

Boosting EU competitiveness – 3 pillars for sustainable growth

This is the title of the EESC Diversity Europa [Group III](#) extraordinary meeting that will be held in the framework of the Finland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Presidency will pursue four main priorities - two of which are to make the EU more competitive and socially inclusive and a global leader in climate action– under the overarching title [Sustainable Europe – Sustainable Future](#). Group III chose to concentrate on three pillars enabling growth and thus boosting EU competitiveness: Bio-economy and low carbon Europe - Digitalization and Infrastructure in the transport sector.

The pillars are strongly interlinked and all ensure a sustainable growth for Europe. However, putting them into place involves a series of challenges to be faced by all stakeholders: from farmers, forest owners, to SMEs, industries, infrastructure operators, public and private investors, research and technology institutes, until down the end of the chain, consumers. They all need to engage in creating wellbeing and prosperity that is ecologically, economically and socially sustainable.

Group III will examine ways to use the three pillars as leverage for EU competitiveness in a most sustainable way and in the framework of the transition to a climate-neutral economy that requires a considerable reduction in fossil emissions as well as a substantial increase in carbon sequestration, especially by replacing fossil-based products.

Bio-economy plays a leading role in this as it involves replacing fossil fuels and fossil feedstock with bio-based energy and raw materials. It entails economic activities that are based on the production, extraction, conversion and use of biological natural resources. Proper physical infrastructure, including *transport* and *digital infrastructure* are a prerequisite for the bio-economy as efficient transport systems are crucial for enabling access to raw materials and the distribution of products to markets. At the same time, on one hand, bio-economy helps decreasing greenhouse gas emissions as fossil fuels in transport are partially replaced by sustainable advanced biofuels. On the other hand, digitalisation contributes to sustainable transport of all modes by making logistics more efficient, helping provide better transport and mobility information for all users and improving traffic safety.

The three pillars thus form a virtuous circle that in order to fully release its outcomes relies on active and well informed consumers willing to make sustainable consumption decisions and adapt to change.

Group III - strong of its diverse composition including most actors¹ involved in the virtuous circle – will examine and debate challenges, opportunities, consequences, examples of best practices taking stock of the particularly favourable national context in which forestry sector and transport are highly developed and innovative. The active participation of institutional, entrepreneurial, academic and advocacy actors in the programme will provide a diverse range of ideas that will contribute to the EESC's engagement to promote a sustainable growth.

¹ The unique feature which forges Group III's identity is the wide range of categories. Its members are drawn from farmers' organisations, small businesses, the crafts sector, the professions, social economy actors (mutualities, cooperatives, foundations and non-profit associations), consumer organisations, environmental organisations, and associations representing the family, women's and gender equality issues, youth, minority and underprivileged groups, persons with disabilities, the voluntary sector and the medical, legal, scientific and academic communities.