

Sustainable development must be top priority for the future of Europe, says EESC



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) presented, at its October plenary session, its contribution to the work programme of the European Commission for the next five years, pointing out that the EU must focus on climate change, digitalisation, the rule of law and globalisation, and embrace a new system of governance, one that more closely involves civil society organisations.

Sustainable development must be at the heart of Europe's future. In the resolution drafted by **Patricia Círez Miqueleiz**, **Rudy De Leeuw** and **Lutz Ribbe** and adopted at the October plenary session, the EESC advises the European Commission to structure its future work plan for 2020 and beyond around this pillar. The Committee calls for an overarching EU 2050 strategy for sustainability in order to implement the UN Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), something that the European Union has committed to achieving by 2030.

We are happy to give our strong and balanced input to the EU's political priorities for the five years to come. We support the Green Deal of the

Commission's president-elect, Ursula von der Leyen, as a key driver for change. We need to act at all levels simultaneously and create a dynamic of action to address urgent environmental, economic and social challenges, said the EESC president, Luca Jahier.

Focus on four clusters

According to the EESC, the scale and speed of change nowadays requires prompt measures in four areas.

Climate change, the environment and biodiversity loss

We need to build a greener, fairer and more inclusive future, where environmental protection is a high priority and is mainstreamed in all EU policies. *Europe must be a leader in fighting for the environment and tackling climate change, but the Commission's Green Deal has to be social as well, said Mr Ribbe, acknowledging the increased effort in climate action included in Ms von der Leyen's agenda for Europe and pointing to the fact that a sustainable transition requires investment in effective and integrated social protection.*

Digitalisation, economy and employment

Europe needs a new economic strategy, promoting continuous, inclusive and sustainable economic development, and offering full and productive employment and decent work for all. *The single market is at the core of European integration, but it must be completed, revitalised, updated and upgraded to a digital single market. Innovation is our priority, said Ms Círez Miqueleiz. We are committed to implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights and we call for a fitness check of the Multi-annual Financial Framework to achieve a social transition that is just for everyone, added Mr De Leeuw.*

The rule of law, fundamental rights and migration

The EU stands resolutely for its principles of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights. Peace, justice and strong EU institutions must be promoted to protect citizens and freedoms. Demographic developments show that Europe needs migrants and their skills. In this respect, however, it is important to change the narrative and policies on migration based on closer cooperation with third countries: refugees and migrants should be seen not as a threat but as an opportunity for Europe's economic and social model.

Globalisation

The EU has to strengthen its position on the international stage in order to guarantee its prosperity, security and values. Europe needs to take the lead worldwide through consistent and strong support for the multilateral, rules-based global order with the UN at its core. The EU should promote global governance based on the core values of a social market economy, human rights, the rule of law, sustainable development, multilateralism and respect for international humanitarian law.

A new system of EU governance with a stronger participation of civil society

The Committee also stresses that a new EU governance structure, as well as new rules and instruments for defining and implementing EU policies, is crucial. In particular, the role of the European Parliament should be enhanced in order to strengthen democratic accountability.

The goal of sustainability in all its dimensions calls for considerable effort and engagement by all the parties involved. Open democratic debate underpinned by the structured involvement of civil society is therefore vital in making the transition fair and effective.

A key role for the EESC in the upcoming Conference on the future of Europe

The EESC is ready to be actively involved in the Conference on the Future of Europe proposed by Ms von der Leyen for 2020. The Committee is leading and facilitating civil society's participation in EU affairs, empowering, involving and consulting grassroots organisations which, in turn, play a pivotal role in designing, implementing and monitoring policies at all stages and at all levels, including the local level.

Civil society organisations have the capacity to reflect genuinely very different and sometimes diverging interests and to make decision-makers aware of these. The EESC is fully committed to continuing to make dialogue possible and to build bridges within civil society and towards the other EU institutions.

For more information and to read the text of the resolution, please consult our [website](#).