



Europe at Work: Organised civil society for a sustainable common future

24/05/2018



Declaration by Luca Jahier, EESC President, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the European Economic and Social Committee
The responses to the multiple crises that the European Union has been confronted with have increasingly led European citizens to become disenchanted not only with the European Union itself but also with democratic institutions in general – both at the European and national level. There is a serious risk of EU citizens no longer seeing the added value of the EU for their living and working conditions as well as for their future perspectives and those of their children and for losing a common sense of belonging.

Therefore, at the moment when Europe is reflecting on its future, it is fundamental to generate more effective policies and a new positive narrative. This must be based on common values, social justice and on a long-term vision and strategy of socially, politically and economically sustainable development for a Europe which is respected globally and which can reconnect citizens with the European project.

Taking pride in our past achievements but also recognising our share of responsibility in addressing the challenges ahead, the European Economic and Social Committee, 60 years after its foundation, proposes five priorities which we believe are crucial for a stronger and more inclusive European Union:

- **A Union of values:** We need to reinforce the values of human dignity, freedom, equality, democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights, as enshrined in Article 2 TEU. At a time when these founding European values are often called into question, we must, through our words and actions, reaffirm that they are essential and non-negotiable. These values ensure peace, justice, non-discrimination and diversity as a guarantee of an open society and define both who we are today and who we want to be tomorrow. Above all we must make the Union a human one once more, where people are placed at the centre of all its actions. It is time to show active commitment to strengthen democracy.
- **Investment for a solid and shared growth:** we must ensure a smooth transition to a society that is sustainable in economic, social and environmental terms. In particular, this can be achieved by implementing a smart, sustainable and innovative industrial policy, based on a strong, fair and indivisible Single Market supported by adequate investments, as well as state of the art technical and environmental developments. We will continue to support European businesses and workers by reinforcing current successful economic and social models, whilst developing new fair and sustainable ones. We must also rise to the challenges posed by climate change and the depletion of the earth's natural resources to enterprise, employment and society at large. Within this context the Paris Agreement is a historic step forward. Action has already started to take place in this regard but much more needs to be achieved within a much shorter span of time.
- **Reinforcement of the European social model:** we need a Europe capable of protecting, and caring for all of its citizens, also those who are excluded from or are unable to participate in the labour market. The effective implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights is a first step in this direction and is essential when it comes to guaranteeing social inclusion, social investment and social innovation. While anticipating the impact of digitalisation and climate change, we need to strengthen our systems of social protection, collective bargaining and guaranteed workers' rights, as well as quality employment, fair working conditions and decent income for all, as well as consumers' rights protection. At the same time, we need a smart approach to developing the appropriate skills for the workplace of today and for the new jobs being created. In this regard, support for these transitions and life-long learning is essential. It is also crucial for Europe that the spirit of entrepreneurship, including social economy, is rekindled. Labour market transformations must generate new, decent employment, help reduce poverty including in-work poverty, and preserve and reinforce social dialogue and workers involvement and participation.
- **A new European narrative:** we believe that it is imperative to support a common sense of belonging and purpose among European citizens. We thus need not only more effective EU policies but also a new positive European narrative, which can reconnect citizens with the European project, whilst restoring people's trust in politics, strengthening cohesion and countering isolationist and nationalistic as well as populist tendencies. The foundation for this endeavour lies in culture, education, driving creativity, openness, solidarity and intercultural exchange. Especially we need to create the right environment for the young generation to regain its trust in European society.
- **A stronger and more structured dialogue with citizens:** a better link between the European Union and its citizens is of vital importance. The European Union must once more become people-centred,

enabling its citizens to achieve a better quality of life. Through our members, who are representatives of civil society organisations in their respective Member States, facing the same everyday challenges of any European citizen, the EESC has played an active role in this regard during the past 60 years. Today we renew our commitment to work with all EU Institutions and European leaders to make the most of this key link with the wider European society and of the considerable experience and knowledge found within the EESC. We are confident that together we can overcome the tide of destructive populism and xenophobia. Besides new forms of consulting citizens, we should not forget the need for a proper civil dialogue and support of public participation. Strengthening them is currently more important than ever.

At the moment of its 60th anniversary, proud of its past and confident about the future, the European Economic and Social Committee stands ready to deliver on its role and responsibilities. As a place of debate and dialogue, representing the economic and social diversity of European societies, we can offer valuable responses to the EU's economic, social and institutional challenges. We will pursue this path with strong commitment, inspired by that same common sense of purpose expressed by the conviction of our founders.

Daniela VINCENTI

Spokesperson and Strategic Communication Adviser to the President

+32 (0)2 546 8262

+32(0)497 412095

Daniela MARANGONI

Press officer

+32 2 546 84 22