

Luca Jahier: “Europe must be sustainable or it will simply not be”

Luca Jahier, the president of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), opened the high-level conference on Sustainable Development Goals and Initiatives for Sustainable Global Value Chains co-hosted by the EESC, the European Commission and the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands by stating that there is no alternative to a sustainable economy: “Europe must be sustainable or it will simply not be”. The conference gathered representatives of businesses, trade unions, NGOs and professional organisations from all across Europe, and the opening session also counted on the participation of Frans Timmermans, Vice-President of the European Commission, and Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands.

Luca Jahier emphasized the role of civil society in the implementation of adequate policies in order to tackle the risks of climate change, pollution and social inequalities: *“The challenges we face can be seen as an opportunity for private companies to drive the transition towards a sustainable economy, but this will only become a reality if we all pull in the same direction: businesses, trade unions, civil society and local authorities”*. Jahier also called the Commission to take the necessary steps to make sure that the EU plays a leading role in this process, because *“the real question here is if we are leading this change or other will do”*.

Frans Timmermans pointed out that *“for the first time humanity has realized that our planet cannot fulfil all our ambitions if we don’t change the way we live and we produce”*. In his view, this situation can only be solved by facing the challenges instead of chaining people to their fears in order to control them better, even admitting that *“constructive solutions are not being convincing enough and nostalgia has become the new opium for the people”*. Timmermans expressed his optimism by stating that private companies are more and more convinced of the need of implementing sustainable policies as *“sustainability is a winning business proposition in the long term, which creates growth and jobs. However, he declared that this attitude cannot rely only in the good faith of companies and that, at some point, regulation is needed: “From my experience I know that civility helps to drive out rudeness, confidence drives out fear, dialogue drives out violence and love drives out hate; but, unfortunately, this is also true the other way around”*.

Sigrid Kaag presented some examples of good practices implemented by the Dutch authorities that could be scaled up at EU level in order to create a *“EU level playing field” in which sustainable development standards could be used as a starting point“*.

The conference was structured in four parallel workshops dealing with global value chains and corporate social responsibility in the textile sector, the banking sector, the extractive industries and the agro-food sector. These workshops were addressed to the representatives of the civil society and were

aimed to identify and share successful experiences and explore which initiatives could be scaled up to EU-level.

<https://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I162772&lg=INT&sublg=none>