



European Economic and Social Committee

Brussels, 5 July 2017

RESOLUTION

The Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe and beyond

At its plenary session of 5 and 6 July 2017 (meeting of 5 July), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following resolution by 226 votes to 16 with 15 abstentions.

Towards a Common Sense of Purpose

An EESC view on the future of Europe¹

1. European society and citizens ask for a credible, legitimate, and resilient EU. For more than a decade the EU has been challenged by political, economic, and social shocks, fostering a gloomy attitude and uncertainty among citizens. The EU needs overall strategies to promote the well-being of its citizens, robust and sustainable investments, creativity and entrepreneurship, and strategies to address the widening gap between rich and poor, poverty and wealth inequality. The current economic recovery should by no means be an excuse to remain passive. By contrast, the EESC urges that a considered and cohesive way forward be found in order to strengthen confidence and trust, as well as a focus on tangible results for citizens and on Europe's huge potential.
2. False expectations must be avoided. Above all, the aim should be an EU that is able to deliver in providing fully-fledged equal opportunities for all. Economic, social and environmental factors are interrelated. It is essential to enable the continent to adjust to the deep transformation process and fierce competition across the globe, and to effectively shape globalisation according to the EU's values.
3. The "blame Brussels" game, which too many have played and still play, must stop. A common commitment on the part of the European institutions and of a wide range of stakeholders including social partners and civil society organisations, both nationally and at EU level, is indispensable. The EESC underlines that the legitimacy of EU decisions depends ultimately on the quality of the democratic process.
4. The path ahead can only be pursued successfully if it is inspired by that same *common sense of purpose* that expressed the conviction of the founding fathers, and was later reflected in any major step forward. The EU should mobilise the legislative tools, guidance, funding and cooperation at its disposal to allow the EU to advance in all desired dimensions. The Treaty of Lisbon points the way.

The White Paper scenarios

5. The EESC does not believe that a choice between scenarios² is a successful method for promoting a *common sense of purpose* or for defining the future path. Firstly, the EU is not

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This resolution, adopted by the European Economic and Social Committee at its plenary session on 5 July 2017, follows on from a request of 4 April 2017 by the European Commission's president, Jean-Claude Juncker, asking the EESC to set out the ideas and priorities of Europe's organised civil society for the future development of the European Union, based on the *White Paper on the Future of the EU*.

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See the White Paper on the Future of Europe, March 2017.

starting from scratch. Thus the Commission should base its proposals on an in-depth analysis of the history of the EU – its achievements and shortcomings – as a valuable source for the future. The commitments of the Member States in the Rome Declaration are a positive and healthy starting point³. The five scenarios are addressed to the Member States, focusing on institutional changes, and thus lack direct relevance for European citizens. They also appear artificial.

6. For the EESC, scenario 1 or, as it sees it, muddling through, is not an option. Scenario 5 looks attractive to a number of people, but at present it is unrealistic. Scenario 2, with an exclusive focus on the common market, is far too limited. Scenario 4 requires an agreement between 27 Member States, which might lead to paralysis of the EU and promote centrifugal trends, endangering the Union's goals and values. Under Scenario 3, mechanisms for differentiated integration, such as enhanced cooperation, could be a useful instrument to overcome blockages in particular areas and to foster a positive dynamic in the EU integration process. However, they are instruments for achieving policy objectives rather than a goal in itself. While they should be recommended as a way of overcoming paralysis or obstacles to desirable EU legislation, the EESC underlines equally the need to promote convergence within the Union and to fight fragmentation and division. Therefore an agreement between frontrunners or catalyst countries should always be open to *the willing*, while a *common sense of purpose* should prevail.

The EESC's view on the future

A. Method

7. Strategic themes should be put in a common perspective to avoid a looming *Europe à la carte* or centrifugal trends. The EESC recommends a development whereby conditions are established for sharing political power across the board in a better way. All this depends primarily on political will and as such it should be a core issue in a genuine debate about the future.
8. The traditional distinction between the national and European level should disappear. Common challenges and interwoven realities across the continent underline the need for a *common mission*. They also require an acknowledgment of European citizenship alongside national citizenship. Policy-making must include and involve all levels of society. Objectives should be shared and the impact of decisions and policies should also be systematically evaluated at national, regional and local level to gain the support of citizens.
9. The European Parliament (EP) must play a central role in shaping Europe's future direction. In addition, there is fundamental need to promote the engagement of national parliaments, as well as their interaction with the EP.

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Declaration of the leaders of 27 Member States and of the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission of 25 March 2017:
<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/03/25-rome-declaration/>

10. The central objectives must be accompanied by an agreement among the Member States on:

- goals, common instruments and deadlines; most needed is a common narrative, building on consistency, transparency, visibility and, above all, shared communication;
- a desirable reform of the Council, ensuring effectiveness and transparency, as well as an independent Commission in matters of exclusive competences and shared competences, with strong emphasis on the Community method;
- the need for orderly consultative arrangements with all stakeholders, as well as correct implementation and respect for the rule of law.

B. Policies

11. Whatever option for the future of Europe is selected, the EESC wants a cohesive and coherent European Union. Many current policies are part of deepening integration, a long-term process that the EESC fully supports. On nearly all of them the EESC has quite recently made detailed comments and proposals for the future.

12. The single market in all its economic and social dimensions and in the framework of a sustainable development model is the indispensable cement of European integration. It should ensure a genuine level playing-field. In the same vein, EMU was seen as a decisive step forward. However, despite impressive progress its architecture remains fragile. EMU is at the core of future developments in the EU; deepening it is therefore crucial. The EESC favours a gradual pathway to a political union with a range of macroeconomic and microeconomic measures and provisions, as well as a strong social dimension. Completion of EMU calls for genuine economic governance, including EU management of the financial sector, well-ordered reforms in the Member States concerned, and shared approaches to labour market policies. Improved governance must reinforce the foundation for more convergence, as well as solidarity, across the euro area. The highly competent public services in the EU can be supportive. The euro area should start closer cooperation in other fields.

13. The EESC also stresses the need for more cohesive governance, deeper integration and full commitment of Member States in the following areas:

- a coordinated European industrial policy based on fair competition – also in discouraging tax evasion – must ensure shared instead of national approaches in improving Europe-wide conditions to foster competitiveness in a social market economy, with the committed participation of all stakeholders in consensual dialogues and in facilitating investment (programmes) and supporting SMEs;
- promotion of upward social convergence – in line with economic convergence – in terms of employment and social outcomes, through the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, while respecting national competences;
- an Energy Union with proper governance, which is indispensable for a proper common market and energy security;

- a forward-looking European strategy and legislative framework to fight climate change on the basis of the Paris Agreement and as a contribution to the international climate agreements, and promotion of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development across EU policies;
 - a Digital Single Market as an important element of future competitiveness and promoting quality job creation, while anticipating the effects of digital transformation on employment and the labour market;
 - an enhanced Europe-wide technology, research and innovation strategy;
 - a (multilateral) trade policy which, in transparent negotiations, should ensure open markets and social and environmental sustainability, also emphasising equality in trade relations to secure European interests in a world that is increasingly facing protectionist trends;
 - an EU policy for consumers, in the form of a citizenship policy.
14. In the EESC's view, social matters and education must likewise be addressed more systematically at EU level to find convincing solutions. Social security and education are mostly subject to the principle of subsidiarity, and therefore fall within the scope of national legislation and decision-making processes, often including the active participation of social partners. Shared competences between the EU and Member States must be better applied in social affairs. Given increased labour market tensions owing to the digital revolution, structural weaknesses in labour markets, and globalisation, the EESC calls for visible European engagement with a view to pushing for more convergence on certain social and labour conditions, while helping to promote quality job creation, fair mobility and positive commitment from citizens. A particular focus on youth and youth unemployment is needed. The role of the social partners, civil society at large, and social dialogue are paramount.
15. More economic and social convergence in the EU is required. Yet the discrepancies between national economies, culture and traditions of social systems need to be taken into account. The EESC underlines that the EU should not be an onlooker but should take a well-defined responsibility. Proper discussions between the social partners (and other stakeholders) are needed first before a common way forward can be defined. Moreover, the EESC points to the importance of the EU social directives being effectively implemented by the Member States.
16. Education is also subject to subsidiarity. However, it is undeniable that the social and economic future of Europe and the engagement of citizens are closely related to up-to-date education and training systems at all levels. The future of the younger generation depends strongly on education. Skills are key for young people as well as older generations. The EU must therefore take an active part in the modernisation process that is under way. Education also plays an important role in communicating Europe: the EESC underlines the need for adequate information and education about the EU – including on European values and citizenship – in primary and secondary schools.
17. Free movement of persons in the Schengen area must be re-established. This means by definition that common borders must be more effectively controlled. In parallel, the deplorable rise in international terrorism, involving murder but also cybercrime, is a serious cause for public uncertainty and must be combated. Cooperation between police forces and judicial authorities is needed more than ever.

18. These areas are directly related to foreign policy and to the acute problem of failing states and civil wars in Europe's neighbourhood, as well as to the ensuing migration flows that are currently overshadowing all other European issues. The EESC is very much in favour of a joint migration policy that affords refugees protection under international law, a Common Asylum System, action to combat illegal migration and human trafficking, and the promotion of legal paths into the EU. In the same context, the EU must establish proper partnerships with neighbouring countries, and in particular it must relaunch a real Euro-Mediterranean policy.

19. Europe faces the challenge of looking after its own affairs more than it ever has since 1945. Relations within NATO and with the United States, and the effective common European management of problems arising in the European Union's neighbourhood, all urgently require deepening of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, on which successful internal and external security will necessarily depend.

Brussels, 5 July 2017.

Georges DASSIS

The president of the European Economic and Social Committee
