



EU Civil Society stands behind the European Project and calls for an ambitious implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda

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On 13 and 14 June 2019, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), together with the Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e del Lavoro (CNEL) organised the yearly "Annual meeting of the Presidents and Secretaries-General of the Economic and Social Councils of the EU and the EESC" in Rome. The topic of this year's conference "*The ESCs role in sustainable development and the implementation of the Social Pillar*" reflected the urgent need for an economic and social transformation towards sustainable development. The actual situations in Member States were highlighted and best practise examples presented. The in-depth debate with the national ESCs led to the following conclusions:

Conclusions

The ESCs' role in sustainable development and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights

The presidents and secretaries-general of the National Economic and Social Councils of the EU (NESC) and the president of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) met in Rome on 13 and 14 June 2019. They present the following conclusions, which convey a clear message of support for the European project and for the Sustainable Development Agenda, since they are, in the end, two sides of the same coin.

This year's annual meeting comes at a crucial time, just about some three weeks after the European Parliament elections, which strengthened its democratic legitimacy, and on the eve of the relevant decisions on appointments for the next institutional cycle and the adoption of the 2019-2024 Strategic Agenda for the Union.

The presidents and secretaries-general of the NESC and of the EESC agree that the 2030 Agenda, as adopted by the United Nations on 25 September 2015 and endorsed by the European Union, has to be the undisputed and overarching priority of the European Union for the next decade.

Following an in-depth debate with the delegations at the Annual Meeting of the Presidents and Secretaries-General of the National ESCs of the EU, the Presidents of the EESC and the CNEL:

- Emphasise the European Union's need for a comprehensive strategy – the 2030 Agenda – which can efficiently address the economic and social challenges that Europe has to face, while taking account of the planet's finite resources.
- Underline that the Sustainable Development Agenda, which includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is the strategy that can provide the necessary responses to the five fundamental transitions that we have to address, namely: an economic transformation, an energy and ecological transformation, an extensive social transformation, a democratic and participatory transformation and a geopolitical transition in international relations.
- Consider that each SGD should be further clarified in practical terms in order to strengthen our citizens' commitment to the European project.
- Point out that the 2030 Agenda is the win-win strategy for all:
 - i. It is the winning agenda for employers because it is clear that the real competitiveness battle will take place, at global level, in the sectors linked to the Sustainable Development Agenda: green mobility, electric cars, renewable energies, plastic processing and batteries. Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (SDG 11) offers huge potential and opportunities, particularly for European business and industry in this field. Sustainable business, as a source of innovation, creativity and wealth, is becoming the new reality. Every indicator shows that demand for some companies is growing among the next generation of customers, clients and talent.
 - ii. It is the winning strategy for workers, because several SDGs are linked to the social dimension of the European project: ending poverty (SDG 1); zero hunger (SDG2); good health and well-being (SDG3); quality education (SDG4); gender equality (SDG 5); decent work and economic

growth (SDG 8) and reducing inequalities (SDG 10). The 2030 Agenda is, therefore, a solid firewall against social inequalities and could be the basis for the social contract of the 21st century.

iii. It is the winning strategy for civil society, provided that civil society is fully involved in the governance process so that it can be further improved. Civil society could prove to be decisive in the proper monitoring of the implementation of the SDGs. This stance is also very clearly reflected in the Sustainable Development Agenda: strengthening the means of implementation and revitalising the global partnership for sustainable development (SDG 17).

- Point out that the social, economic and environmental issues are very closely interrelated and a sustainable and equitable Europe can only be obtained if substantial progress is made in an integrated way in all these dimensions.
- Stress that on the basis of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), important measures have already been adopted. This commitment must be further strengthened as significant elements of the EPSR remain largely unaddressed and have not yet been implemented (such as the chapter on "Social protection and inclusion"). Drawing up a road map would strongly encourage implementation in the various sectors.
- Consider that the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) must be used as a means to implement the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, as the SDGs are linked to the rights and principles that flow from it. The EPSR, jointly signed by the European institutions on 17 November 2017 at the Gothenburg Social Summit, has generated positive momentum for a more ambitious social agenda. This political effort needs to be further pursued.
- Welcome the signals from the European Commission and from both the European Parliament and the Council on the Sustainable Development Agenda.

- The Reflection Paper "Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030" adopted by the Commission in January 2019 forms part of the EU's firm commitment to deliver on the 2030 Agenda and to champion sustainability.

- The European Parliament's March 2019 "Annual strategic report on the implementation and delivery of the SDGs" fully endorses this political stance and captures the required sense of urgency. It underlines that sustainable development is one of the EU's fundamental objectives, as laid down in Article 3(3) of TFEU, and is closely linked to European values. Lastly, the report stresses that the Union should renew its commitment to being a global front-runner in implementing the 2030 Agenda and urges the Commission to draw up an ambitious, overarching and all-encompassing strategy for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

- The Council in its Conclusions of 9 April 2019 "Towards an ever more sustainable Union by 2030", urges the Commission to draft a comprehensive implementation strategy outlining timelines, objectives and specific measures that reflect the 2030 Agenda, to be presented in 2019.

- Urge the Heads of State and Government at the European Summit on 20/ 21 June 2019 to determine an **ambitious strategy** with regards to the debate on the adoption of the 2019-2024 Strategic Agenda for the European Union (including the implementation of the 2030 Agenda) and the issue of climate change ahead of the United Nations Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit.
- Acknowledge that in recent years, the European Semester process has proved to be a useful economic and social governance tool. It should now be updated and adapted to the 2030 Agenda so that the European semester is used in the service of this strategy, with precise indicators and more effective monitoring systems in order to guarantee better implementation.
- Stress that in addition, the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021-2027 should establish sustainable development as its core objective. The Commission, in its MFF proposal, dedicated 25% of the overall budget to sustainable development and to the fight against climate change and the European Parliament proposed 30%, while the EESC calls for 40%. If we wish to be consistent, then we must call for adequate resources not only at European level, but also at national level adapting the fiscal systems of our countries in line with the new sustainable development strategy and the roll-out of circular economies.
- Moreover, if the EU is to provide decisive political leadership and strive for a sustainable Europe, then some specific measures should be taken. We would favour the inclusion in the incoming Commission of a vice-president, with a dedicated team, specific budget and working structure, in charge of mainstreaming the SDGs into EU policies.
- The President of the European Commission should present the progress made and outline further action needed to implement the SDGs in the annual State of the Union speech.
- Point out that the launch of a collective EU journey aimed at meeting the SDGs will further mobilise civil society and European citizens - young people in particular. This is a project of hope and resilience that has the potential to further consolidate unity and solidarity within the EU.
- Stress the need for our councils to be fully engaged as they could, with their valuable know-how and indisputable political weight, help shape sustainable transitions. Because they are able to quickly adapt and renew themselves, these intermediary bodies can unquestionably function as a bridge between citizens and decision-makers and could also become councils for civic participation, entrusted with the

organisation of public consultations on new sustainable development models.

- Lastly, they underline that the European Union as the largest economy in the world must through its trade policy play a fundamental role in promoting if not imposing the sustainable development agenda on a global level.