



EESC consultations on the future of Europe



European Economic and Social Committee

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The president of the European Economic and Social Committee hands a copy of the compilation of national consultations to the president of the European Commission during the plenary of 21 September 2017.

What is the White Paper on the Future of Europe?

Announced during the 2016 speech on the State of the Union, the White Paper on the future of Europe is a European Commission initiative. This White Paper is the European Commission's contribution to the Rome summit of 25 March 2017, which marked the sixtieth anniversary of the Rome Treaties, and during which the European Union (EU) reflected on its achievements over the last six decades and looked to the future.

The President of the European Commission outlined the main challenges and opportunities in store for the EU over the course of the next ten years. Five scenarios were presented depicting how the Union might evolve between now and 2025 based on the choices it makes in order to meet these challenges and seize these opportunities:

- Scenario 1: Carrying on
- Scenario 2: Nothing but the single market
- Scenario 3: Those who want to do more
- Scenario 4: Doing less more efficiently
- Scenario 5: Doing much more together

The White Paper is followed by discussion papers on subjects such as the social dimension of Europe, globalisation, strengthening the Economic and Monetary Union, the future of Union defence and the future of EU finances.

The debates being conducted in Brussels and in Member States should result in the collective drafting of "a plan, a vision and a way ahead" to be put to citizens in the light of the European Parliament elections taking place in June 2019. The White Paper thus the start of a relatively collective and decentralised process at the end of which Europeans will decide on their future. In order to stimulate debate,

the Commission is offering to hold a series of “debates on the future of Europe” in national parliaments, towns, cities and regions across the EU. The European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions are required to participate.

The role of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

On 4 April 2017, the president of the European Economic and Social Committee, Georges Dassis, received a request for an exploratory opinion from Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission. He asked the EESC to present the ideas and priorities of European civil society concerning the Union’s future development.

In view of this, the EESC opted for an original consultation method. First of all, this method addressed the need to engage civil society in each of the Member States rather than their representatives in Brussels. The EESC’s next objective was to guarantee balanced representation among the different components of European civil society. Lastly, the consultations, to be facilitated by three members of the EESC, aimed to encourage key players to participate in a format that was adapted to the culture of each nation (workshops, conferences).

27 national consultations were organised in the Member States between 4 May and 9 June 2017, and 1 003 representatives of civil society organisations took part in the debates. The reports on the national debates were then drafted, compiled and disseminated, in particular to the president of the European Commission and the MEPs who attended the interparliamentary meeting of 11 October 2017, which focused on “the future of Europe”.

The EESC’s resolution on the **Commission’s White Paper on the future of Europe and beyond** was adopted in plenary on 6 July 2017.

All the documents are available to civil society and citizens (<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/policies/in-focus/future-europe>).

The 27 national consultations

The EESC conducted consultations in 27 Member States: Germany (DE), Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BU), Cyprus (CY), Croatia (HR), Denmark (DK), Spain (ES), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), France (FR), Greece (EL), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Luxembourg (LU), Malta (MT), the Netherlands (NL), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), the Czech Republic (CZ), Romania (RO), Slovenia (SI), Slovakia (SK), Sweden (SE).

These consultations provided tangible information in response to questions compiled by the EESC.

1. Which of the five scenarios set out by the White Paper best meets from your perspective the internal and external challenges facing the EU, and why?

European civil society has knowledge based on experience of the challenges facing the European Union. Although all players generally agreed on the fact that the method chosen by the European Commission was in response to an existential issue, civil society did not, from the outset, display any real enthusiasm for the five proposed scenarios. A number of Member States were cautious (DE, CY, DK, EE, FI, HU, IE, IT, LV, LU, NL, SI, SE). However, three scenarios gave rise to both interest and debate: “Those who want more do more” (scenario 3), “Doing less more efficiently” (scenario 4), and “Doing much more together” (scenario 5). On the other hand, “Carrying on” (scenario 1) and “Nothing but the single market” (scenario 2) generated little interest or were not considered desirable (NL, PL).

More detail: Scenario 3 was welcomed because it was deemed realistic or necessary (CY, DK, ES, EE, FI). Scenario 4 seemed interesting (DK, CY, EE), but generally did not seem to be

coherent enough to be seriously envisaged. Scenario 5 was the most discussed option, even though it was not always considered to be realistic (BE, BG, CY, FI, PL). This scenario also generated greater enthusiasm as it proposed giving the EU the best-thought-out scenario.

2. Would another scenario, not mentioned, be possible and preferable? If so, why? How do you see trust and confidence being fostered in Europe?

The scenarios outlined by civil society seem to respond to expectations on European integration. They incorporate principles and political levers which would provide structure for an alternative scenario. On the one hand, values such as social justice, the development of a European identity, humanism, reciprocity (CY, EL, FR, SE) and sustainability (HR, HU) reflect the principles underlying the European project. On the other hand, political levers for deepening the single market (BG, NL, CZ), monetary union (BG, RO, CZ) and the social dimension (BG, ES, HU, IT, LV, LT, CZ, SK) outline a new scenario.

In parallel, many civil society players are anticipating Commission proposals by proposing a sixth scenario which would combine the proposed options (scenarios 4 and 5 in BG and 3 and 4 in HU and LU, scenarios 5 and 3 in PL). Lastly, something that is rarely referred to, federalisation of the EU should be accompanied by safeguards (HR, SI).

As far as boosting confidence is concerned, it is interesting to note the similarity in the views of German and Greek civil society on the current barriers hindering collective bargaining in Greece.

3. Is more visibility of and better communication on the European Union required, and how?

Civil society notes that the EU is all too often denigrated by national political leaders (EL, FI, LU, MT, CZ, PL, SK). First and foremost, if the

EU's visibility is to be raised, it needs a better narrative. Thus communication based on a "positive narrative" (FR, IE) could, for example, be illustrated by EU funded projects (DE). Likewise, it is no longer a matter of addressing a few groups interested in the EU, but of making more widespread efforts to reach out to the public (AT, FI, FR), to young people (BG, CY), even schoolchildren (LT, PL, PT) and to those who are resistant to the idea of Europe (FR).

Better communication is based on quality information and a transparent decision-making process (HR, ES, NL), objective media (CZ) and also a more balanced communication approach as part of which the EU would recognise its weaknesses and shortcomings (SE).

Lastly, the EESC's consultation process is seen as an exercise in communication on the future of the EU. European civil society should then take on a more important role (EL, HU, IT, SI, SE), in particular to raise its profile.

4. Are the policy areas referred to sufficiently comprehensive and illustrative? How would you rank them in a scale of importance? Is there a major policy area not mentioned or insufficiently high-lighted? If so, which one and which of the five scenarios would best suit its development

Civil society is nearly unanimous on two points. Firstly, the social dimension is missing from the five proposed scenarios (DE, AT, BG, CY, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, EL, HU, IE, IT, LU, MT, NL, PL, CZ, RO, SI, SE). Secondly, sustainable development is likewise absent (HR, FR, SI, CZ, NL, LV, IE, HU), although the EU has undertaken a commitment in this respect vis-à-vis local populations and international partners.

The policy areas referred to demonstrate the predominant concerns in the Member States. Thus, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Romania mention the Common

Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and peace. In Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Lithuania and Romania, civil society speaks of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). Likewise, civil society in Germany, Croatia, Finland and France is keeping a keen eye on the EU's competences in trade policy.

Lastly, civil society challenges politicians on issues where greater consistency could be secured between European policies, particularly in the economic (taxation and competitiveness, especially industrial competitiveness) and social (youth, social investment) domains.

5. Regarding “the way ahead”, how should the “Future of Europe Debates” across Europe’s national parliaments, cities and regions be structured? What role should organised civil society play in the “way ahead” and how?

For many organisations, the way ahead lies in continuing to hold consultations, while broadening them to include local, regional, national and European levels (FR, EL, IE, MT, RO, SU). Moreover, debates would gain more relevance if they systematically involved the social partners (BE, HU, SK) and economic sectors and branches in the discussions and if they were given more media coverage (EL). National parliaments have a very important role to play (BG), as do Member States’ economic and social councils (FR, PT), as illustrated by the work already carried out on the future of Europe by the French and Portuguese councils, which resulted in the stances adopted in July and September 2017.

Organised civil society feels that it has already taken on a role of pathfinder here. In this respect, it should be systematically associated with the major debates on the future of the EU (AT, FI, SI). Some organisations also call for work to be carried out on specific topics (FR). Lastly, they stress that there should be increased coordination between the different

components of civil society and better communication to plug the information deficit lamented by the public (AT, EL).

6. What are your particular expectations as regards the outcome of the consultation?

Civil society is expecting its recommendations to be taken on board by the European Commission, for example in the speech on the State of the Union (September 2017), and also in subsequent national debates. Some contributors have, however, expressed doubts as to the impact that the civil society consultations will have on European-level decisions (EL). In order to remedy this, the Commission is encouraged to “clearly” explain the follow-up it intends to give to the outcome of the consultations launched by the EESC (IE).

There are strong expectations everywhere of concrete decisions and action (DK, FR, LU), based on realistic and feasible objectives (BE, LU, MT) and devised with the help of carefully thought-out policies; at the top of the list: economic and monetary union, the social rights pillar and employment (LT, PL, PT). In other countries, reaffirmation of the European project entails people’s well-being (EL) and simplified communication.

7. How can the citizen be more empowered in shaping the future of Europe?

The public can be more involved than they are now. In most countries (DE, HR, CY, FI, FR, EL, LV, MT, CZ), greater public participation is deemed to be fundamental. It seems especially necessary to involve young people. Moreover, public involvement should be coordinated by civil society, to whom the organisation of national, regional and local public debates would be entrusted.

Recommendations also relate to the fact that Article 11(2) of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) should be fully applied¹. In the

¹ Article 11(2) stipulates that “the institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society”.

long term, it would likewise seem important to launch a campaign to educate people about the EU.

Lastly, reference is made to the institutional dimension of the EU. In addition to the necessary transparency which is perceived as being a democratic guarantee for the public, questions often relate to the EU's capacity to implement decentralised measures for informing people about major debates, such as that on the future of Europe.

Outcome of consultations

The national consultations have stimulated debates and fed into the EESC's resolution. Moreover, the consultations have revealed several interesting issues:

- Interest in or rejection of the various scenarios is not divided up along geographical lines with a north-south, east-west or any other such divide.
- Rights across the EU in particular, some organisation networks have taken up the subject in order to spark a dialogue on, and even propose, a sixth scenario.
- The outline of a sixth scenario is emerging, particularly in the responses to questions 4 and 6.





European Economic and Social Committee

RESOLUTION

The Commission's White Paper
on the Future of Europe and beyond

Towards a Common Sense of Purpose

An EESC view on the future of Europe²

1. European society and citizens ask for a credible, legitimate, and resilient EU. For more than a decade the EU has been challenged by political, economic, and social shocks, fostering a gloomy attitude and uncertainty among citizens. The EU needs overall strategies to promote the well-being of its citizens, robust and sustainable investments, creativity and entrepreneurship, and strategies to address the widening gap between rich and poor, poverty and wealth inequality. The current economic recovery should by no means be an excuse to remain passive. By contrast, the EESC urges that a considered and cohesive way forward be found in order to strengthen confidence and trust, as well as a focus on tangible results for citizens and on Europe's huge potential.
2. False expectations must be avoided. Above all, the aim should be an EU that is able to deliver in providing fully-fledged equal opportunities for all. Economic, social and environmental factors are interrelated. It is essential to enable the continent to adjust to the deep transformation process and fierce competition across the globe, and to effectively shape globalisation according to the EU's values.
3. The 'blame Brussels' game, which too many have played and still play, must stop. A common commitment on the part of the European institutions and of a wide range of stakeholders including social partners and civil society organisations, both nationally and at EU level, is indispensable. The EESC underlines that the legitimacy of EU decisions depends ultimately on the quality of the democratic process.
4. The path ahead can only be pursued successfully if it is inspired by that same *common sense of purpose* that expressed the conviction of the founding fathers, and was later reflected in each of the major steps forward. The EU should mobilise the legislative tools, guidance, funding and cooperation at its disposal to allow the EU to advance in all desired dimensions. The Treaty of Lisbon points the way.

² This resolution, adopted by the European Economic and Social Committee at its plenary session on 5 July 2017, follows on from a request of 4 April 2017 by the European Commission's president, Jean-Claude Juncker, asking the EESC to set out the ideas and priorities of Europe's organised civil society for the future development of the European Union, based on the White Paper on the Future of the EU.

The White Paper scenarios

5. The EESC does not believe that a choice between scenarios³ is a successful method for promoting a common sense of purpose or for defining the future path. Firstly, the EU is not starting from scratch. Thus the Commission should base its proposals on an in-depth analysis of the history of the EU – its achievements and shortcomings – as a valuable source for the future. The commitments of the Member States in the Rome Declaration are a positive and healthy starting point⁴. The five scenarios are addressed to the Member States, focusing on institutional changes, and thus lack direct relevance for European citizens. They also appear artificial.
6. For the EESC, scenario 1 or, as it sees it, muddling through, is not an option. Scenario 5 looks attractive to a number of people, but at present it is unrealistic. Scenario 2, with an exclusive focus on the common market, is far too limited. Scenario 4 requires an agreement between 27 Member States, which might lead to paralysis of the EU and promote centrifugal trends, endangering the Union's goals and values. Under Scenario 3, mechanisms for differentiated integration, such as enhanced cooperation, could be a useful instrument to overcome blockages in particular areas and to foster a positive dynamic in the EU integration process. However, they are instruments for achieving policy objectives rather than a goal in itself. While they should be recommended as a way of overcoming paralysis or obstacles to desirable EU legislation, the EESC underlines equally the need to promote convergence within the Union and to fight fragmentation and division. Therefore an agreement between frontrunners or catalyst countries should always be open to the *willing*, while a *common sense of purpose* should prevail.

The EESC's view on the future

A. Method

7. Strategic themes should be put in a common perspective to avoid a looming Europe à la carte or centrifugal trends. The EESC recommends a development whereby conditions are established for sharing political power across the board in a better way. All this depends primarily on political will and as such it should be a core issue in a genuine debate about the future.
8. The traditional distinction between the national and European level should disappear. Common challenges and interwoven realities across the continent underline the need for a common mission. They also require an acknowledgment of European citizenship alongside national citizenship. Policy-making must include and involve all levels of society. Objectives should be shared and the impact of decisions and policies should also be systematically evaluated at national, regional and local level to gain the support of citizens.
9. The European Parliament (EP) must play a central role in shaping Europe's future direction. In addition, there is fundamental need to promote the engagement of national parliaments, as well as their interaction with the EP.

³ See the White Paper on the Future of Europe, March 2017.

⁴ Declaration of the leaders of 27 Member States and of the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission of 25 March 2017:

<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/03/25-rome-declaration/>

10. The central objectives must be accompanied by an agreement among the Member States on:

- goals, common instruments and deadlines; the most necessary is a common narrative, building on consistency, transparency, visibility and, above all, shared communication;
- a desirable reform of the Council, ensuring effectiveness and transparency, as well as an independent Commission in matters of exclusive competences and shared competences, with strong emphasis on the Community method;
- the need for orderly consultative arrangements with all stakeholders, as well as correct implementation and respect for the rule of law.

B. Policies

11. Whatever option for the future of Europe is selected, the EESC wants a cohesive and coherent European Union. Many current policies are part of deepening integration, a long-term process that the EESC fully supports. On nearly all of them the EESC has quite recently made detailed comments and proposals for the future.

12. The single market in all its economic and social dimensions, as part of a sustainable development model, is the indispensable cement of European integration. It should ensure a genuine level playing-field. In the same vein, the EMU was seen as a decisive step forward. However, despite impressive progress its architecture remains fragile. The EMU is at the core of future developments in the EU; deepening it is therefore crucial. The EESC favours a gradual pathway to a political union with a range of macroeconomic and microeconomic measures and provisions, as well as a strong social dimension. Completion of EMU calls for genuine economic governance, including EU management of the financial sector, well-ordered reforms in the Member States concerned, and shared approaches to labour market policies. Improved governance must reinforce the foundation for more convergence, as well as solidarity, across the euro area. The highly competent public services in the EU can be supportive. The euro area should start closer cooperation in other fields.

13. The EESC also stresses the need for more cohesive governance, deeper integration and full commitment of Member States in the following areas:

- a coordinated European industrial policy based on fair competition – also in discouraging tax evasion – must ensure shared instead of national approaches in improving Europe-wide conditions to foster competitiveness in a social market economy, with the committed participation of all stakeholders in consensual dialogues and in facilitating investment (programmes) and supporting SMEs;
- promotion of upward social convergence – in line with economic convergence – in terms of employment and social outcomes, through the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, while respecting national competences;
- an Energy Union with proper governance, which is indispensable for a proper common market and energy security;
- a forward-looking European strategy and legislative framework to fight climate change on the basis of the Paris Agreement and as a contribution to the international climate agreements, and promotion of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development across EU policies;
- a Digital Single Market as an important element of future competitiveness and promoting quality job creation, while anticipating the effects of digital transformation on employment and the labour market;

- an enhanced Europe-wide technology, research and innovation strategy;
 - a (multilateral) trade policy which, in transparent negotiations, should ensure open markets and social and environmental sustainability, also emphasising equality in trade relations to secure European interests in a world that is increasingly facing protectionist trends;
 - an EU policy for consumers, in the form of a citizenship policy.
14. In the EESC's view, social matters and education must likewise be addressed more systematically at EU level to find convincing solutions. Social security and education are mostly subject to the principle of subsidiarity, and therefore fall within the scope of national legislation and decision-making processes, often including the active participation of social partners. Shared competences between the EU and Member States must be better applied in social affairs. Given increased labour market tensions owing to the digital revolution, structural weaknesses in labour markets and globalisation, the EESC calls for visible European engagement with a view to pushing for more convergence on certain social and labour conditions, while helping to promote quality job creation, fair mobility and positive commitment from citizens. A particular focus on youth and youth unemployment is needed. The role of the social partners, civil society at large, and social dialogue are paramount.
 15. More economic and social convergence in the EU is required. Yet the discrepancies between national economies, culture and traditions of social systems need to be taken into account. The EESC underlines that the EU should not be an onlooker but should have a well-defined responsibility. Proper discussions between the social partners (and other stakeholders) are needed first before a common way forward can be defined. Moreover, the EESC points to the importance of the EU directives on social matters being effectively implemented by the Member States.
 16. Education is also subject to subsidiarity. However, it is undeniable that the social and economic future of Europe and the engagement of citizens are closely related to up-to-date education and training systems at all levels. The future of the younger generation depends strongly on education. Skills are key for young people as well as older generations. The EU must therefore take an active part in the modernisation process that is under way. Education also plays an important role in communicating Europe: the EESC underlines the need for adequate information and education about the EU – including on European values and citizenship – in primary and secondary schools.
 17. Free movement of persons in the Schengen area must be re-established. This means by definition that common borders must be more effectively controlled. In parallel, the deplorable rise in international terrorism, involving murder but also cybercrime, is a serious cause for public uncertainty and must be combated. Cooperation between police forces and judicial authorities is needed more than ever.
 18. These areas are directly related to foreign policy and to the acute problem of failing states and civil wars in Europe's neighbourhood, as well as to the ensuing migration flows that are currently overshadowing all other European issues. The EESC is very much in favour of a joint migration policy that affords refugees protection under international law, a Common Asylum System, action to combat illegal migration and human trafficking, and the promotion of legal paths into the EU. In the same context, the EU must establish proper partnerships with neighbouring countries, and in particular it must relaunch a genuine Euro-Mediterranean policy.

19. Europe faces the challenge of looking after its own affairs more than it ever has since 1945. Relations within NATO and with the United States, and the effective common European management of problems arising in the European Union's neighbourhood, all urgently require deepening of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, on which successful internal and external security will necessarily depend.
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