



EU synergy in action for accelerating the Circular Economy transition

06/03/2019



Luca Jahier, EESC President
Speaker

Welcome Address delivered at the 2019 Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference [Check against delivery]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very warm welcome to all of you. It is my pleasure to be here today for the opening of this important event.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Commission for the award that it received in January from the Davos World Economic Forum. It is a confirmation that we are on the right way. We have to take stock of the fact that this has happened so fast and with such impressive results. Also because of the strong cooperation among all stakeholders in EU civil society. The EESC has been fully engaged since the very beginning and we are proud that together with the European Commission we have launched this platform.

I believe the Commission will agree with me that the project of accelerating the circular economy transition has been an excellent example of EU synergy in action. The ambitious circular economy initiatives adopted by the Commission, coupled with our Committee's access to a widespread civil society network, are paving the way toward a more sustainable European economy.

We believe that the Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform is a powerful living bridge, linking the EU institutions with grassroots civil society organisations, promoting and sharing circular economy solutions for all citizens, for the well-being of present and future generations.

The benefits produced by this collaboration are evident and I am convinced that it will serve as a model of future relations between EU institutions and stakeholders.

With the recent publication of the Reflection Paper, the upcoming elections of the European Parliament and the renewal of the Commission later this year, I believe that we have a crucial window of opportunity to further push the sustainable development agenda. This agenda does not only have to become an EU top priority, it has to become the policy framework for the next decade.

Sustainable development is a chance for Europe, in terms of protecting biodiversity, sustaining competitiveness, and fighting against increasing social disparities. However, to become a real opportunity, it has to be put in motion and we are not quite there yet.

The EESC has been calling for the adoption of an overarching EU Sustainable Development Strategy ever since the adoption of the SDGs. The lack of a coherent plan with clear policy targets has so far prevented the EU to properly implement the 2030 Agenda in the EU and at national level and yet, several Member States have already prepared their national strategies.

The long-awaited Reflection Paper "Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030", published on 30 January, is a good analysis of where we are; yet, it is not as ambitious as it should have been and hoped. Four years after the adoption of the universal Agenda 2030, it is, nevertheless, a first step in the right direction, but it is the beginning of the road towards a successful implementation of the sustainable agenda.

I suspect that Vice-President Timmermans himself and many other Commissioners would have wished for a more ambitious end-result but possibly not everyone in the Commission's college shared their commitment and legitimate ambition. And yet, dear Vice-President, dear Commissioners, thanks to your perseverance and skill, you delivered on this crucial topic.

As EESC, we will build on this Reflection paper because it constitutes a window of opportunity and we will do all we can to keep up its momentum.

The sustainable agenda is for us the driving force through which we intend to actively contribute to the upcoming European elections because this is an agenda, which is good for companies, for workers and for the civil society. It is, in fact, an agenda, which is good for the European citizens and for the generations to come.

Fifteen days ago, as President of the EESC, I organised an event, by the way in the exact same venue of

today's Conference, the Charlemagne: we had more than 400 participants, 27 speakers coming from several horizons (civil society, social partners, national Economic and Social Councils and Presidents of the European institutions) and more than 140 journalists: President Juncker was kind enough to take the floor and so was Greta Thunberg, the Swedish young activist against climate change.

This event sent a powerful message, which gives me hope: youth is committed to fight against climate change and in favour of sustainable agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am certain that all of us here are united in our belief that more active transition from the linear to the circular economy will bring about benefits in terms of economic growth, creation of new jobs, and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

The circular economy contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals. This is why the implementation of the SDGs are among the key priorities for my term in office as EESC President.

I will continue to push for this agenda because the circular economy contributes, firstly, to the economic dimension by creating new business models; secondly, circular economy contributes to the environmental dimension by pursuing resource optimisation; and thirdly, it contributes to the social dimension by creating new jobs.

The transition to a circular economy is a long-term process. It requires the active involvement and engagement of all stakeholders - at local, national and European level. This is why two years ago the EESC, together with the European Commission, launched an open European platform dedicated to the circular economy. This platform acts as a hub gathering knowledge, show-casing good practices from all over Europe, providing a place for dialogue, and acting as a bridge between existing initiatives.

This initiative has demonstrated the vital role of civil society in harnessing the energy that stakeholders bring to making the circular economy a reality.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me finish by thanking the European Commission, Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioners Vella and Bieńkowska for hosting this important event today and wish you a great debate and fruitful exchanges.

Allow me to take this opportunity to welcome you to tomorrow's event, when the European Economic and Social Committee, the house of the European Civil Society, opens its doors to Day 2 of this conference.

The slogan of my Presidency is "rEUnaissance - Dare a sustainable Europe". I think that the Circular Economy is a powerful driver of rEUnaissance.

Tomorrow's participatory workshops will provide you with another opportunity to share knowledge and good practices for the implementation of circular economy on the ground. So let me thank you in advance for all your valuable contributions. Thank you for your attention.

[Video of the welcome address](#)