



FOR A UNITED, DEMOCRATIC, SOLIDARITY-BASED, PEACEFUL AND PROSPEROUS EUROPE CLOSE TO ITS PEOPLE

Guidelines for European Union policies

President Georges Dassis



European Economic and Social Committee

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I. EUROPE

1. The European Union's "aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples"¹. European **organised civil society upholds these goals**, will not lose sight of them and will play its part by flagging them up whenever necessary.
2. The states of Europe **must be united** in order to safeguard peace between them, develop their values and contribute to the well-being of their peoples. History has proven that such a union can achieve this.
3. The EU has experienced such marked successes that it has been seen as *κτῆμα ἐς ἀεί* - a given. It is not, however, and never will be. At all times, **the EU must be safeguarded, maintained and developed**. As members of the European Economic and Social Committee, we are unmoved by this realisation: we have become involved in all forms of European economic and social life precisely because we know that there is still work to be done.
4. The EU is experiencing a serious and profound **crisis**. The economic and financial difficulties have illustrated that its **governance** has weaknesses, that its **integration** is inadequate, and that there is a real danger of serious **divisions** and the loss of what was the driving force behind the European venture: the support of its peoples and even the enthusiasm of many **Europeans**.
5. However, many people who were not yet EU citizens had the over-riding desire to join the EU because of its attraction as an area of freedom, democracy, justice, dialogue and prosperity. The EU must not disappoint them. It must be **seen by everyone as an asset**.
6. A human endeavour can only have meaning if its end goal is human beings. We cannot glue the pieces back together through **social regression**, but rather through **entrepreneurship, work and solidarity**. We will not prevent extreme nationalists from misleading vulnerable people with promises of wonderful futures and golden dawns on the day when the EU is thrown down by showing ever poorer and more unhappy people the spectacle of bewildered leaders wrongly considered to embody each nation; instead, we must act boldly and cleverly to show them that **united we stand** – for instance, against speculators and to improve the living conditions of us all.
7. We need to lift Europe up, improve and keep Europe, but not for systems, structures and abstract concepts; we must do this for the **men and women** of Europe.

¹ Article 3(1) of the Treaty on European Union.

II. THE COMMITTEE

A) The Committee's role

8. The Economic and Social Committee is itself the **expression of genuinely European values**: it was established by the Treaties, mirroring what was being done in some Member States, in order to support, develop and promote dialogue in and with organised civil society.
9. The economic power of civil society helped shape **reconstruction** in the wake of a horrific war. Civil society today has a similar role to play in building tomorrow's Europe.
10. The very existence of the Committee is a proof of **democracy** and the EU should make the **public** more aware of this: when they set up and funded a consultative body of this type, the public authorities knew that it would be critical of them – that after all is its duty. However, an authority which is not afraid to give a voice to public associations through an official EU body is certainly an authority which can pride itself on being democratic.
11. Another key feature of the Committee is that it is designed to put across the views of the **whole of organised civil society**: employers, workers and public associations are consulted together and must give their views together. This is yet another **European innovation**: other great unions of states do not have this particular type of consultation. It provides real **added value** both because it yields genuinely shared views and because, in order to deliver their views, the various components of civil society must first communicate with each other.
12. Human beings are *πολιτικὸν ζῶον* – a political animal, a social being. Living in society necessarily entails interaction with others, solidarity, association and union. Tomorrow's Europe must be a society which has **succeeded in amalgamating the individual and the group**, avoiding any tyranny by society over the individual and any tyranny by the individual over society.
13. Each individual should therefore be completely free, respected and empowered in society, but at the same time, the **freedom to organise** in the society in which we live and to undertake **collective bargaining** must be encouraged and accorded the importance it deserves.
14. According to the Treaty, the Committee "shall consist of **representatives of organisations** [...]". Therefore, it is not a group of isolated experts: it conveys the views of unions of businesses, trade unions and socio-professional bodies and associations which are well known to the general public.
15. The Committee provides the EU with a solution to the issue of **lobbying** which should be more widely known by the general public. With complete transparency, all of its members represent their organisations. We do not conceal the fact that we are working for businesses, for workers and for the various interests which justify the existence of our organisations: we fly their colours officially. We do not engage in sub rosa canvassing of the Commission's departments in order to influence European legislation surreptitiously: we publish our requests in the Official Journal.

B) How the Committee should operate

16. The Committee's chief focus is the remit conferred upon it by the Treaty, namely the adoption of **opinions** addressed to the EU institutions. Its resources will primarily be allocated to preparing, adopting, distributing and following up on its opinions.
17. Secondly, the Committee, acting alone or with partners, may undertake any **activity useful** to the EU, its institutions or European organised civil society.

18. Thirdly, the Committee will **inform** the general public and public organisations about itself, its opinions and Europe, including by travelling to the Member States and by welcoming visitors to Brussels. It will continue to make its infrastructure available to **European, national and local civil society organisations**, insofar as it is able and on the understanding that its own activities and those of the Committee of the Regions will always have priority.
19. **Administrative decisions** will be taken exclusively by the statutory bodies authorised to do so, starting with the Plenary Assembly and the Committee Bureau. The Committee presidency will however endeavour to **prepare** for all meetings by organising prior consultations, particularly with the groups.
20. Whenever possible, the **Committee's opinions** will be drawn up by a section or by the Consultative Commission on Industrial Change, as there is considerable benefit to the Assembly receiving draft opinions which have already been discussed and voted on by a large number of Committee members. In urgent cases, the presidency will **consult** with the Committee's groups and bodies to ensure that the Assembly is able to adopt an opinion either before the deadline set for the Committee or in time to ensure that it has as much impact as possible.

C) The Committee and the European institutions

1) The Parliament

21. The Committee has always supported an elected Parliament and the expansion of its authority. **"Participatory democracy"** is not the rival of **"parliamentary democracy"**: it must rather be its strongest supporter. The Committee will therefore strive to promote all forms of cooperation, administrative or political, with the Parliament.
22. The Committee should play its part when the Parliament communicates with Europeans during the annual State of the Union review. It could do so by preparing an opinion on this issue in good time each year, and by organising a major event at the most appropriate juncture.

2) The Council

23. The Committee exists only by the **will of the states which are signatories of the Treaties** and it is those states which appoint its members. It will thus carry out a crucial task by ensuring that the Council is aware of the **views of civil society**. As has always been its practice, the Committee will regularly invite members of Member State governments to attend its meetings, particularly the state which holds the presidency. It will also be ready to respond to any request for an opinion from the Council or its presidency.

3) The Commission

24. The Committee intends to play a **special role** with regard to the Commission as the Commission plays a special role in the framing of legislation.
25. With regard to consultations in the context of policy shaping and law making, the Committee will endeavour to ensure that the opinions of the EU's **consultative bodies** receive special treatment. The rapid growth of electronic means of communication means that, in theory, consultation can be opened up to everyone, but individual or stand-alone contributions cannot have the same weight as those of organisations, groups of organisations or, even more, the whole of European organised civil society.

4) The Committee of the Regions

26. The Committee will ensure that the administrative and technical **synergies** between the two consultative bodies remain an example of **good practice**, rational management and savings for the EU budget. It will also strive to develop and raise the profile of **political cooperation**, in the interest of both bodies and of the EU.

5) The other EU institutions, services and agencies

27. The Committee will endeavour to establish the best possible relations and to cooperate with all EU institutions, both administratively and politically.

III. FUTURE ACTION

28. Most of the measures sketched out below are linked to recommendations issued by the Committee in its opinions or its contribution to the Commission's work programme. The Committee will continue to promote and further the recommendations already issued but naturally will not bar itself from developing fresh ideas or tackling other issues, either on its own initiative or in reaction to referrals.

A) Over-arching principles

29. Whenever it takes action, the EU must uphold **fundamental rights**.
30. Whenever it takes action, the EU must uphold **equality**, particularly between men and women, the **prevention of any form of discrimination** and the **specific protection** of groups of people in need of it for any reason, with particular reference to minorities, people who are poor, disabled or ill, or unemployed workers, refugees, mothers, children, young people and old people.
31. Whenever it takes action, the EU must consider the **environmental** dimension and the issue of **climate change**.
32. Whenever it takes action, the EU must allow for its own internal **diversity**, languages, cultures and local, regional or national customs. It must not deprive the states of their prerogatives beyond their express commitments, and must instead encourage them to become involved, voluntarily and with determination and honour, in a growing number of fields.
33. Whenever it takes action, the EU must demonstrate **transparency**, give priority to the **"Community method"** and support **social dialogue** and **civil dialogue**, while ensuring that the identity of actors is known and their representativeness ascertained.
34. The EU must not abandon either its **social model** or its **political model** of the rule of law and parliamentary and participatory democracy, as both are key to its identity.

B) Solidarity and progress

1) Cohesion

35. The pursuit of social, economic and territorial cohesion must remain one of the EU's fundamental objectives.
36. With regard to territorial cohesion, the EU should have an **urban policy** and a **rural policy**. It should both adopt **macroregional strategies** and promote **local development** driven by local actors. It must also work towards the Single European Transport Area and finance strategic investments.
37. If economic and social convergence between states and regions is to be achieved, the **Europe 2020 strategy** must be reinforced, its objectives must be more clearly defined, indicators other than GDP must be used, and civil society and national parliaments must be given a stronger role.

38. **Social investment** has an important role to play here. Moreover, public expenditure should not be included in the budget deficit under EU budget rules.
39. The **Investment Plan for Europe** should be followed up on and monitored by the Council and the Parliament. It should be supplemented by a second **extraordinary investment plan** for growth and jobs.
40. It is imperative to encourage, promote, simplify and diversify access to **funding**. Selection criteria must comply with the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy, make the EU more competitive and highlight the impact on jobs.
41. The model of governance of cohesion programmes must allow for **social partner** involvement. **Organised civil society** must have the means to support the community. Support must be given to regional development agencies, groups of small enterprises and social enterprises.
42. Public investment is fundamental, as is a pro-active marketing strategy to attract private investment, without exposing society to any risk. Autonomous forms of financing are needed, such as **European Investment Bank (EIB) participation and eurobonds**.
43. In the regions or states hardest hit by the recession, Structural Fund co-financing must be provisionally **excluded** from accounts calculated under the budget rules.
44. The Committee itself will help to **inform** civil society about the use of all cohesion-related instruments.

2) Economic and Monetary Union

45. EMU is the cornerstone of future development in the EU. It is important for countries both inside and outside the euro area.
46. It must promote living standards, prosperity and stability. It must establish a climate of confidence and conditions in which the **real economy** can flourish. It must have an **economic pillar** and a **social pillar**.
47. The euro area should be provided with **specific instruments**, such as a convergence and competitiveness instrument with solidarity mechanisms, an instrument for joint debt issuance, a debt redemption fund, a temporary eurobill fund or specific fiscal capacity.
48. Europeans see a democratic deficit in the fact that unelected bodies play an important role in governance, resulting in a loss of confidence in the European venture. The **European Parliament** should therefore play a key role in establishing the economic priorities for each semester and in monitoring the country-specific recommendations, and **civil society** and the **social partners** should be assigned a real role in drawing up the recommendations.
49. Greater **fiscal** harmonisation is vital, as is increased cooperation in the fight against tax fraud, tax evasion and tax avoidance.
50. As regards **social** matters, assessments of the **social impact** of existing or future measures must be carried out, a **Social Action Programme** must be implemented and a **minimum income** must be introduced to combat extreme poverty. The level of this income will unfortunately have to be different for each country but it would have to be "European" – adopted jointly by the Member States and funded by means of an ad hoc fund – and extended as swiftly as possible beyond the Monetary Union.

3) The financial sector

51. The financial sector must be closely monitored and, where necessary, further regulated, in order to ensure its **stability** and contribute to growth.
52. **Banking union** must be fully completed by stepping up both the efficiency of the mechanisms in place and coordination between the bodies responsible for their application.

4) The “real economy”

53. Europe must reintroduce a real **industrial policy** in order to have a competitive, innovative, resource-efficient and low-carbon industry. It must encourage industry to relocate to Europe. It must identify and reinforce all positive factors, including the protection of geographical indications and designations. It must closely monitor **developments in the sectors** and listen to sectoral unions of businesses and workers, as well as associations with an interest in industrial production, including environmental and consumer associations.
54. Europe must not neglect its **farming sector** or its farmers. The Common Agricultural Policy was the first really European policy, and it must continue to ensure that the EU is self-sufficient as regards healthy agricultural products. In order to achieve this, it must ensure that family-run farms remain viable.
55. **Corporate financing** should be facilitated by developing and diversifying debt and equity capital markets.
56. Specific instruments must be designed for the **social economy** and social enterprises.
57. Particular attention should be paid to **SMEs**, micro-enterprises and family-run businesses. Although they make up over 98% of European businesses, provide over 67% of EU private-sector jobs and produce 58% of gross corporate value added, SMEs are particularly vulnerable and subject to major difficulties as regards financing.
58. A common, EU-wide definition of the **professions** should be developed, describing their general characteristics, the categories of professions and the professional and ethical requirements for carrying out such professions, in order to protect consumers and guarantee quality-based competition in the single market.

5) The digital single market

59. The EU must flank the digitalisation process by **research, development and a legal framework** as well as by **training** users and sector workers. Particular attention must be given to **security, access and impact** on businesses, jobs and work and on society as a whole.

6) Transport

60. The **Single European Transport Area** must be promoted and made a priority. Moreover, adequate public financing at national and European level must be guaranteed for **strategic investment** in transport.

7) The Energy Union

61. The Treaty of Rome established the European Atomic Energy Community. Sixty years on, it is time for the EU to establish the European Energy Community. European energy must be **competitive, safe and sustainable**. The establishment of the Energy Union requires reliable, sound and transparent **governance** together with a European **dialogue** to convey the concerns of businesses and associations of workers and individuals.
62. Absolute priority must be given to combating the high **cost** of energy and **energy insecurity**, for both businesses and the general public. The EU must undertake to protect Europeans from energy poverty and to prevent them being marginalised.
63. Businesses must be supported during the energy **transition**, a balanced **climate** policy must be promoted, indigenous **renewable energy sources** must be encouraged and **innovative models** of sustainable development in the areas of energy savings and waste reduction must be explored.

8) Defence

64. Steps must be taken to establish a **European defence policy** and to consider **European membership of NATO**; at present, 22 Member States belong to NATO on an individual basis.

9) Own resources

65. The European Union must have a **budget** equal to its ambitions. The Committee will strive to draw up proposals to secure a substantial increase in the budget, to simplify the system of contributions and payments for the Member States and to design a new system of own resources.

C) Civic and social policy

1) Services of general interest and public services

66. Ensuring universal access to basic services is one of the fundamental duties of the community, and thus of the public authorities, from local level up to European level. It is important to **define** these services, overlooking nothing which is truly in the general interest, and to provide a sound **management framework**.

67. The **public authorities** must deliver a number of services for members of the public and businesses. Public administrations and services must be encouraged to do so **efficiently, swiftly, transparently and democratically**, namely by ensuring that they are always answerable to an authority overseen by voters and by providing a guarantee of accessible means of appeal. It is imperative to encourage modernisation, simplification and clarity, and to ensure that the **role** of public services at every tier in Europe is properly understood both by the general public and by the agents themselves.

2) Justice

68. Justice must be **accessible** and all judicial bodies must be able to operate efficiently and to hand down rulings within a reasonable timeframe. Regarding criminal matters, cooperation between the judicial authorities and the police must be stepped up, to remove any possibility that crime, particularly serious crime, organised crime and terrorism, may capitalise on the existence of separate jurisdictions.

69. The fight against **corruption** should be explicitly built into the programmes of the European institutions. For its part, the Committee will take an active part in combating corruption.

3) Health

70. The fight against **inequality** in health matters is a priority: even in times of crisis, people's health should not depend on their purchasing power. Member States' health systems must be based on the **principles** of universality, accessibility, equality and solidarity. There must therefore be the option for services to be covered by the **public purse** (taxation and health insurance), and the percentage payable by the patient, where appropriate, must never dissuade the most disadvantaged people from accessing healthcare.

71. Cost control, particularly as regards pharmaceutical products, and the development of **new technologies** are important for the sustainability of health systems.

4) Education and training

72. Education, teaching and initial and ongoing vocational training are among the areas in which the EU and its Member States should **invest** the most. Any measure promoting personal development, culture, intelligence and socialisation, from early childhood up to retirement age, should be encouraged, as should preparing people for specific jobs and offering further training. The EU must develop schools across the board and support the work of teachers across the board.

5) Employment and work

73. **Employment must be an absolute priority** and the impact of any measure on employment must be properly assessed.
74. Labour market policies should provide for greater **participation** by employers' organisations, trade unions and civil society at large.
75. The jobs created must be **sustainable and "decent"**. It is important to promote **collective agreements** and negotiations to secure decent jobs for fair pay. Steps must be taken to combat undeclared or wrongly declared work, unstable contracts, forced "self-employment" and anything which prevents businesses, particularly SMEs, from creating more good quality jobs, including unnecessary administrative burdens or delays in settling invoices.
76. **Youth unemployment** in particular is extremely worrying. It is crucial to ensure that the funds assigned to combat this problem are governed by effective rules and that they are used swiftly and correctly on the ground.
77. In the event of **posting** of workers, the principle should be to apply the working conditions and social rights of the **destination country**. Furthermore, in order to counter abuse, substantially improved coordination must be implemented between Member States and a **single market authority** able to take effective action against abusive practices must be set up.

6) Migration

78. A new **migration policy** is needed, founded on human rights and solidarity.
79. The Dublin Convention must be revised to authorise asylum seekers to apply in **any Member State**. The countries most affected by migration flows must receive financial **support** sufficient to enable them to host people in decent conditions.
80. **Solidarity** must be guaranteed and responsibilities shared between the Member States, a **legal** migration system underpinned by active policies must be put in place, **equal treatment** of migrant workers must be guaranteed and provision must be made for democratic **oversight** of the enactment of legislation and policies.
81. **Cooperation** with countries of origin and transition must be enhanced, both to support regional development in order to reduce migration flows and in the areas of return and readmission, further measures must be taken to combat **traffickers**, search, **rescue** and disembarkation must be organised at European level and an intra-EU **transfer** mechanism must be established.

D) External action

1) Neighbourhood

82. European policy must focus on relations of **good neighbourliness**, promoting **security** and **stability** and establishing a better **economic and social situation** in partner countries. Initiatives must comply with **fundamental rights** and uphold **social rights**, including freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. The **Committee** must keep up **communication** with the employers' organisations, trade unions and associations in neighbouring countries and **help** them to promote stability and cohesion.

2) Trade

83. In negotiations with third states or groups of states, the EU must stand firm as regards its **economic interests** and its **social and environmental** requirements.
84. The **Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership** between the European Union and the United States must therefore safeguard **European standards** and the accompanying level of protection. Priority must be given to setting up an **international arbitration court** rather than settling disputes between investors and states through private arbitration mechanisms. Lastly, such agreements must include a **civil society** consultation mechanism guaranteeing balanced representation of economic, social and environmental interests in both implementation and follow up.

3) Development cooperation

85. Projects financed by the EU must be made more effective and **local civil society** must have better access to funding.
86. **Social protection** must be seen as fundamental for inclusive, sustainable development.

4) Sustainable development

87. The EU must keep up its efforts to **promote** sustainable development at international level and must **mainstream** the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals into its own policies.
88. A framework must be put in place for more structured participation by European civil society in the implementation and follow up of these goals, including as regards the work of international organisations.

E) Better lawmaking

89. When there is a simpler way to achieve the aim of the rules in place, the **burden** on individuals, businesses (particularly smaller businesses) and farmers **must be reduced**.
90. However, legislative streamlining must not run counter to the **general interest**, which assumes that individuals, workers and consumers will be protected. Any streamlining contemplated must therefore be subject to an integrated and balanced analysis of the economic, social and environmental impact.
91. A key component of "smart legislation" is ensuring that **consultations** are properly structured; they must be organised **simply and transparently** on an **institutional and representative** basis.
92. Ex post analyses will only be effective if they are conducted **at a certain distance**. Furthermore, the Commission should strive to improve the process by drawing firstly on **its own experience** and its own resources and those of the **consultative bodies** set up by the Treaty, having recourse to "trilogue", committee procedure or potentially costly and burdensome external assistance only when its added value is clearly demonstrated.

F) Participatory democracy – the Committee’s contribution

93. The priority must be to reinforce participatory democracy, in order to foster Europe’s “democratic resilience”. The following steps must be taken if **civil society** is to play a stronger role in decision making:

- the rules in place for **European Citizens’ Initiatives** must be streamlined and improved;
- a periodic, structured and effective framework for horizontal and vertical **civil dialogue** must be established: the procedures for civil society participation in EU decision making must be revised and a green paper issued on ways and means whereby civil dialogue could be effectively organised on a permanent basis;
- the **process of consulting** stakeholders must be improved, in terms of representativeness, accessibility, transparency and feedback;
- a single **database** must be created with information on contact, consultations and dialogue with civil society, and an annual report on these consultations drawn up;
- a **European statute for associations** must be adopted, and work must continue on drawing up a European statute for foundations;
- the Member States must be asked to include **national** economic and social councils or similar institutions in the European Commission’s structured dialogue with the national parliaments.

94. The **European Economic and Social Committee** will continue to contribute to the European policy-shaping process by conveying the **ideas and expectations** of European civil society to the EU institutions. It will work to ensure that its mission is more widely **known** and to ensure that it has the appropriate **impact** on the EU’s policies and laws. It will call on the institutions to support it in its work and will itself support the **economic and social councils** and similar institutions in our Member States and in our regions.





European Economic and Social Committee

Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 99
1040 Bruxelles/Brussel
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