

Europe 2020: Sustainable Europe and young generations - Visions and ideas for a sustainable Europe

**Conference on
European Sustainability in Governance and Policy
by Standard Ethics the University of Florence and the Institute for Political, Economic and Social Studies in Rome (EURISPES)**

SPEECH

by

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Ladies and gentlemen:

- It is with great pleasure that I am with you today at this conference on "Europe 2020: Sustainable Europe and young generations", speaking at this session on 'Visions and ideas for a sustainable Europe';
- Sustainability is of course the key word, both internally in Europe and at the international level, notably in view of the forthcoming UN conference 'Rio + 20';
- And of course the economic crisis is still looming over us in Europe, making 'sustainability' vital for the European project;
- Indeed, it remains to be seen how the outcome of the elections in Greece will impact the Eurozone and the future of the EU;
- The second key word in the title of this conference is 'young generations' or 'youth', who are of course the category which is the most negatively affected by the economic crisis;
- It is also the category of actors which is going to be the most impacted by a 'non-sustainable' Europe, today and tomorrow;
- For this reason, it is crucial that we demonstrate inter-generational solidarity with the young, that we embed them in the process rather than just let them 'pick up the pieces' of our bad decisions;
- Consequently, my presentation today will address three complementary dimensions to the topic: firstly, sustainable Europe via sustainable development and the green economy; secondly, I will briefly touch upon sustainable Europe via the social economy and social enterprises; thirdly, sustainable Europe via participatory democracy.

- The Various Interests Group of the European Economic and Social Committee organised a conference in Brussels on 2 May entitled 'Think Green! The opportunities of sustainable development and of the green economy';
- Moving from the theory of sustainable development to concrete case studies of existing green economy initiatives, the conference strove to raise awareness among citizens of the benefits of green growth and notably, to dispel myths and fears;
- For if Europe is to be 'sustainable' we firstly need to ensure that the current generation has 'digested' the fact that we cannot continue our lifestyles and production patterns;
- We also have to recognise the inter-linkages between the ongoing financial, social and environmental crises which have resulted from a non-sustainable use of resources;
- Thus, we need a new economic approach based on development and sustainability;
- Unfortunately, Europe has exported its industrialised economic model to the world. Now it is only through coordinated action and political commitment at all levels, that we will be able to aspire towards sustainable growth and to reverse environmental degradation;
- And there is certainly a great deal of degradation to speak of: by 2050 there will be 9 billion people in the world, who will produce at least 9 billion tonnes of CO₂;
- Already today, we are using 1.3 to 1.4 times the resources of the Earth. And on an annual basis, we waste 1/3 of the biomass we create. Clearly we have to change our behaviour;
- One step in the right direction is of course the green economy and the opportunities that it provides for the creation of *new growth* and *new jobs*;

- Indeed, it is estimated that in the next ten years the green economy will generate over 20 million new jobs;
 - But if this green economy is to be able to contribute to the sustainable development of Europe, we need to develop technology that will overhaul the energy system and modernise it without jeopardising our energy needs;
 - We need to find alternative solutions, many of which can be provided by nature, solar energy being just one;
 - But first of all, we have to accept that we must de-couple economic growth from resource use;
 - That means public authorities at all levels introducing favourable regulatory environments and financial incentives. In Europe we have the Europe 2020 Resource Efficiency Flagship – very good, now we need legislation to implement it and we need a pact between all concerned stakeholders to move rapidly in this direction;
 - As regards producers, it is imperative that investment is made into identifying and implementing resource efficient solutions, new means of production and service provision;
 - The private sector in particular has a key role to play in promoting the necessary entrepreneurship and investment, whilst the social economy is central to ensuring sustainable enterprise models with social and environmental objectives;
 - Together with the producers, the key partners in this process are of course the consumers and citizens;
 - Consumers need to be helped to make more sustainable choices, through more choice and information, better marketing, improved sustainability labelling, and cheaper green products;
 - But citizens also need to be recognised as *active* players in this new sustainable Europe, as the initiators and implementers of green businesses and projects, for example, energy production decentralised to the citizen's level;
 - Arguably, young people in particular must be actively involved in all of the above process, as they hold in their hands both the present and the future!
 - And I do believe that the future of Europe has to be in this direction, for sustainable and green growth have the potential to lead to social equity, social inclusion and job creation, all of which are in dire need in the current period of economic crisis.
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- Ladies and gentlemen, I would now like to briefly introduce the next part of my presentation, which is on a sustainable Europe via the social economy and social enterprises in particular;
 - However, I will not spend too much time on this topic, as we have two MEPs here today from the Social Economy InterGroup, who will undoubtedly address this issue;
 - I would just like to say that clearly, the social economy has fared much better in the economic crisis than traditional companies – the social economy has been a more

'sustainable' economic model and there is increasing interest in social enterprises, which I welcome;

- Moreover, we are increasingly witnessing a move by 'normal' companies towards social entrepreneurship. My perception is that private sector companies are more and more investing in 'social markets', of course with a view to making profits and perhaps even as a marketing exercise;
- Although we should not be opposed to the private sector playing a role in the domain of social enterprises, I do believe that there is also a responsibility to raise awareness of the fact that the objectives of social enterprises go way beyond considerations of profit and include social inclusion, democratic systems of governance, etc;
- Consequently, a sustainable Europe has a lot to gain from the social economy, but we should also try to preserve the particularities of the sector;
- A legal environment surrounding the social economy would be a first step in this direction, via, inter alia an EC Regulation for a European Foundation Statute, or public procurement legislation which would encourage demand for socially responsible goods and services, to name but a few.

- In the last part of my presentation, I would like to briefly touch upon the subject of a sustainable Europe via participatory democracy;
- This is particularly crucial for our younger generations, who will be the future political leaders, the future entrepreneurs, the future Europeans!
- But today and particularly as a result of the crisis, if we are to ensure the sustainability of the European Union, it is imperative that we make the EU more visible, tangible, relevant and accessible to the lives of its citizens;
- Today, we are in dire need of enhancing the sense of 'European identity' among our citizens through increased opportunities for participatory democracy and accountability at the European level;
- And we should recognise and act upon the opportunities of the Lisbon Treaty's Articles 10, 11 and 12 to send a *political message of confidence* in active citizenship and representative democracy;
- We should seize upon the opportunity to develop a European identity among citizens so that they recognise that investing in Europe is in their personal and national interest;
- In a nutshell, for a sustainable Europe we need 'more Europe', which means more trust between Member States, between Member States and Institutions, between citizens, governments and the EU, and between different national societies;
- A sustainable Europe necessitates the creation of a perception of 'community of destiny' among all of the above, something which is currently seriously lacking, both between Member States and even within the governments of single Member States.

Ladies and gentlemen:

- I hope that I have not tired you with the multitude of the issues raised in this presentation;

- But a sustainable Europe is a complex topic, with the social, environmental and economic dimensions clearly linked and with a multitude of actors;
- Youth have a central role to play and the first step is to recognise them as autonomous actors in their own right, something that is urgent and has not yet been done;
- Europe has many challenges: both reflecting the myriad of national characteristics and the difficulties of a supra-national structure;
- In effect, we need to ensure the sustainability of all of this, which is why citizens and organised civil society are key actors in this challenging process.