



New business models and corporate social responsibility go hand in hand

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Speaker

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Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you today here at the EESC, the House of the European civil society, your house!



I would like, first of all, to congratulate all of you for efficiently defending the European values and also for promoting the work that we are doing inside the Committee.

Let me congratulate in particular Philippe CITROËN for his commitment and active role of coordinator for the work that Industry4Europe is carrying out.

The creation and emergence of Industry4Europe in the European political arena shows the strong capacity we have when we need to deliver.

You have done it well! I refer to your extremely concrete joint call to the candidates for the 2019 European elections.

In it, you are rightly calling the future Parliament and the future European Commission to put industry at the top of the European political agenda. The manufacturing sector weighs for more than 20% of the European GDP and it is an essential driver of employment.

You are rightly pointing out that today, 52 million people throughout Europe benefit from employment in industrial sector. But there is, of course, much more. An efficient industry requires an efficient research and development: it calls for efficiency and excellence.

It is precisely this excellency that allows the European companies to remain competitive and to export.

Your call to the European institutions for swiftly presenting an ambitious long-term EU industrial strategy is crystal clear and is completely shared by us.

We are in the midst of the fourth industrial revolution. Everything is changing. And Europeans are facing increasing challenges such as: environmental degradation, climate change, demographic transition, industrial transformation, new economic models, and migration...

Citizens are worried for their future.

We, as civil society, and you, in particular, as driving force of the civil society, we all have an important role to play and address citizens' concerns, not least improve their well-being.

The EESC Committee has always defended a holistic approach to industry: our imperative has always been to reconcile growth, climate, environmental challenges and social challenges.

We are convinced, more than ever, that civil society has to be fully involved in these challenges.

The motto of my Presidency is, as you may know, rEUnaissance.

I am, in fact, calling for a renaissance of the European project and of the role of the European Union. I am convinced that an industrial renaissance is needed as well (*Commissioner Tajani, during his mandate, called for it*). I agree that when it comes to the economic dimension of the European project, we need a full-fledged "master plan" for European Industry, mainstreaming industrial policy across all EU policies.

This is a huge task that the EESC has always supported through its opinions:

- From improving education and training for the new jobs and services to Research and Development policies;
- From supporting climate and energy transition to defend sustainable finance - From a strengthened

social dialogue to the inclusion of sustainability chapters in the EU Free Trade Agreements or even by incorporating ILO labour standards and UN Principles on Business and Human Rights....and so on.

The European Institutions have the responsibility to support all this.

This is the message that the EESC has delivered, again and again, to the European Institutions.

I saw that in your joint call to the candidates for the upcoming European elections, you also welcome an industry that goes for quality and sustainability.

I could not agree more and I would like to draw your attention on the fact that the EU has already the strategy for the next decade: this is the sustainable development agenda, which has been adopted at United Nations' level in 2015 but has been, by then, fully endorsed by the European Union.

Agenda 2030 is, in fact, a win-win agenda: it is good for employers, it is good for workers and it is good for civil society.

I believe that the European employers have to seize the opportunities offered by the sustainable development agenda; the battery supply chain, the renewable energies or the electric cars are all key areas for achieving the economic and energy transition and for allowing Europe not to depend on technology from third countries such as US or China.

But sustainable agenda is also good for workers since several Sustainable Development Goals are the best firewall that I can think of to tackle social inequalities; the SDGs call for a decent work for all and for a better life.

And when it comes to civil society, I believe that if civil society is properly involved in the monitoring and implementation of the 2030 Agenda, then it can really make the difference. No wonder that I am calling for a change of strategy of the European Union. Europe 2020, for many reasons, has not delivered as well as we had hoped for. It is time to move to 2030 Agenda and to use the best economic and social governance tool that we already have: the European Semester.

Linking the objective (2030 Agenda) to the governance tool (the European Semester) is the right way forward.

The European Commission has adopted on 30 January a Reflection paper on *"Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030"*. Let's be clear about it : we would have hoped for more and I said it clearly and loudly to my friends of the Commission but one thing is for sure: This Reflection paper is a window of opportunity to further push the sustainable development agenda.

Around me I see that every day: More and more companies are integrating the SDGs in their strategies. They have understood that sustainability and competitiveness are not in opposition, they are in fact complementary.

They have understood that responsible business can lead to more sustainable profits and growth, new market opportunities, and long-term value for shareholders: new business models and corporate social responsibility go hand in hand.

As EESC, we will be as active as possible in the upcoming European elections and we will also come out strong with these key messages: We must all take our responsibilities.

Thanks.