



European Economic and Social Committee

Towards a more effective Europe 2020

CONCLUSIONS¹

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The economic and financial crisis which hit Europe as of 2007 and which is continuing to have a negative impact on Member States' economies and on the quality of life of the European people has revealed the **poor resilience of the EU system**.

Four years after the launch of the Europe 2020 strategy, the EU is far from achieving its scheduled targets. The Member States are currently developing at different speeds and this is affecting their ability to meet the Europe 2020 goals and worsening social and economic divergences that were to be overcome by promoting sustainability and social inclusion.

The North Star that should have guided the Europe 2020 strategy for growth and social cohesion seems to have vanished from our sights (or was it just a shooting star that briefly lit up the skies of Europe?).

For those of us on the Steering Committee (it was not a shooting star), the way to relaunch the Europe 2020 strategy is by strengthening the tandem of competitiveness and cohesion.

And to do this, the provisions of Article 3 of the EU Treaty must be made truly operational/practicable.

Relaunching the strategy requires a paradigm shift to make the economic, environment and social targets truly interdependent, using a holistic approach intended to secure a better balance between the qualitative and quantitative aspects of development.

This is the way to build a **resilient system** that can give European civil society "protection and development", managing and, where possible, anticipating crises and economic and social change.

Resilience is a factor that affects civil society's ability to react to major upheavals and address unexpected stresses and crises. Means of preparing civil society to avert and cope with crises do exist, but they require more effective management and closer cooperation between all levels representing institutional, economic and social interests.

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Towards a more effective Europe 2020: civil society's proposals for boosting social inclusion and competitiveness in Europe, 4 and 5 December 2014, Rome.

Resilience has to be given a more central position in the processes for supporting the transition from crisis to recovery and development.

European civil society's resilience can be strengthened and yield fruit only if everyone treats it as a priority - not just the EU institutions but Member States' governments, the private sector and civil society as well.

The world is changing, communities are having to deal with increasingly serious, frequent shocks, and organised civil society representatives must work in a way that allows them to keep pace with developments. Civil society must be equipped to deal with crises better, addressing the root causes rather than struggling to contain the effects, supporting the development of a monitoring system based on indicators that take account of households' disposable income, the quality of life, environmental sustainability, social cohesion and the health and overall well-being of present and future generations.

The "beyond GDP" indicators based on promoting 'fair, sustainable well-being' are the starting point and driver for implementing a smart, sustainable, inclusive system for risk assessment, prevention and powerful response.

As we proposed in the opinion and report, and as the positive feedback of these two days has shown, this should be done by implementing a European strategy which, rather than being the sum of 28 European strategies, provides a single integrated European strategy comprising two types of policies:

- Policies which place work, enterprise and social economy players at the centre of the European stage as drivers of genuinely sustainable development.
- Sectoral (or vertical) policies providing the pillars which will ensure the effective relaunch of Europe 2020 by:
 - strengthening industrial policy,
 - unifying energy policy,
 - strengthening research and innovation (we need innovative systems able to revive traditional manufacturing sectors by integrating them with the services system),
 - promoting ways of making the European economic system more competitive, in relation to the social protection system and the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

A speaker here has warned that *if the EU institutions fail to meet citizens' expectations, those citizens will call those institutions into question, and this also applies to an institution such as the EESC.*

One of our roles is to be the guardians of the Europe 2020 strategy and the application of Article 3 of the EU Treaty, to say when things are acceptable and when they are not, and to suggest ways of changing them (to do otherwise would be to negate our role).

Renewing the institutions will also mean renewing the EESC - the home of civil society - to make our scrutiny role more effective.

It is gratifying to see that many of the things said during these two days can also be found in the **declaration of EU economic and social councils** issued on 13 November in Paris, which stressed the need to promote a path for a Europe that is:

- more social and more solidarity-based;
- more competitive and job-creating;
- closer to the people.

And so I put forward this thought for future debate: perhaps there could be a **pact for Europe** between economic, social and civil-society stakeholders to define the factors on which we agree and which we want to deploy in order to secure an effective EU recovery by strengthening the EU's competitiveness and social cohesion.
