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Press release

Second stage of the 10th Edition of the Festival for Sustainable Development held in Brussels

Sustainability: Europe performs much better than the United States in terms of well-being. The EU must put sustainable development back at the centre of its policies

Giovannini: “The data shows that the EU is the world champion of sustainable development. Precisely because of global instability, it must place the ecological transition and social justice, positive drivers of competitiveness, back at the heart of its policies. But the involvement of civil society must also be relaunched”

Brussels, 8 May 2026 – Relaunching European global leadership by bringing together competitiveness, sustainability and civil society participation: this was the theme of the second stage of the Festival for Sustainable Development, held for the first time in Brussels, entitled **“European Leadership for the Future: Civil Society at the Helm of the Post-2030 Agenda”**.

Hosted by the [Civil Society Organisations' Group](#) of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), on the eve of Europe Day celebrations, the event was attended by Executive **Vice-President of the European Commission for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition, Teresa Ribera**, Directors-General of the Commission, representatives of social partners and leading European think tanks.

The event, **promoted by the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS ETS)**, took place at a delicate **moment for the future of the Union**: in response to current poly-crises, Europe, rather than accelerating, risks slowing down precisely on the ecological and social transition mapped out by the Green Deal and the European Pillar of Social Rights, despite the continued declarations by European leaders in favour of implementing the 2030 Agenda signed at the United Nations in 2015.

The meeting opened with a presentation by **Enrico Giovannini, Scientific Director of ASviS**, of data compiled by **the Alliance on the state of sustainable development in the European Union**. Since 2010, three Sustainable Development Goals have seen deterioration at European level: reduced inequalities (Goal 10), protection of terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity (Goal 15), and partnerships for sustainable development (Goal 17). **The picture regarding inequalities is particularly critical**: 23 European countries are recording a worsening, three remain broadly stable, and only one shows a slight improvement. Even more stark is the situation regarding biodiversity, with all EU member states falling behind compared to 2010. **Positive signals are emerging on certain Goals**, particularly on gender equality, where 21 European countries show significant improvements, as well as in the areas of clean energy, innovation and climate action. Overall, only 10 of the 19 quantitative European targets analysed (53%) appear achievable by 2030, while seven (37%) are experiencing delays significant enough to make their attainment unlikely without a strong acceleration of European policies.





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"The Spring 2026 Report, which we presented at the opening of the Festival on 6 May in Milan," said Giovannini, "calls precisely for the need to move from incremental progress to genuine systemic transformation, capable of combining economic growth, ecological transition, democratic quality and social cohesion."

The presentation by **Peter Benczur of the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission** showed how, over the past 10 years, the EU has **achieved significantly better performance than the United States** in terms of "fair and sustainable well-being", measured according to the economic, social, environmental and institutional dimensions identified as priorities in the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. In particular, considering social cohesion, welfare, redistributive capacity, resilience and quality of life, the European model proves more robust than the American one, which, however, thanks to stronger economic growth, appears capable of generating greater resources to invest in the future. Benczur noted that "The EU has been a supporter and developer of the new consensus on sustainable and inclusive wellbeing. In line with the UN HLEG work and the EU treaty, the goal is to adopt new, distribution- and sustainability-sensitive metrics, for more inclusive and balanced policies within planetary boundaries".

Mariana Kotzeva, Director-General of Eurostat, spoke about the role of Eurostat and European official statistics in monitoring EU progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. She highlighted the importance of clear and easily understandable communication of Eurostat's annual SDG Report through interactive tools and visualisations. Ms Kotzeva said: "The civil society has played a vital role in designing the EU SDG indicator set and in using statistical evidence for driving public debates on the 2030 Agenda".

In the course of the debate on European policies, **Mario Nava, Director-General DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion at the European Commission**, stressed that "Competitiveness, sustainability and social fairness can and must go together: clean technologies, efficient resource use and strong social standards all make Europe more resilient. Civil society helps shape solutions that work for European businesses, workers and communities".

Cillian Lohan, President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, EESC: "Urged the European Commission to put the European Green Deal back at the top of its agenda. 'European civil society stands ready to do its utmost to relaunch the EU's sustainable agenda and to encourage the European Commission, once again, to take the lead. This agenda was the right compass in 2019, and it is even more so today. It promotes high social and environmental standards and acts as a powerful firewall for democracy, while also supporting economic growth. Civil society must relentlessly forge alliances to enable the EU to lead the way in shaping the post-2030 agenda.'"

The debate on the future of European policies also feeds into the international discussion on moving beyond GDP as the sole indicator of progress. Yesterday, on 7 May, the **report "Counting What Counts. A Compass for Measuring Progress for People and the Planet"** was published, produced by the group of experts established by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, of which Enrico Giovannini is the sole Italian member. The document proposes new indicators to measure the fair, inclusive and sustainable well-being of people and the planet, integrating economic, social, environmental and institutional dimensions, with the aim of guiding public policies beyond GDP-measured economic growth alone.

It follows that without the participation of citizens, businesses and intermediary bodies, the transition risks losing support, effectiveness and the ability to genuinely influence European policies and the shaping of the post-2030 agenda. **Marco Riccardo Rusconi, Director of the Italian Agency for International Cooperation (AICS)**, highlighted how "Sustainable development requires strong partnerships between institutions, civil society and local





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communities. Investing in participation, professional cooperation networks and connections between local and global dimensions is essential to turn the SDGs into concrete and lasting action”.

At the event organized with the support of Ferrero and moderated by **Donato Bendicenti** (RAI Chief Correspondent from Brussels), was also attended by **Maria Nikolopoulou** (President of the SDG Observatory of the EESC), **Ingeborg Niestroy** (Stakeholder Forum and SDG Watch Europe), **Andrea Renda** (Director of Research, CEPS), **Francesco Tramontin** (Vice President Global Public Affairs, Ferrero), **Luca Jahier** (Former EESC President and member of the EESC Civil Society Organizations’ Group, Elena Avenati (Private Sector and SDGs Manager, Save the Children), **Karl Falkenberg** (President EU Chapter of the Club of Rome), **Patrizia Heidegger** (Deputy Secretary-General, of the European Environmental Bureau) and **Lidija Pavić-Rogošić** (Vice-President of the Civil Society Organisations’ Group (EESC).

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