

EESC on European Industry Day: Let's turn challenges into opportunities

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The EESC argues for closer cooperation, longer-term and predictable policies and fair trade agreements under the Commission's leadership

"Industry is the source of prosperity in almost all Member States. When industries die, whole regions suffer", warns [Gonçalo Lobo Xavier](#), EESC Vice-President ahead of a two-day conference organised by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform to mark European Industry Day (22-23 February).

"The challenges for Europe's industry are extraordinary, and no single Member State can meet them alone. But the opportunities are also enormous. We have to grab them to keep our lead in the many sectors where we have it and get it back where we have almost lost it to competitors.

This path, however, will only be successful if all 28 Member States play together, not solo. Therefore I call on the Commission and the Member States to blend the many existing policies into a single longer-term strategy and commit our countries to coherent action in order to support industry clusters across national borders."

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) takes the same line in a recent opinion on [Investing in a smart, innovative and sustainable industry](#), adopted on 15 February, where it also calls for the completion of the single market, including the capital market. It is particularly necessary to enhance standardisation and self-regulation, says the EESC.

"The low-carbon and circular economy offers many business opportunities. In order to grab them, we need a common framework and a longer-term strategy as well as Member States' commitment to coherent action. All Member States need to pull together to overcome the global challenges", says opinion rapporteur [Bojidar Danev](#).

Open trade must be fair and sustainable

Enterprises are challenged in an unprecedented way to swiftly transform new technologies into successful innovations in ever more competitive markets. "It is important that our companies comply with our very high environmental and social standards, but the same standards must apply to our competitors. We therefore urge the Commission to actively use the instruments available to tackle unfair trade practices. Our enterprises need a level playing-field," says Mr Danev.

People's welfare at the core of the labour market transition

The structure of the labour market will change dramatically. In order to avoid or at least mitigate the impact on employees, the EESC advocates proper

assessment and anticipation of possible changes. Since all workers need to upgrade their skills, particularly their digital abilities, work-based learning solutions must be applied more widely.

Technological challenges require ambitious policies and long-term investment but also changes to our education systems. Flexible pathways between education and work are needed. Collaboration between industry, schools and universities must be fostered, not only at national level but also Europe-wide.

“We need an expansion of the dual school system. Vocational training should play a greater role,” stresses opinion co-rapporteur [Monica Sitarová Hrušecká](#), who will speak at the European Industry Day’s workshop on the *Role of skills in future employment*.

“People must be at the core of change”, she adds. “The opportunities afforded by new technologies must not only be harnessed to create new products, but also to improve working conditions for staff”.

“Job security, job creation and social protection, particularly through the difficult time of transition, need to be in focus”, emphasises Ms Sitarová Hrušecká. “The EESC therefore urges the Commission to both provide more resources and extend the scope of the European Global Adjustment Fund”.

Bundling national to European efforts

“Our main competitors, China and the US, but also Korea and India, are single states with one industrial policy, while our industry policy is in the hands of 28 Member States. Industry is where we most need to manage the balancing act between the nation state and the EU, overcoming national thinking to think geopolitically. Like in the old days, the new Silk Road must also lead from West to East, with high tech products going from Europe to the rest of the world.

Therefore my advice is to pull together, to increase European collaboration in R&D and innovation activities combined with a strong skills agenda, and to turn the challenge of the digital age into a big opportunity for Europe’s industry”, concludes Mr Lobo Xavier, who will speak in the panel “Clusters and partnerships for stronger EU value chains” on the European Industry Day on 23rd February.