the European Parliament. Therefore the EESC calls on the Commission to draw up its work programme in an ambitious, yet pragmatic manner, in order to address properly the challenges entailed in the European Union being at a crossroads. Given the uncertainties about Brexit and global developments, a wide-ranging, participatory and structured debate on the future of Europe is now more necessary than ever. It is important to go back to our roots and recall the original project and fundamental values and objectives of the Union as they are enshrined in the EU Treaties.
- 1.2 We should build on the positive outcomes achieved so far. However, the appearance of nationalistic, protectionist, authoritarian and populist attitudes and movements should be seen as a wake-up call for the leaders of the EU institutions and Member States, to the effect that we need to examine what has to be done to regain public confidence and safeguard a successful future for the European project.
- 1.3 To this end, the EESC calls on the Commission to strive for a strong, solid and cohesive Union that is able to generate sustainable growth, quality jobs, well-being and equal opportunities for all the people of Europe, based on a shared vision and positive narrative rooted in public involvement and participation. A united, cohesive Union, built on Member States' commitment to the cause, is sorely needed so as to respond to the economic, social and environmental challenges the EU is facing. Internal cohesion is also a prerequisite for the EU to act as a strong global player in areas such as international trade, security, energy, climate policy, and the promotion of human rights.
- 1.4 The EESC recognises that the Brexit negotiations will make 2018 a challenging year. However, it is important that the Commission continue to implement measures already agreed upon, especially those relating to single market initiatives. At the same time, it is necessary to prepare for the long term future of the EU. The EESC would refer here to its views on the White Paper on the Future of Europe. The EESC will also submit opinions on the associated reflection documents; for this reason, these topics are only referred to briefly in this contribution.
- 1.5 As there is a strong link between the economy, employment, people's welfare and the environment, the EESC calls on the Commission to adopt sustainable development as an overarching approach to its work programme. The EESC thus frames its contribution in terms of the three "pillars" of sustainability, as follows:
 - a) Strengthening the economic foundations of Europe;
 - b) Fostering its social dimension; and
 - c) Facilitating the transition towards a low-carbon and circular economy.
- 1.6 The EESC emphasises that the pillars are universal, indivisible and interdependent. The EU should be ambitious and strive for policies and initiatives that bring about win-win-win solutions in terms of economic, social and environmental benefits.

- 1.7 To this end, the EESC urges the Commission to develop its policies in an integrated manner and apply a coherent, consistent approach, involving all parts of the Commission and breaking down the silos in policy- and law-making. The EESC also calls on the Commission to continue – in accordance with the better regulation principles - to improve the quality of EU law-making and the simplification and clarification of legislation, with the aim of creating practical benefits for all players.
- 1.8 Furthermore, the EESC reiterates its call for an overarching strategy to be devised to mainstream the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda into all relevant EU policies and it invites the Commission to prepare a long-term vision and strategy on sustainability, building on the upcoming EESC opinion on "The transition towards a more sustainable European future - a strategy for 2050".
- 1.9 The EESC underlines the crucial importance of civil society's structured participation in designing, implementing and monitoring EU policies, programmes and other initiatives in order to achieve tangible results, gain public acceptance and promote cohesion in society. The social partners have a specific role to play in devising and implementing policies directly or indirectly affecting employment and labour markets.
- 1.10 While the proposals for action are presented in more detail in sections 2.-5., the EESC summarises its **key policy priorities** for the Commission's 2018 work programme as follows:
- The EESC calls on the Commission to continue implementation of the strategies and programmes aimed at the further development of the single market, taking into account its economic and social dimensions in the framework of sustainable development. While recognising that the EMU is the core of the single market, measures are particularly needed in the fields of capital markets, as well as digital, energy and transport markets. Furthermore, the EESC calls for an active trade policy, taking into account the need for transparency and the close involvement of civil society.
 - The Commission should adopt a comprehensive strategy for the promotion of entrepreneurship, innovation and industrial development, including the opportunities and challenges brought about by global megatrends such as rapid progress in digitalisation and the Internet of Things, and the transition towards a low-carbon and circular economy.
 - The EESC calls on the Commission to develop the social dimension of the EU with the aim of fostering quality job creation, improving skills and competences, increasing social investments and the development of the social economy, as well as preventing poverty, inequalities, discrimination and social exclusion, with special emphasis on the inclusion of young people in society. Furthermore, particular attention should be paid to responding to the profound changes caused by digitalisation for the whole society.
 - The EESC calls for measures for focusing the public financial resources efficiently and responding to future challenges caused by Brexit and the need for sustainable growth,

innovation, employment and cohesion. In addition to public investment, encouragement of private investment is likewise needed to respond to the substantial investment needs.

- The Commission should continue implementing measures, including the effective control of external borders, to protect Europeans against security threats. It should also strengthen measures for the EU to be a more effective player on the world stage by means of multilateral cooperation and active conflict prevention. The EESC furthermore considers it necessary to strengthen cooperation on defence.
- The EESC calls on the Commission, and offers its support, to develop a strategy that aims to bring about structured civil dialogue that is organised efficiently and on a permanent basis.

2. Strengthening the economic foundations of Europe

2.1 The European Semester and EMU

2.1.1 The European Semester process should reinforce the Commission's coordination role in order to ensure Member States' compliance with the targets and recommendations of the Europe 2020 strategy and implementation of the structural reforms needed for long-term sustainable economic growth, quality job creation and social progress. Closer involvement of the social partners and other representative organisations of civil society and increased ownership for them in the formulation and implementation of reform programmes is a key factor for success in this process, recognising that the social partners have a specific role to play, in view of their exclusive competences, responsibilities and tasks.

2.1.2 The EESC calls for symmetrical macro-economic adjustment in the euro area, shared by both Member States with deficits and those with surpluses. This includes an aggregate positive fiscal stance for the euro area as a whole.

2.1.3 Economic and Monetary Union is a core element of the European integration. The EESC would refer to its previous positions and calls for initiatives for completing the EMU, including the development of its governance, democratic control and macro-economic dialogue.

2.2 Financial resources and investment

2.2.1 With the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the Commission should pave the way for focusing resources efficiently and responding to future challenges caused by Brexit and the need for sustainable growth, competitiveness, innovation, employment and social cohesion, by deploying a performance- and result-oriented approach. The EESC calls on the Commission to align the duration of the next MFF with the political cycle of the Commission and the Parliament. It also calls for preparations to be made for the introduction of new types of EU own resources.

2.2.2 The EESC welcomes the second phase of the EFSI (European Fund for Strategic Investments) for boosting investment by involving ever more private capital, together with public capital

from both national and regional sources. To this end, the scope of the EFSI should also cover other branches of finance in addition to banks.

2.2.3 The EESC emphasises the need for effective and efficient use of European funds. Investment in innovation, entrepreneurship, skills development, active labour market policies, and digital, energy and transport systems needs to be prioritised, ensuring that funding will be adequately allocated for projects with a high social impact.

2.2.4 The EESC stresses that further implementation of the Capital Markets Union is needed to improve access to private finance, with special emphasis on the needs of SMEs. Greater use of equity and capital market funding should also be promoted.

2.2.5 As for completion of the Banking Union, the EESC emphasises that further risk-sharing has to be accompanied by further proposals on risk reduction. In upcoming reforms of the banking regulation, the Commission should pay due attention to the specific features and possibilities of small and non-complex banks.

2.2.6 The EESC calls for steps to curb tax fraud, tax evasion and aggressive tax planning. The existing bias in tax systems that favours debt financing of business should be changed. As regards VAT, the EESC reiterates its recommendation to move away from the current transitional system towards a definitive VAT regime tailored to a European single market.

2.3 Digital, energy and transport systems

2.3.1 The EESC highlights the importance of the digital single market for the whole of society. Digital skills, an enabling business environment and consumer confidence are among the most critical conditions for making use of the potential of digitalisation. As data is a production factor and a raw material for creating added economic value, the accessibility and free flow of data are of extreme importance. At the same time, adequate protection of private and commercial data needs to be ensured, with special attention paid to data generated by individual businesses. The EESC also urges the Commission to continue its efforts to increase cybersecurity capabilities and cooperation. Furthermore, the EESC calls for international cooperation in the digital field, for example within the framework of the OECD.

2.3.2 Development of the digital infrastructure has to be continued, including broadband and wireless connections, digital energy and transport systems, and "smart" buildings and communities. The use of digitalisation needs to be promoted correspondingly in the education, health and social sectors. Full use of digitalisation should also be promoted to make administrative processes smoother. Special emphasis should be placed on providing cover for remote areas and minimum digital access for everyone, also enhancing the inclusion of vulnerable groups of society.

2.3.3 The EESC has been a firm supporter of the Energy Union initiative from the outset. It calls on the Commission to pursue implementation of the Energy Union strategy, ensuring there is an adequate energy infrastructure and smoothly functioning energy markets ensuring the availability of secure, affordable and climate-friendly energy for the general public and businesses. The EESC highlights the significance of the energy dialogue at EU, national and

local levels, with the full involvement of civil society. It will issue its views regularly on the state of the Energy Union and individual initiatives.

2.3.4 Transport is closely linked to the Energy Union. As transport is one of the basic enablers of activities for the whole of society, it deserves a high profile in the Commission's work programme. The main purpose of the measures should be to provide people and businesses with accessible, smooth, safe, affordable, and climate-friendly mobility and transport. This requires substantial public and private investment in transport systems and the development of public transport. Transport-related energy and climate issues, and the introduction of new technologies should not be developed in isolation from transport market issues.

2.3.5 Taking into account the horizontal importance of services of general economic interest (SGEIs), the EESC invites the Commission to improve the rules on public compensation for the provision of SGEIs and their application, in order to provide guidelines and create a compendium of best practices.

2.3.6 The EESC acknowledges the role of both cities and rural areas in economic, social and territorial development and cohesion. In underlining the role of cities, the EU should continue to work on a well-defined, properly implemented Urban Agenda. The considerable potential of rural, mountain and island areas should be utilised in the Commission's new approach to integrated territorial development.

2.4 Development of production and services

2.4.1 The EESC calls on the Commission to adopt a comprehensive approach and strategy to industrial development. Special attention should be paid to the opportunities and challenges brought about by global megatrends such as rapid progress in digitalisation and the Internet of Things, interlocking of manufacturing and service industries, and the transition towards a low-carbon and circular economy.

2.4.2 The growth potential of services, including the retail sector, has to be unleashed as well, while safeguarding consumers' and workers' rights and acknowledging that there are still barriers in the Single Market.

2.4.3 Innovation policy, including social innovation, is crucial for economic competitiveness and renewal and for achieving societal benefits. The EESC calls for the promotion of supranational networks and cross-cutting networks between universities, businesses and civil society organisations within the context of Horizon 2020. The EESC also recommends simplifying administrative rules on funding and state aid.

2.4.4 An EU-wide Industry 4.0 and Society 4.0 strategy is needed, focusing on technologies and platforms, standards and reference architectures, networks of regional Innovation Hubs and skills at all levels.

2.4.5 As for the challenges raised by global megatrends in individual branches such as the automotive, steel and coal industries, the EESC calls for proper management of structural

change, through fair and appropriate transition frameworks and dialogue on sector-specific issues with social partners. On the other hand, opportunities emerging in areas such as the space and defence industries have to be grasped and turned to good advantage, while ensuring favourable conditions for the development of industrial sectors in general, with good working conditions.

2.4.6 Special efforts should be focused on enhancing the financing, innovation and internationalisation of small and medium-sized enterprises and the Small Business Act for Europe has to be fully implemented. SME policies should be tailored to the different needs of various forms of enterprises such as family businesses, traditional small and micro enterprises, start-ups and scale-ups, including social economy enterprises. The EESC also invites the Commission to launch consultation on the definition of an SME.

2.4.7 The EESC finds it important that a comprehensive view be taken on new trends in production and consumption patterns, such as collaborative, circular, sharing and functional economic models, as well as development opportunities such as the social economy. Measures are needed to facilitate the introduction of these new and diverse models, but at the same time, a level playing field and compliance with relevant and appropriate legislation has to be guaranteed in order to ensure public and consumer protection, and workers' rights.

2.4.8 Taking into account the specific role played by the social economy, the EESC reiterates its request to launch a comprehensive Action Plan for the Social Economy in line with the December 2015 Council Conclusions on *"The promotion of the social economy as a key driver of economic and social development in Europe"*.

2.4.9 Multi-functionality, the diversity of farming models and sustainability should be maintained at the heart of the matter when addressing the funding, modernisation and simplification needs of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) as part of the next MFF. Greater efforts are also required in research and digitalisation in the agricultural sector.

2.4.10 The EESC calls on the Commission to shift to a more integrated agricultural and food policy, also taking into account the need to move towards a circular economy and to drastically reduce food waste. The Commission should also adopt legislation to eliminate unfair trading practices in the food supply chain.

2.4.11 In order to enable the proper development and renewal of industries and agriculture, the political and regulatory framework must provide a stable and predictable investment and operation environment and follow the principles of better regulation, for the well-being of citizens.

2.5 International trade

2.5.1 The EESC calls for active and fair trade negotiations with partners such as Japan, Mercosur and ASEAN, as well as the smooth implementation of agreements already concluded, taking into account the issues raised in previous EESC opinions. In implementing the Commission communication on "Trade for all", the EESC considers it important to conclude negotiations in

a balanced and transparent way, delivering benefits for business and citizens, while protecting environmental, social, labour, consumer and other standards, as well as public services. All in all, the EESC underlines the significance of transparency and the involvement of civil society in the negotiation, implementation and monitoring of trade agreements from the very beginning.

- 2.5.2 The EESC welcomes the improvements made to investor dispute settlement with the introduction of a new system to replace ISDS, but calls on the Commission to take further steps so that the ICS can truly function as an independent international judicial body.
- 2.5.3 The pursuit of bilateral trade negotiations should not weaken the EU's commitment to the WTO and a strong multilateral global agreement. The EESC expects an active follow-up to the 2017 WTO Ministerial Conference in areas such as agriculture and e-commerce. In addition, there is an urgent need to assess risks and opportunities, from a civil society perspective, in order to determine the way forward in the ongoing multilateral negotiations on the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) and Environmental Goods Agreement (EGA). The EESC also calls for rapid adoption and implementation of the reforms of the EU Trade Defence policy.
- 2.5.4 The EESC deems it important to ensure consistency between trade policy and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the EU's development policy. To this end, ambitious trade and sustainable development chapters with strong civil society monitoring mechanisms should be sought, for inclusion in the trade agreements.
- 2.5.5 The EESC furthermore calls for civil society monitoring of all aspects of the agreements, including those whose provisions do not specifically contain a joint monitoring body involving civil society. The EESC's expertise confers unique benefits on such work.
- 2.5.6 It also calls for there to be discussions with civil society on the impact assessment and practical implementation of the proposed Multilateral Investment Court.

3. Fostering the social dimension of Europe

3.1 European Pillar of Social Rights

3.1.1 The EESC takes note of the Commission's Communication on a European Pillar of Social Rights and the proposal for a Proclamation of the EPSR, and the accompanying legislative and non-legislative initiatives. The EESC is working on this package and will give its opinions in due course.

3.1.2 So far, the EESC refers to its earlier opinion on the European Pillar of Social Rights¹, in which it pointed out its general objectives for the development of the Pillar through a combination of legal and non-legal instruments related to areas such as the future of work, fair working

¹ Opinion of 25 January 2017 on the Communication from the Commission *Launching a consultation on a European Pillar of Social Rights*, [OJ C 125, 21.4.2017, p. 10](#)

conditions, employment, enforcement of the existing EU social acquis, and social investment. It stated that the Pillar should apply to all Member States, while acknowledging that the Euro area may need particular instruments/mechanisms. It took the view that the European Semester and National Reform Programmes should become the principle vehicles for the implementation and monitoring of the Pillar, and called for concrete benchmarks in the European Semester.

- 3.1.3 The framework conditions in labour markets need to support new and more diverse career paths. Different forms of sourcing labour and different forms of working are needed in working life. This requires providing a suitable employment protection legislation environment to provide a framework for fair working conditions and to stimulate recruitment under all employment contracts.
- 3.1.4 In order to respond to the changing demand for skills and competences, the EESC emphasises the need for improving the work-based education system, vocational education and training, lifelong learning, as well as upskilling and reskilling. Ways to enhance smooth transitions between jobs and from unemployment and education to work should be developed as well, with the aim of achieving an inclusive labour market.
- 3.1.5 Acknowledging the fact that the future of the EU is strongly linked to younger generations' trust in the EU project, the EESC underlines that the Commission should strengthen its activities to effectively address the root causes of youth unemployment and exclusion.
- 3.1.6 In order to enhance inclusive growth and social cohesion, the EESC calls for measures to meet the need for social investment, in the sense of investing in people and in social infrastructure and services. Further consideration needs to be given to how to link the "Juncker Plan 2" with the Social Investment Package objectives, including through the EFSI. Moreover, the EESC has called for a European Social Investment Pact, which should support social reforms and social investment and help to bring about renewed economic, social and territorial convergence. The Annual Growth Survey should also emphasise social investment.
- 3.1.7 The European Social Fund should continue to be a key component of the ESI Funds, with specific attention paid to promoting the training and labour integration of vulnerable groups in the population (e.g. young people, immigrants and refugees, and people with disabilities). The consolidation and redeployment of the new Erasmus processes must be made more systematic and inclusive. The EESC also reiterates its call for opportunities for all young people to benefit from European exchanges.
- 3.1.8 Whilst acknowledging that poverty reduction is primarily the competence of the Member States, the EESC points out that: poverty reduction should be systematically addressed through the European Semester process; academic research on 'reference budgets' enabling a life in dignity should continue to be supported; and there should be comparable and common indicators e.g. on poverty and inequality, as well as mandatory social impact assessments of all reform agendas proposed by the National Reform Programmes and the Country Specific Recommendations. The EESC has also advocated the creation of an integrated European Fund to combat poverty and social exclusion, based on experiences with the implementation of the FEAD and the ESF. In addition, the Europe 2020 Strategy should be linked with implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

3.2 Citizens' and consumers' rights

- 3.2.1 The EESC calls on the Commission to closely monitor compliance with the EU's fundamental values and principles in all Member States, and to strengthen the procedures to protect and defend democracy, the rule of law, fundamental rights, human rights and access to justice.
- 3.2.2 Consumer policy is close to the interests of the public and can therefore influence people's commitment to the EU's integration process. The EESC calls on the Commission to ensure that consumer rights are enforced and respected in the REFIT process, in the digital world and in the safety of products and services. The Commission should strengthen measures to eliminate energy poverty and consumption poverty and to enhance access to food and services for all Europeans. The Commission should also promote consumers' rights to information, education and participation and their right to organise themselves so that their interests are represented when the rules in which they have a stake are being devised.
- 3.2.3 The Commission must complete its review of the main legal and non-legal instruments of EU consumer policy as a cross-cutting, horizontal citizenship policy and must present a new action plan to protect and defend consumers over the next ten years.
- 3.2.4 The EESC calls on the Commission to take all appropriate measures to counter gender discrimination in the labour market, education and decision-making, as well as gender-based violence. The EESC also calls on the Commission to establish an agenda to protect minorities and vulnerable groups, promoting the full respect of fundamental rights and non-discrimination. The Commission should intensify efforts to unblock the Directive on implementing the principles of equal treatment, and address the conditions of children, women and the elderly in vulnerable situations as well as new forms of vulnerability.
- 3.2.5 The Commission should upgrade the European Disability Strategy in line with the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and implement the UNCRPD in its external policies and programmes, including the launch of an EU disability card recognised in all Member States. Preparations for a European Disability Rights Agenda 2020-2030 should also be starting, and the year 2021 should be declared the European Year of Disability Rights.
- 3.2.6 Accessibility for all should be mainstreamed into Digital Single market initiatives. To this end, the Commission should step up its efforts to conclude negotiations with the other institutions on the European Accessibility Act. Passengers' rights should also be strengthened, with special attention paid to people with disabilities and with reduced mobility.
- 3.2.7 The EESC also encourages the Commission to support activities in educational institutions at all levels to help students to distinguish between fake news and science-based facts.

3.3 Migration

- 3.3.1 The EESC underlines the need for assisting and integrating refugees and asylum seekers. It advocates an efficient reform of the Common European Asylum System that is respectful of human rights and the establishment of a genuinely common system for all Member States. It also recommends that progress be made with resettlement and humanitarian visas for refugees in order to meet real needs. It calls on the Commission to monitor implementation of the agreement on the distribution of refugees among Member States.
- 3.3.2 Furthermore, it calls for the review of partnership agreements with third countries of transit and origin of migration flows to respect human rights and international law, and to develop financial instruments to address the root causes of migration.
- 3.3.3 While appreciating the Commission's work on the legal channels of migration through the evaluation of existing directives, the EESC calls for longer-term governance of labour migration, planning for updated legal mobility channels, and the exchange of information on labour market opportunities. Taking into account Europe's demographic structure, the EESC highlights the need to transform the challenge of integrating refugees and migrants into the labour market into an opportunity. Investment in training and adequate support systems will be key factor to facilitating integration into the labour market to help migrants fulfil their potential, thus utilising their skills, entrepreneurial spirit and dynamism, while recognising the value of diversity and different cultures in our society in general.
- 3.3.4 The EESC considers that 2018 - as the European Year of Cultural Heritage - presents a unique opportunity for mobilising all players to counter populism and nationalism and to promote a positive narrative for the future of Europe. In this context, awareness-raising about the need for intercultural understanding with regard to refugees and migrants could also be enhanced.

3.4 Internal security and external policy

- 3.4.1 The EESC calls on the Commission to continue implementing measures, including the effective control of external borders, to protect Europeans against security threats such as terrorism, organised crime and cybercrime.
- 3.4.2 In addition, it considers it necessary to strengthen cooperation on defence. To this end, the EESC endorses the creation of a European Defence Union and welcomes the European Defence Action Plan.
- 3.4.3 Taking into account the challenges raised by the unpredictability of US policy and the risk of increased protectionism and unilateralism, the EESC encourages the EU to continue work in line with its Global Strategy, supporting multilateralism in the framework of the United Nations and working actively towards preventing conflict and solving international crises. The EESC also underlines the need for closer coordination of objectives, policies and resources among Member States in order for the EU to be a more effective player on the world stage.

- 3.4.4 The implementation of Agenda 2030 should form the basis of EU development cooperation. To show leadership, the EU should present a voluntary review of its internal and external activities on SDGs at the UN High Level Political Forum.
- 3.4.5 The EESC supports the establishment of a platform for dialogue with social partners in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy in order to better assess the labour market, and calls on EU Member States to develop a common European approach to the coordination of social security systems between the EU and southern neighbouring countries. The neighbourhood policy must make clear the link between instability and poverty, and inequality and the lack of opportunities, which can increase vulnerability to radicalisation and hamper the process of democratisation.
- 3.4.6 The EESC highlights the significance of external economic relations and international diplomacy for safeguarding and increasing stability and security. It also encourages the EU to make full use of the role that culture can play in international relations.

4. Facilitating the transition towards a low-carbon and circular economy

- 4.1 The Action Plan on the Circular Economy should be carried out in an integrated, consistent way, making use of the opportunities for reconciling economic, social and environmental aspects. The EESC calls on the Commission to encourage market-driven activities by promoting innovation, facilitating front-runner initiatives, including in remote and urban areas, enhancing their scale-up, and providing an enabling regulatory framework. It also points out the links between the circular economy and other "new economic models".
- 4.2 Due attention should also be paid to the implementation of "traditional" environmental policy and legislation, covering waste management and air, water, soil and biodiversity protection. The EESC urges the Commission to continue this work as part of the European Environmental Review process.
- 4.3 Climate targets for 2030 should be implemented in as cost-efficient a manner as possible. To this end, the EESC calls on the Commission to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the current low-carbon policy instruments, and make sure that the tools are appropriate and used in the most efficient way.
- 4.4 The Commission should also consider climate issues from the point of view of climate justice, i.e. from the perspective of issues such as equality, human rights and poverty.
- 4.5 Climate diplomacy remains an important mission for the EU in the fight against climate change. It is necessary to get all the biggest emitters to commit to targets which are at least as ambitious as those of the EU. The EESC also encourages the Commission to strive for global carbon pricing in order to create a level playing field in relation to competitors outside the EU.
- 4.6 The EESC calls on the Commission to prepare a strategy on increasing its climate and environmental "handprint", i.e. its positive global impact. This requires an environment conducive to innovation and investment and favourable trading conditions for exporting climate

solutions and low-carbon products. This is how the EU can make an efficient contribution to climate change and environmental challenges and have a much greater impact than solely operating within its own borders.

5. **Empowering, involving and consulting Civil Society**

- 5.1 The EESC underlines the pivotal role of civil society organisations in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies at all stages and at all levels, including the local level. This requires a change in culture and an acknowledgement of the value of civil society at EU and Member State levels, which is already enshrined in Art. 11 TEU, which provides for EU institutions to promote and facilitate horizontal and vertical civil dialogue, to carry out broad consultations and lay down the foundations for the European citizens' initiatives. These are complementary processes that take place without prejudice to consultation of the EESC and social dialogue.
- 5.2 The EESC follows closely and is actively involved in structured dialogues or consultative fora (e.g. Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, European Migration Forum) gathering and involving civil society organisations and other players from EU institutions and Member States and calls for support for its initiatives for the creation of a Platform for Change (gender equality in the transport sector) and an Institutional Forum on citizens' participation (in the framework of the citizens' initiative). When constituting such platforms like REFIT, the Commission should consider the EESC's representation, in accordance with the mandate given to the Committee by the treaties, and in so doing ensure that this reflects the Committee's composition in the form of its three groups.
- 5.3 As a complementary process to the above initiatives, the Commission recently set up a dedicated internet portal entitled "Contribute to law-making" to gather the opinions of the general public, thus including both organisations and individuals. The EESC recommends that the Commission make a distinction between contributions from civil society organisations and those coming from individuals. To this end, the Commission should carry out stakeholder mapping in cooperation with the EESC to identify representative and geographically balanced target groups, drawing on the Transparency Register. In addition, the Commission should ensure that the responses have quantitative and qualitative weighting. Furthermore, the Commission should constantly work on the improvement of transparency, accessibility, feedback and accountability to participants.
- 5.4 The EESC calls on the Commission to develop a more strategic approach to these practices, putting them on a more structured institutional and representative foundation by taking advantage of the resources of representative consultative bodies that already exist at European, national and regional levels. To this end, the Commission should work closely with the EESC and ask for an exploratory opinion on how civil dialogue could be organised effectively and on a permanent basis, leading to a specific Commission communication.
- 5.5 The EESC underlines that there is a need to improve the effectiveness of the European Citizens' Initiative, in line with the announcement of the revision of the ECI regulation made by EC First

Vice-President Timmermans, and to explore new ways, such as the use of digital tools, to increase the engagement of young people and people from vulnerable groups in particular.

- 5.6 Finally, the EESC acknowledges that the Commission has taken into account many elements of the EESC's contribution to the 2017 work programme. However, there are also issues that have not been included and they have therefore been reiterated in this document. As regards implementation of the Commission's 2018 work programme, the EESC is ready to submit its views and participate in work on specific initiatives in the course of the coming year.



European Economic and Social Committee

Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 99
1040 Bruxelles/Brussel
BELGIQUE/BELGIË

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