

***European Economic and Social Committee***

***Europe 2020 Steering Committee***

**CONCEPT NOTE**on
**Conference "Europe 2020 – paths for reinventing Europe's future"**

**Background**

EU2020 is the EU's only long-term strategy to establish a link between needs and reforms in Member States and it is currently under review. The European Council, consecutive Presidencies of the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, President Juncker and First Vice-President Timmermans have all recognised the role of EESC in implementing the strategy. On 4-5 December 2014 in Rome, the EU2020 Steering Committee (SC) organised the conference "**Towards a more effective Europe 2020"**. Since then a number of important activities have been launched and, most importantly, the EC has decided to delay the revision of the EU2020 strategy until the end of this year. The SC is organising a conference which will take a different, broader approach. This conference, which will be entitled **"Europe 2020 – paths for reinventing Europe's future",** will take place on 6 July 2015, at the EESC premises in Brussels.

**Policy issues**

The EU2020 strategy is not delivering the expected results. Despite some signs of upward market trends, the struggle for economic growth continues. Poverty and social inequality is constantly rising throughout the EU. Years of austerity measures have pushed the EU further away from creating a sustainable and fairer Europe. Now one in five young people are unemployed and if specific steps are not taken urgently, the EU will have a lost generation. In addition, none of the EU's strategies give adequate consideration to climate change, particularly to the predicted temperature change in excess of 2 degrees. All policy measures should include sustainability as one of their key priorities. The EESC has an opportunity to consult stakeholders at large and to determine how to best contribute towards finding realistic solutions.

*Is the Europe 2020 strategy still valid and able to deliver growth and jobs?*

**Main focus of the conference**

The economic landscape has shifted enormously, given the recent 20% fall in the value of the euro against the US dollar, the 50% fall in the price of oil and historically low interest rates. An opportune moment is also approaching for Europe to redirect economic development and consequently create a more socially viable environment. In light of this, the conference will examine the current situation by focusing on the following key areas:

1. Tackling economic and environmental challenges;
2. Addressing social issues,

There is a clear need to address the question of governance and, as it is a cross-cutting issue, it will be given general consideration at the event. From an organisational point of view, the conference will adopt a new approach[[1]](#footnote-1). This innovative, interactive system is intended to boost the participants' real-time involvement.

1. Tackling economic and environmental challenges

The conference will discuss the factors which shape post-financial crisis reality from an economic perspective. In order to ensure that the debate is both effective and forward-looking, it could specifically focus on how to:

* Encourage tangible and intangible investment;
* Improve the business environment, especially through the access to finance for SMEs;
* Develop the digital economy;
* Develop the green economy;
* Promote sustainable development and Post-2015 Agenda;
* Promote research, job creation and upskill human resources;
* Strengthen governance and building resilience.

Furthermore, the debate will provide an opportunity to examine the inextricable connection between economic, environmental and social challenges. The transition towards a smart economy would most probably bring a loss of employment to many sectors. We need to anticipate this change and create the economic and environmental conditions necessary for an optimal transition. There is an urgent need to take account of changes that can only be measured by creating composite indicators which factor in citizens' wellbeing[[2]](#footnote-2).

*What role could civil society organisations play in translating favourable economic conditions into real growth and jobs?*

*In civil society's view, which fiscal stimuli would be most effective for improving competitiveness – in relation to companies and SMEs in particular? How could green jobs be promoted to support economic performance?*

*In what ways could civil society help to address the fracture between governance at national and EU levels? How could it help to establish stable links between these levels of government in order to facilitate sustainable economic and social progress?*

*Achieving a sustainable balance between economic, social and environmental factors, while effectively implementing and evaluating strategies is of key importance. How could civil society contribute towards introducing new (composite) indicators that measure real growth (including citizens' wellbeing and good governance)?*

2. Addressing social issues

It is essential that we discuss how to re-establish effective dialogue at different levels (local, national, EU). It is consequently necessary to present concrete proposals for resolving the most critical socioeconomic issues. Debate on this area could focus on:

* Promoting social dialogue in order to encourage consensus-building among major stakeholders;
* Strengthening social protection, active labour market policies, skills development and targeted programmes for disadvantaged groups;
* Tackling unemployment and reducing poverty and social exclusion;
* Establishing a welfare system to cope with change and growing social problems;
* Creating alliances between social partners and other CSOs;
* Creating a sustainable economy, by focusing on changes in production processes and technologies, reallocating jobs and facilitating close cooperation between governments and the social partners.

*How could social partners and organised civil society contribute towards developing efficient dialogue, information flow and communication as part of the reform process?*

*What are the next critical steps that civil society could take in order to get involved in designing*

*and implementing measures aimed at tackling social issues – not only for the purpose of moving towards reaching the Europe 2020 strategy goals, but also in order to address the democratic deficit?*

*How can wage inequalities between European, national and regional levels be addressed? How can organised civil society contribute towards implementing minimum wages in order to strengthen social security?*

*How can the European welfare state model achieve sustainability? How can organised civil society participate in this process?*

**Tools for measuring performance**

The success of the reforms depends on their implementation and therefore progress made in Member States needs to be evaluated constantly. The EESC network of national economic and social councils (ESCs) needs to have better access to information and to be able to develop qualitative assessments. Currently, the various indicators do not give a comprehensive measurement of support for the EU2020 strategy. The EU needs to update these indicators and eventually establish composite indicators that are capable of analysing interdependent factors and therefore predicting developments. Stakeholder involvement in the design and collection of new composite indicators would be important. Given that it possesses grass-root information, civil society could contribute to the evaluation of relationships between various socioeconomic factors. The SC – together with other EESC internal bodies – could also make a difference by analysing the possibility of creating an integrated qualitative analysis system for future indicators.

*How could the EESC add value to the qualitative analysis process?*

**Gaining momentum for civil society**

Over the years, the EESC and the SC have become actively involved in the stakeholders' contribution to the EU2020 process. Since the Lisbon Strategy the SC has worked with the ESCs and similar organisations on analysing, contributing towards drawing up and implementing National Reform Programmes (NRPs). Environmental, social and economic governance at all levels (local, sub-regional, regional, national, international), has lost sight of this collaboration. The network of national ESCs must therefore address this change. The network must evolve and it could improve its operations by including new partners in the stakeholders' network. A broader network can identify bottlenecks and implement best practice more effectively. It is also better able to communicate reforms.

*How could national and EU level networks be extended, and who could they include in order to create new partnerships and stronger alliances?*

**Expected outcomes**

The conference aims to analyse current reality critically and to propose how civil society could participate more efficiently in the EU process. Firstly, it intends to provide revised civil society with proposed priority actions for the next five years. These recommendations could include new perspectives on social progress, aimed at boosting the performance and effectiveness of the EU's revised strategic goals. They may also include considerations on effective governance and indicators other than GDP, as well as making proposals on qualitative indicators and how to make them operational. Cooperation with the European Commission and the European Parliament must therefore progress, in order to improve the exchange of information and ensure optimal governance. The conference could also propose priority actions for forthcoming years.

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1. For a detailed description of the model system please see Annex I. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This should be based on the "Going beyond GDP" concept. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)