



European Economic and Social Committee

The post-2015 agenda for sustainable development

Conclusions

of the

joint extraordinary meeting of the

External Relations Section and the Sustainable Development Observatory

20 October 2014

1. Introduction

On 20 October 2014, the EESC External Relations Section (REX) and the Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) of the EESC Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment Section (NAT) held a joint extraordinary meeting to debate the state of negotiations and provide recommendations to EU institutions by way of contribution to a common EU position on the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda.

2. Objectives and fundamental principles of the post-2015 agenda

- 2.1 Members of the EESC, as previously stated¹, fully support global efforts to establish an ambitious post-2015 framework to eradicate global poverty, reduce social inequality and enable a development model that combines social justice with economic stability and the protection and restoring of the planet's natural resources and ecosystems. They further welcome the Commission communication "A Decent Life for All: from Vision to Collective Action"² outlining the principles, priority areas and targets for a post-2015 framework.

¹ EESC opinions CESE 2417/2013 - REX/372 (2013) and CESE 955/2013 - NAT/594 (2013)

² COM(2014) 335

2.2 The Committee shares the position expressed by the Council³ and the Commission⁴ that the post-2015 framework must build on the principles of:

- being **global in aspiration and coverage and universally applicable** to all countries,
- being **based on national ownership and taking into account different national contexts**, capacities and levels of development,
- being **human rights-based and people-centred**,
- clearly concerning a **new model of development** that combines poverty eradication and preservation of environment in a mutually reinforcing manner,
- **integrating the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development** in a balanced way.

2.3 Members underline the importance of maintaining the **fundamental principle of universality**, which opens up a new dimension of shared responsibility between developed and developing countries and the emerging economies for poverty eradication, the reduction of social inequality, inclusive economic development and environmental protection. The Sustainable Development Goals and Targets should be universally applicable to all countries. At the same time, implementation of the universal framework must allow differentiation, whereby the specificities of each region and country are taken into account.

2.4 EESC members highlight that the post-2015 agenda must fully **integrate the fight against poverty and inequality with policies to preserve natural resources and ecosystems**. Human well-being requires access to safe accommodation, healthy food, clean water and sanitation and low-carbon energy, a clean environment and the sustainable management of global public goods. Eradicating the root causes of poverty and inequality also requires peace, security, democratic governance, the protection of human rights, including gender equality and social justice, and equitable access to education, healthcare, natural resources, decent work and good infrastructure.

2.5 Members welcome the **OWG Outcome Document** with its comprehensive set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals which are complemented by specific targets. It effectively incorporates the above-mentioned principles into a solid foundation for the post-2015 framework. This agreement is the fruit of long and difficult global negotiations. It is an achievement that should be defended and built upon.

³ EU Council Conclusions on the Overarching Post-2015 Agenda

⁴ COM(2014) 335.

3. A strong European voice in international negotiations

- 3.1 Members call on the EU and the Member States to define a strong and ambitious common position, defend it with one voice and, on the basis of the principles previously defined, **provide leadership** in the negotiations on the post-2015 framework.
- 3.2 Members call on the EU and the Member States to **support the set of 17 SDGs in the OWG Outcome Document**, and to take a stand against re-opening the debate on the goals, which could undermine the achievements. The Council must make the promotion of the OWG recommendations an integral and central part of the EU position in the negotiations on the post-2015 agenda. At the same time, individual targets under each goal may require further refinement so that they can be managed and monitored.
- 3.3 The EU should promote and defend the principles of sustainable development not only in the UN but also in other multilateral and bilateral relations. In this regard, EESC members of the REX section and the SDO highlight the proposal put forward by the recent EU-ACP Joint Declaration on the Post-2015 Development Agenda⁵ and the commitments made at the 2014 EU-Brazil Summit⁶. In the framework of its international programme, the EESC will continue to support this process by promoting the post-2015 agenda as part of its activities with representatives of civil society from third countries and regions.

4. Coherent EU policies

- 4.1 In order to achieve credibility and **lead by example**, the EU and its Member States have to ensure that all their policies are geared towards the fight against poverty, inequality and environmental degradation in a balanced and coherent way. We draw attention to the fact that ongoing debates on key EU policies with a 2030 or longer horizon will pave the way for implementation of the global post-2015 framework in the EU. It is imperative that these policies be integrated closely into the global framework, and that they set objectives and targets that will further the achievement of future SDGs. At the same time, using future SDGs as a baseline should not prevent the EU from setting more ambitious standards and targets at domestic and EU level based on specific European priorities and values. The Year for Development 2015 could provide an opportunity to raise awareness, gain EU citizens' support and promote the integration of EU policies into the global sustainable development agenda.
- 4.2 So far, the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and the economic governance of the EU have followed asymmetric paths. As a consequence, the EU has regressed rather than progressed with regard to key objectives such as financial stability, job creation, poverty eradication and the preservation of natural resources and ecosystems. The mid-term review of

5 Declaration endorsed at the 39th session of the ACP-EU Council of Ministers: http://www.acp.int/sites/acpsec.waw.be/files/ACPEU%20JOINT%20DECLARATION_post2015.pdf.

6 http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/141145.pdf, points 37 and 38.

the Europe 2020 strategy and the European Semester must tie in closely with the UN post-2015 process in order to ensure the implementation of the global Sustainable Development Goals in the EU. It must lead to a better balance of economic, social and environmental objectives in the strategy.

- 4.3 Moreover, the EU will have to extend its planning horizon beyond 2020 in order to implement future SDGs. Members therefore urge the Commission to complement the Europe 2020 strategy review by introducing an integrated political strategy for a sustainable Europe in a globalised world, with a time horizon of at least 2030⁷. Members also ask the new President of the European Commission to give a Vice-President of the European Commission specific responsibility for the EU Sustainable Development Strategy.
- 4.4 Key areas where a concerted effort will be needed to make EU policies coherent with the post-2015 framework include trade, agriculture, job creation, social protection, climate change, energy, environment and biodiversity protection, transport, health, product and consumer policy, regional and urban development, migration and the fight against corruption and money laundering. It is especially necessary that EU policies be consistent with the objective of preserving global public goods through the promotion of global public policies. Moreover, research and innovation policies should be geared to enabling the necessary transformation processes.
- 4.5 EESC members call on the Commission to prioritise participation civil society participation in all the chapters of trade and association agreements, not only those covering trade and sustainable development but also those concerning human rights, sustainable impact assessments, dispute settlement mechanisms and development aid. Civil society participation is fundamental from a democratic point of view, but also for achieving the objectives of the post-2015 framework. EESC members call on the Commission to ensure that negotiations on trade agreements are much more transparent and participatory.
- 4.6 The EU should promote sustainable agriculture worldwide as a means of ensuring food security and a decent life for farmers. To this end, the EU should support equitable access to land, production resources (including sustainable energy sources) and credit, with a special focus on the needs of local communities and women farmers. The EU should further advocate that international funds be directed preferably towards small- and medium-scale sustainable farming, family farming and rural communities. The EU should also set an example domestically by protecting and promoting the EU multifunctional agricultural model that integrates social and environmental concerns into agricultural production and strengthens rural development for the benefit of local communities.

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EESC opinion SC/39 of 15 October 2014

- 4.7 The private sector is a key player in the implementation of the post-2015 agenda. Healthy industrial and services sectors, especially small businesses and micro-enterprises, social enterprises and cooperatives are essential for local development, the creation of local jobs and social well-being. Members stress the importance of creating an enabling environment for entrepreneurship, investment and innovation. Members also stress the importance of promoting corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a way to develop sustainable business.
- 4.8 The EU has to step up its efforts to fight inequality and poverty, and to ensure social security domestically, two objectives which are at the heart of the post-2015 agenda. Members reiterate the call of the Committee to strengthen the social dimension of the Union alongside European economic and monetary union, by taking stronger measures to address the challenges of an ageing society; reduce and eradicate mass unemployment; guarantee fundamental social rights; promote entrepreneurship and new jobs; combat poverty; maintain social inclusion; facilitate social investment; promote higher education and training; develop social governance and ownership of the European project; facilitate sustainable industrial sectors; and preserve the common values of social models within Europe⁸.
- 4.9 Climate change is one of the greatest threats to human development; this will affect all economies but will hit people living in poverty the hardest. The EU 2030 climate and energy policy must set ambitious targets and lay the foundations for the EU's role as a leader and an inspiration to other countries and regions in the run-up to a new global climate agreement in 2015. We call on the EU to implement the Rio+20 commitments to phase out harmful and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, which undermine sustainable development. By implementing the transition to sustainable energy domestically, the EU can demonstrate its feasibility, its potential to address the challenges of climate change, the finite nature of fossil fuels and dependency on energy imports from politically unstable regions, as well as deriving health, environment and local development benefits.
- 4.10 Human well-being and economic development depend on financial stability, social cohesion and the planet's natural resources and functioning ecosystems. Satisfying the needs of a growing world population and the demands of developing economies while at the same time respecting planetary boundaries can only be achieved by establishing a new development model that is fairer and that addresses the current patterns of consumption typical for developed countries and the uneven distribution of resources and wealth. Europe must face up to its responsibility by enabling the transition to a model of sustainable development in these three dimensions.

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Opinion SC/038 *For a social dimension of European Economic and Monetary Union*, rapporteurs Dassis and Jahier.

5. Preparing for effective implementation of the post-2015 framework

- 5.1 The Committee calls on the European Commission to set out in a further communication the prerequisites for effective implementation of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, including financial resources and mechanisms for implementation, accountability, monitoring, reporting, and transparency. The implementation process should be financed through public funding, including domestic sources, as well as private investment, according to the principles and objectives set in this agenda.
- 5.2 The global post-2015 debate has been an unprecedented, inclusive and participatory global process. It is crucial to maintain this transparent approach in the negotiations and to develop it further in the implementation and monitoring of future SDGs. We call on the EU institutions and Member States to support a strong participatory process at the UN level, with clear terms that will ensure civil society involvement and public accountability.
- 5.3 Effective implementation, monitoring and public accountability require strong and active participation of civil society at the local, regional, national, European and international levels. The EESC calls on the European Commission to present a roadmap for the civil society contribution to post-2015 implementation which would guarantee a transparent and participatory approach to the implementation and monitoring of the post-2015 agenda at the EU, national, regional and local levels. At the national level, mechanisms have to be developed for civil society involvement in the national plans for the implementation of SDGs.
- 5.4 The Committee calls on the EU institutions to ensure effective monitoring of implementation of the SDGs using appropriate indicators of sustainable human progress. In this regard, the Committee points to the OECD *Post-2015 reflections*⁹, in particular on building effective institutions and accountability mechanisms and measuring and monitoring external development finance, as well as the *Beyond GDP* initiative¹⁰.
- 5.5 The Committee confirms its readiness to support and facilitate civil society involvement on implementation of the SDGs in the EU and to promote civil society awareness of the post-2015 agenda in third countries.

⁹ <http://www.oecd.org/dac/post-2015.htm>

¹⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=88&eventsId=1006&furtherEvents=yes>