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**A new vision for a new Europe: prosperous, inclusive and sustainable**

**Ahead of the French presidency of the European Union, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) organised a seminar in Paris where high-level speakers discussed the priorities for the recovery and reconstruction of Europe after the pandemic.**

The European Union has to develop a new and forward-looking vision for a "Post-COVID Europe", together with concrete proposals for a future that prospers economically, is socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

This is the message delivered by the EESC president, **Christa Schweng**, at the seminar on "Post‑COVID Europe: Building a new deal beyond the stability and growth pact and making Europe fit for 55. The civil society has a say", which took place on 16 November 2021 in Paris and was hosted by the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council on its premises at the Palais d'Iéna.

Mentioning that the biggest challenge was now to ensure a balanced recovery throughout Europe while laying down a path towards a resilient and sustainable future, **Ms Schweng** said: "I see two guiding principles after the struggles caused by the pandemic: recovery and reconstruction. The tools to face the current economic and social challenges should be both investment and reforms."

**Need to reform the EU fiscal framework: solidarity and responsibility**

The event included high-level speakers and focused, on the one hand, on the need to reform EU budgetary rules in order to meet the social and environmental objectives while ensuring fiscal responsibility and, on the other, on the importance for European civil society organisations to remain engaged and actively involved.

**Jean Jouzel**, climatologist, set the scene of the debate, underlining that the environmental challenges were global and required everyone to look in the same direction. The latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) showed that the climate crisis was caused by human activities and was affecting the land, air and sea of our planet, and reaching the EU's objective of carbon neutrality by 2050 meant turning the ambition into action now.

With reference to a possible reform of the EU fiscal framework, **Emmanuel Jessua**, from the Research Centre for Economic Expansion and Business Development, said that the EU needed budgetary rules that were simple, credible and well applied, and that a Europe of solidarity was only possible by increasing the trust between its Member States.

In the same vein, **Andreas Eisl**, of the Jacques Delors Institut, pointed out that the need for budgetary reform had already been highlighted before the pandemic, but now it was urgent to allow funds to be allocated to the green transition: a new pact would have to strike the right balance between solidarity, responsibility and control.

Reference to sustainable financing was made by **Etienne Barel**, from the French banking federation, who noted that banks were very much aware of their responsibilities and were among the first organisations to have committed themselves to the ecological elements, recognising that the transition should be inclusive and not take place to the detriment of citizens. However, it was up to the politicians to decide what could be financed or not.

**A new green and social Europe**

**Sarah Coupechoux**, representing the Abbé Pierre Foundation, stressed the importance for civil society to have a stake in the discussion, maintaining that a future pact should reflect a just transition as well as citizens' concerns about tackling poverty: basic needs such as how to survive, how to live with dignity from their own work and how to find decent housing should be ensured.

Very much on the same wavelength, **Thierry Cadart**, from the French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT), called for a global approach to develop the concept of social justice, which should be the watchword for the future. He stated that the environmental issue was not an option, it was compulsory, and that there could not be social justice if the planet were dead. Citizens wanted to be listened to and solutions could be found in Europe, but in a social one.

Speaking on behalf of young generations, **Camille Étienne**, climate activist, emphasised the fact that young people had committed very seriously as they believed in raising awareness of the world we would be developing. There was not going to be any ecological transition if it was not fair and just, and it was key not to wait, but to act very rapidly.

Finally, **Joël Destom**, EESC member, drew attention to the importance of building trust and confidence among the Member States, warning that Europe had to renew itself, not just adapt, otherwise dangers might arise. Ever-growing cooperation between civil society and citizens was needed in the future: today, more than ever, it was important to explain Europe, of which we needed to be our own architects.

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*The European Economic and Social Committee represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. It is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the EU decision-making process.*

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