



European Economic and Social Committee

NAT/760
Reflection Paper "Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030"

OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

Reflection Paper "Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030"
[COM(2019) 22 final]

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Referral	European Commission, 12/03/2019
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Bureau decision	11/12/2018 – enlargement 22/01/2019
Sections responsible	Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and Information Society
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Plenary session No	546
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	168/3/5

1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1.1 Sustainable Development must be at the heart of the future of Europe. While appreciating the comprehensive analysis in the Reflection Paper, its description of the challenges, the direction in which to move and the potential for Europe that it shows, the EESC is concerned that the pace of transition towards sustainability, globally and within Europe, falls short of what is needed to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that we agreed upon. The urgency of addressing today's environmental, social and economic challenges is not matched by political action.
- 1.2 Sustainable Development is a common goal on a global scale; it requires common effort of all nations to achieve sustainable use of natural resources and prosperity for all people. Europe cannot achieve it alone, but the EU can and should use its weight as biggest trade block and as big importer of bio-based resources to push globally for sustainable sourcing, thus supporting maintaining global biodiversity and ecosystems that are vital for our common future.
- 1.3 Sustainable Development is about the future of people; the economy should, within the planetary boundaries, work for society to deliver prosperity and equity, now and for future generations. The Agenda 2030 is a people-centred project designed to leave no one behind. The launch of a European Green *and Social* Deal will be an important element in the transformation of European economies in a radically more sustainable direction.
- 1.4 The time for reflection has passed: it is now high time for action. The EESC wants to see an urgent move to develop and deliver an EU-wide, overarching, long-term Sustainable Development Strategy accompanied by a comprehensive implementation plan to achieve the SDGs by 2030.
- 1.5 The Sustainable Development Strategy should encompass both EU internal and external action and promote maximum coherence between them. The implementation plan should integrate sustainability in all policy areas, outline key actions which the EU will undertake to implement the SDGs, a clear timetable and roadmap, concrete targets and indicators, and the main roles and responsibilities of all EU institutions, agencies and actors. Cornerstones of the implementation should be innovation, sustainability-oriented international cooperation and trade agreements, and mobilisation of business and civil society.
- 1.6 The establishment of a governance and coordination framework alongside the strategy for implementing the 2030 Agenda is necessary to ensure that the SDGs are at the centre of all policies. In particular, the EU Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 should have been based on the SDGs and the European Parliament should play a prominent role. The new Commission should be organised around the implementation and mainstreaming of the SDGs, as laid out in the Commissioners' Mission Letters.
- 1.7 The EESC calls on the Commission to move beyond GDP growth policy. The use of GDP as a measure of prosperity ignores important elements of social and environmental costs and benefits.

- 1.8 The EESC recognises that there are leaders within the business community on integration of sustainability. Many businesses are actually ahead of the policies. Policy needs to create the stable environment and certainty to ensure best practice becomes common practice. This will make business capable of delivering sustainable solutions.
- 1.9 The EESC calls for all existing EU policy and budgetary/financial frameworks and tools (such as the European Semester, Better Regulation, MFF, etc.) to be urgently aligned with the achievement of the SDGs. Credible sustainability-proofing methodologies should be identified or developed at EU level to ensure that budgetary/financial instruments, policy frameworks, and impact assessment approaches support SDG implementation in the EU's internal and external action. New tools, such as measures of "distance to targets" and new indicators, should also be developed.
- 1.10 The EESC was the first EU institution to have a body dedicated to advancing sustainable development – the Sustainable Development Observatory – and is committed to promoting and mainstreaming the SDGs in a more comprehensive manner throughout its opinions as well as in its internal functioning and structure. It will therefore launch an internal reflection on aligning its internal governance with the SDGs.
- 1.11 Structured involvement of civil society is necessary and a clear mandate for civil society's participation in the development, implementation and monitoring of the strategy should be provided. The important role played so far by the Multi-Stakeholder Platform (MSP) should be reviewed with the involvement of all stakeholders and lessons learnt from the success of other relevant multi-stakeholder forums, specifically the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform. The MSP should be upgraded and brought into a formal and interinstitutional consultation framework, as recommended by the European Parliament¹.
- 1.12 Sustainable Development has the potential to be a tool for social solidarity and can counter the rise in populist anti-establishment feelings of citizens who are disconnected from decision-making and power. It must not be an elitist agenda but a people-centred project, aiming at making sustainable consumer choices accessible and affordable.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The long-awaited Reflection Paper "Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030" was published on 30 January as part of the debate on the future of Europe as well as of the EU's commitment to deliver on the UN SDGs, including on the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.
- 2.2 The EESC has been at the forefront of calling for the development of an ambitious, overarching EU Sustainable Development Strategy for several years and has put forward proposals on the necessary policy and governance measures to achieve the SDGs in many of its opinions across sectors. While contributing to the discussion on the Reflection Paper, the current opinion builds on previous EESC work and aims to set out a vision and make concrete proposals for the

¹ EP Annual strategic report on the SDGs, March 2019.

necessary governance reforms, tools and mechanisms underpinning an overarching strategy that will be by its nature long-term.

2.3 A growing number of social and ecological indicators point to the need for urgent action and a rapid transition to sustainability on the part of the EU and other global actors. A recent UN IPCC report warns that humanity has approximately 11 years to limit the emissions of greenhouse gases and prevent a rise in global temperatures or trigger dangerous and potentially irreversible levels of climate breakdown². Alongside the climate emergency, other environmental challenges, such as biodiversity loss and air pollution, are of increasing concern for our citizens and require urgent action. Social inequalities are also rising in Europe. Nearly one quarter of our children and young people are at risk of poverty or in poverty³, and millions of young people cannot find decent work to start shaping their adult life. Certain minority groups have further levels of exclusion, for example people with disabilities. Nationalist and populist movements are thriving across Europe and fundamental values and rights are challenged in several Member States (MS). The very foundations of the EU are being called into question.

3. General comments

3.1 The time for reflection has passed, and it is time for action. The publication of a Reflection Paper on sustainability should have been timed to coincide with the launch of the SDGs in 2015. The EESC wants to see an urgent move to design and deliver an overarching EU-wide Sustainable Development Strategy and an Implementation Plan, as recommended in previous opinions⁴ and as mandated by EU Council Conclusions in 2017, 2018 and April 2019⁵.

3.2 The Reflection Paper sets out different possible scenarios for achieving sustainability. The reality is that a hard choice between scenarios is not realistic. Only Scenario 1 provides for an overarching strategy, but this scenario would also need elements of the other two scenarios to be effective. An overarching strategy is essential, and a coordinated political approach is a prerequisite to achieving a sustainable future. This opinion further develops some of the ideas that are sketched out in Scenario 1.

3.3 The urgent requirement for more ambition and rapid implementation expressed in this Opinion should not be mistaken for a lack of appreciation of any progress that has been made to date. The EESC welcomes the analysis provided by the Reflection Paper and the recognition of policy foundations for a sustainable future as well as of horizontal enablers for the sustainability transition. However, the urgency from concerned citizens and experts is not matched by political action.

² <https://www.ipcc.ch/>

³ [Eurostat](#)

⁴ EESC Opinions "Indicators better suited to evaluate the SDGs", [OJ C 440, 6.12.2018, p. 14](#), "Next steps for a sustainable European future", [OJ C 345, 13.10.2017, p. 91](#), "The transition towards a more sustainable European future", [OJ C 81, 2.3.2018, p. 44](#)

⁵ Towards an ever more sustainable Union by 2030 - Council conclusions.

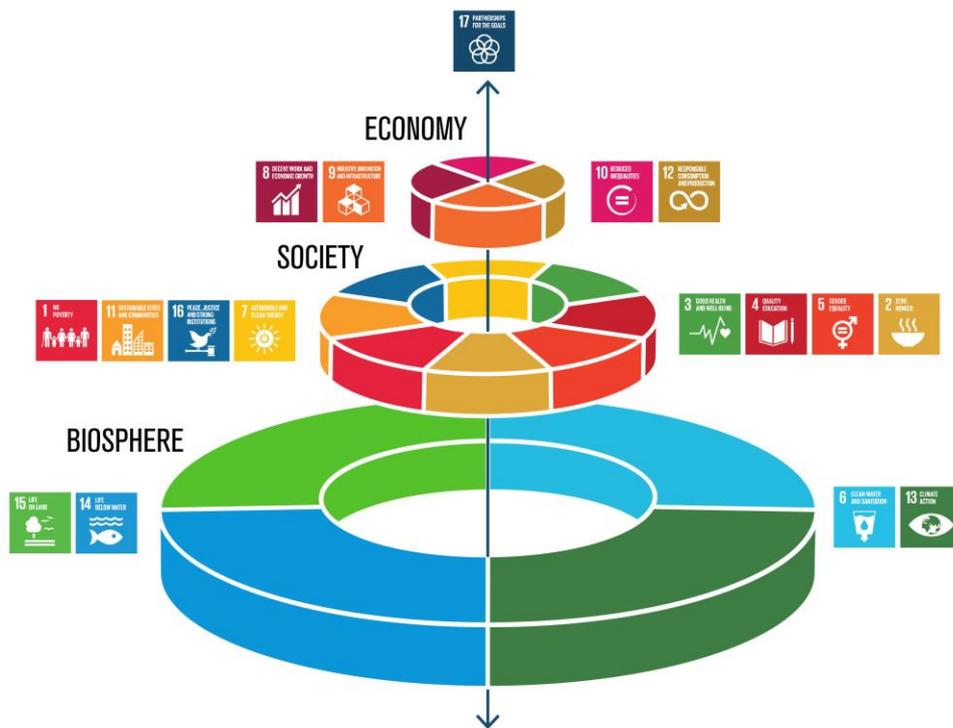
- 3.4 The EU has taken a lead in terms of policy initiatives on sustainability. However, for a variety of complex reasons, implementation has not matched these initiatives. The EU has one of the world's largest ecological footprints and CO₂ emissions per capita. Even within its own borders, the EU is not on track to achieve environmental sustainability.
- 3.5 It is not enough to create a low-carbon, resource efficient and more social Europe; a sustainable Europe will need to take into account the environmental and social impact beyond its borders due to its imports. If the EU wants to be a global leader as described in the Reflection Paper, then the EU must understand and take seriously its responsibility and impact on a global level. In this connection, the Committee sees the EU's ongoing negotiations with the Mercosur countries as almost a litmus test for a new trade policy geared to sustainable development. It therefore supports the call by those groups who are clearly urging that such a treaty should not be concluded without, for example, the committed involvement of all parties in implementing the climate agreement, conserving tropical rainforests and/or taking on board the interests of indigenous peoples – or, at least, that a termination clause must be included that takes effect if such recognised and fundamental sustainability efforts are violated.
- 3.6 As a continent that has been in the lead in the extraction and use of natural resources, and with high rates of consumption, Europe can provide valuable lessons in the actions that have been taken to improve resource efficiency and reduce its impact on the environment, and other efforts made to achieve change, including in social protection.
- 3.7 The EU must frame and implement a model of sustainable development that demonstrates to the rest of the world, how the continuous pursuit of real sustainability promotes social cohesion, advances economic development, ensures ecological well-being, facilitates inclusive governance and leaves no one behind.

4. **Fostering a systemic approach to sustainable development**

- 4.1 The Reflection Paper does not go far enough in stressing that a paradigm shift and a systemic approach are needed to address today's unprecedented challenges. The definition of Sustainable Development is already agreed. However, there is a need to ensure it is fully and consistently implemented through policy and regulation and that its principles are enforced.
- 4.2 The definition used by the UN and the EU is from the Bruntland's Commission: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"⁶.
- 4.3 Since the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, Sustainable Development has been referred to as having three pillars, environment, social and economic, and that each pillar should be respected and considered in decision-making. Sustainable Development is enshrined under Article 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union as one of the EU's long-term goals.

⁶ <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>

4.4 The diagram known as the "wedding cake" below illustrates that Sustainable Development is about people, and an economy should work for society to deliver prosperity, equity and an environment that provides quality of life. This diagram links the layers to the internationally agreed SDGs⁷.



4.5 The key principle of sustainable development is the integration of environmental, social, and economic concerns into all aspects of decision-making. Two principles set out in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union – the precautionary principle⁸ and the polluter pays principle⁹ – are applied in this context and must be used to ensure that the most vulnerable do not bear the cost of environmental damages. Inherent in sustainability is the concept of intergenerational equity.

4.6 A fourth dimension of sustainable development has to be recognised as well – that of governance going through all the three economic, social and environmental layers. The EU should reinforce the important paradigmatic shift of Agenda 2030 towards a more participatory model of multi-stakeholder governance for sustainable development (see point 9), and encourage a "whole of society" approach to making the important transition to a more sustainable future for the planet.

⁷ [Stockholm Resilience Centre](#), 2016. Illustration: Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre

⁸ Article 191 TFEU.

⁹ Article 191(2) TFEU.

4.7 The Reflection Paper sets out the use of law as a means of ensuring and facilitating implementation as the preferred approach. The Commission says that respect for the law would be a prerequisite to receiving any EU funding and therefore be used as a driver for implementation of the SDGs. This will require equality in law of the three elements of sustainable development, environmental, social and economic. The EESC repeats its call for a recognition of the rights of nature to ensure parity with the rights of individuals and of corporations¹⁰.

5. **Moving beyond GDP growth policy**

5.1 Europe needs a paradigm shift¹¹ and a new model of growth, one that is qualitatively different from what we have had thus far, that is socially inclusive and ecologically sustainable, and able to encourage and accompany convergence of the digital and ecological transitions in our countries and societies.

5.2 The EESC calls, as in former opinions, for the need to look beyond GDP and to also use other indicators to determine prosperity at a national level^{12 13}. GDP is an indicator of economic development in financial terms but ignores important elements of individual and social wellbeing and does not properly take into account the costs of natural capital (climate, depletion of natural resources, negative impact on ecosystem services like clean air, fresh water, fertile soils and liveable cities and landscapes). It ignores the quality and fairness of labour relations and the unpaid work of people, thus ignoring most value added of carers for children or elderly people and volunteers in cultural and sports activities. Sustainable development means economic growth¹⁴ that takes all aspects of present and future human wellbeing into account; it includes the societal and environmental costs and benefits of activities and respects the planetary boundaries. It increases the wealth that humankind holds in common. It is not enough to put an economic value on societal and environmental elements; we must ensure that economic actors take these into account in their decision making. This requires intervention to safeguard public interests and to internalise external effects.

5.3 Competitiveness is a prerequisite for continuous improvement of resource efficiency. However, competition in free markets does not by itself deliver optimal results for society. Society must set the rules and conditions for producers of goods and services and organise countervailing power to secure public goods and interests, such as fairness and sustainability. The market power of actors must be contained to prevent misuse to the detriment of labour, consumers, other businesses and the public at large. The global competitiveness index therefore needs to take into consideration environmental and social dimensions¹⁵.

¹⁰ EESC Opinion "Climate Justice", [OJ C 81, 2.3.2018, p. 22](#)

¹¹ EPSC, July 2016.

¹² EESC Opinion "Next steps for a sustainable European future ", [OJ C 345, 13.10.2017, p. 91](#)

¹³ EESC Opinion "Beyond GDP" [OJ C 100, 30.4.2009, p. 53](#)

¹⁴ EESC Opinion "Sibiu and beyond".

¹⁵ EESC Opinion "Sibiu and beyond".

- 5.4 While appreciating the comprehensive analysis in the Reflection Paper, its description of the challenges, the direction in which to move and the potential for Europe that it shows, the EESC is concerned that the pace of transition towards sustainability, globally and within Europe, falls short of what is needed to achieve the goals that we agreed upon. Over 200 academics recently published a letter calling on Europe to move beyond growth-policies¹⁶.
- 5.5 The EESC supports the line in the Reflection Paper that transition to sustainability should be seen as an opportunity to enhance employment and prosperity. European businesses have a chance to take the lead, be at the source of collaborative innovation, riding the wave of the digital revolution to create sustainable business practices and new standards. The SDGs have the potential to define growing markets for companies that can deliver innovative solutions and transformative change.
- 5.6 The EESC recognises there are leaders within the business community on integration of sustainability. Business is an enabler for societal and environmental development¹⁷. Many businesses are actually ahead of the policy.
- 5.7 An overarching strategy for Sustainable Development and the appropriate regulatory framework will create an enabling environment that would stimulate more investment and maximise opportunities for businesses. It will make business capable of delivering sustainable solutions.

6. **Financing the change**

- 6.1 The Reflection Paper includes finance, pricing, taxation and competition among the horizontal enablers for the transition.
- 6.2 The EESC notes that, despite the broad vocal support for sustainability, the current policy environment does not provide an effective mechanism for the integration of social and environmental costs in investment decisions. Assessment of actions and investment is mostly based on financial/economic returns only. This does not produce actual application of the principles in a transformative way.
- 6.3 Some finance must be based on environmental and social returns. Finance needs to be used to leverage the change that gives returns for sustainability – the current measure of the effectiveness or the worthiness of actions is based on financial/economic returns only. This limited thinking will never fund the transition to sustainability. In the EESC's view, reorienting capital flows towards a more sustainable economy must inevitably go hand in hand with financial inclusion and social cohesion in a Europe where no-one lags behind¹⁸.

¹⁶ <https://degrowth.org/2018/09/06/post-growth-open-letter/>

¹⁷ EESC opinion "Sibiu and beyond".

¹⁸ EESC Opinion "Action Plan on Sustainable Finance", [OJ C 62, 15.2.2019, p. 73](#)

- 6.4 Funding and financing for R&I is a critical aspect of sustainable development but also the funding and financing instruments themselves need to be designed in an innovative way¹⁹ with for instance budgeting for the systematic inclusion of persons with disabilities. Financing needs to go beyond projects that are low carbon, and have higher resource efficiency to capture the valuable work and initiatives that give returns that are either environmental or social.
- 6.5 Social investment is particularly useful to counter the high risks of poverty in the EU and increase Europe's employment potential²⁰. The EESC recognises the continued investment in circular economy initiatives as a tool for achieving increased sustainability.
- 6.6 The launch of a European Green *and Social* Deal will be an important element in the transformation of European economies in a radically more sustainable direction. It should be a major European public investment programme to support large capital projects with clear and widespread public benefits such as the retrofitting of public buildings, the redesign of public transport and the building of clean-energy systems. It should create badly-needed jobs across Europe particularly in regions with high concentrations of unemployment (particularly among youth and persons with disabilities) and would encourage rapid development and innovation in European vocational education and training systems.
- 6.7 The Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) is crucial to ensuring mainstreaming of the SDGs, and the final decision on the MFF for the 2021-2027 period will signal whether the EU will be able to achieve its 2030 Agenda commitments. The Commission's proposal misses the opportunity to make the 2030 Agenda the priority of the European agenda. Beyond the limited proposed increase in the climate mainstreaming target, the new MFF should allocate relevant financial resources for sustainable development and also ensure that no funding undermines the implementation of the SDGs. Funding needs to be made available to SDG implementers, including MS, local authorities, business, trade unions and NGOs for innovative, scalable and inclusive projects²¹. In particular, the next final MFF should enable the transition to a climate-neutral economy by 2050. The EU must show a level of ambition that will match the challenge of the fight against climate change; an average 40% of its global budget must be allocated to this objective²². Also, the EESC highlights a problem with small-scale civil society actors accessing financing to ensure potentially transformative initiatives are supported and can happen²³.
- 6.8 The EESC again calls for an end to fossil fuel subsidies, and for a sustainable food systems approach to our food production and processing sectors as a practical means of mainstreaming sustainability in policy²⁴. It has pointed out on several occasions that the EU has so far failed to

19 EESC Opinion "Facilitating access to climate finance for non-state actors", [OJ C 110, 22.3.2019, p. 14](#)

20 EESC Opinion "The impact of social investment on employment and public budgets", [OJ C 226, 16.7.2014, p. 21](#)

21 EESC Opinion "Indicators better suited to evaluate the SDGs ", [OJ C 440, 6.12.2018, p. 14](#)

22 EESC Opinion "European Finance-Climate Pact", [OJ C 62, 15.2.2019, p. 8](#)

23 EESC Opinion "Facilitating access to climate finance for non-state actors", [OJ C 110, 22.3.2019, p. 14](#)

24 EESC Opinion "A comprehensive EU food policy", [OJ C 129, 11.4.2018, p. 18](#)

deliver on its many promises about internalising external costs, consistently applying the "polluter-pays" principle and phasing out environmentally harmful subsidies, and calls once again on the EU institutions to put forward a comprehensive plan for a green taxation system²⁵.

- 6.9 Sustainable Development also signifies progress and prosperity. Research and innovation will play a critical role in this. At both EU level and MS level, publicly funding R&I must significantly increase with a focus on delivering SDGs. This could also be used to leverage private sector funding.
- 6.10 Private investment has a key role to play in the transition to a sustainable economy. Public-private partnership can help optimise the sustainability returns on investment both in a European and international context.

7. **Sustainable development as a tool for social solidarity**

- 7.1 Sustainable development could be a tool to counter the rise in populist anti-establishment feelings of citizens who are underprivileged and disconnected from decision-making and power. It must not be an elitist agenda but a people-centred project, aiming at making sustainable consumer choices accessible and affordable. Attempts to address problems by forcing costs on those already struggling and feeling disenfranchised and excluded is leading to a clear rejection of political solutions (e.g. climate policies, and many environmental policies), and manifesting itself in an expression of extremism and an insular anti-migration message. Decent work is a necessary condition for the sustainability transition.
- 7.2 The transition requires investment in effective, inclusive and integrated social protection systems, including quality and accessible services such as health and long-term care, by practicing the social dialogue. Research shows that investment in education and healthcare have long lasting positive effect on social mobility, however Member States have tended to reduce investment in both areas over the past decade. If such is the case, this trend must be reversed. The cost of transition to a low carbon sustainable economy, must be met proportionally by those who can most afford to pay (for example as per Polluter Pays Principle) and should be subsidised with public money. Solutions to our current unsustainable model that exacerbate the problem are not viable solutions and need to be rejected as policy options – in reality they are being rejected on the streets of Europe, e.g. through the Climate Strike children.
- 7.3 The Reflection Paper does not hide from the statistics that show this huge inequality issue in the EU. Over 22% of EU citizens are at risk of poverty. Middle income earners are dropping, with low income earners increasing in most Member States. Approximately 7% suffer material deprivation. These are shocking figures that quantify the abject failure of current policies. Furthermore 43 million people cannot afford a decent meal every second day. That's nearly 10% of our population.

²⁵ EESC Opinion on the Market-based instruments towards a resource efficient and low carbon economy in the EU (own-initiative opinion), [OJC 226, 16.7.2014, p. 1](#)

7.4 The Reflection Paper states that environmental issues cannot be solved with environmental policies alone if economic policies continue to promote fossil fuels, resource inefficiency or unsustainable production and consumption. The EESC highlights that all EU, national and local policies should take account of the social sustainability factor in the same way that they do for economic and environmental sustainability²⁶.

7.5 While the need for linkages between economic and environmental spheres and the economic and social areas has been fully recognised, it is often still not given due consideration. The link between environmental and social concerns also has to be developed further. For instance, the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) should serve to promote people's well-being and should significantly contribute to the 2030 Agenda. Although there is much common ground between the 17 SDGs and the 20 principles of the EPSR, a proposal to better combine the two in practice in order to achieve useful synergies in the implementation should be put forward by the Commission.

8. **A new European political narrative on sustainable development**

8.1 There is a clear imperative for the EU and its MS to develop an engaging public narrative on the importance of SD for Europe and the world. The substance of this new public narrative should avoid being overly technical or jargonistic and should focus on how they relate to the real lives of people in Europe and beyond. It starts from education at all levels, from schools to organisations.

8.2 An EU-wide public awareness-raising campaign should be launched involving different sectors who can reach out to their own constituencies. In particular, mass media, especially public media, "creatives" from the world of culture, the arts, music etc. should be encouraged to get involved in developing cultural programmes at national level that translate the political narrative of SD into culturally resonant communication within different MS.

9. **A new multi-stakeholder and multi-level governance**

9.1 The Agenda 2030 promotes an important paradigmatic shift towards a more participatory model of multi-stakeholder governance for sustainable development. Goal 17 of the agenda identifies a central role for multiple stakeholders, including the private sector, trade unions, civil society, academia, local communities and others, in monitoring, implementation, review and follow-up activities.

9.2 When multi-stakeholder participation in Agenda 2030 is fully operationalised at multiple levels (i.e. regional, sub-regional, national and local), this new model of governance is likely to have broad popular appeal. The opportunities for inclusive public participation in monitoring and implementation activities presented by Agenda 2030 provide a clear mandate to go a considerable way towards ameliorating current levels of public cynicism and the loss of trust in formal political systems.

²⁶ EESC Opinion "A socially sustainable concept for the digital era", [OJ C 237, 6.7.2018, p. 1](#)

- 9.3 The MSP set up by the Commission in 2017 and in which the EESC took an active part should now play a lead role in developing and supporting the implementation of an ambitious Strategy and Implementation Plan for a Sustainable Europe. An official review of the functioning of the MSP that involves all stakeholders should be carried out and a clear mandate should be set out. This process should examine best practice from other relevant multi-stakeholder forums (e.g. the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform) and incorporate this learning into the way in which the MSP is organised going forward in order to maximise its effectiveness and overall functioning. This could include the need for more adequate resourcing of the MSP's work, more frequent meetings of its high-level political committee, more opportunities for extended debate and engagement amongst its members, more focus on regular liaison with national SD platforms and the facilitation of more regular, transparent and accessible public consultations on matters related to sustainable development.
- 9.4 National strategies for the implementation of the SDGs have already been developed or are being developed by several MS²⁷. An EU-wide strategy would provide an enabling framework for the national strategies to gradually move towards greater convergence. The "Open Method of Coordination" could be applied in this context, facilitating the exchange of good practices and peer-to-peer learning across MS.

10. **Aligning the existing tools to SDG implementation**

10.1 A fundamentally new European Semester

10.1.1 Currently the European Semester is the main annual coordination instrument of the EU's macro-economic objectives involving the EU and its MS. It needs to be fundamentally transformed and made more transparent so that it contributes to ensuring political coherence and coordinated implementation and monitoring of the SDGs, as already called for by the EESC²⁸ and by the MSP²⁹. All phases of the Semester process need to be adapted to ensure effective coordination of the implementation of the SDGs at EU and national level in line with a future overarching strategy³⁰.

10.1.2 The Annual Growth Survey should be replaced by the "Annual Sustainable Growth Survey"³¹, with a balance between social, economic and environmental priorities in line with the SDGs. Organised civil society should be more involved in all phases of a reformed Semester, at both EU and national level to bring additional policy expertise to the process, ensure more

27 [See EESC country fiches on SDGs Member State activities](#)

28 EESC Opinions "Indicators better suited to evaluate the SDGs ", "The transition towards a more sustainable European future ", [OJ C 81, 2.3.2018, p. 44](#), "Annual Growth Survey 2018", [OJ C 227, 28.6.2018, p. 95](#)

29 MSP report.

30 EESC Opinion " Sibiu and beyond".

31 EESC Opinion "Annual Growth Survey 2019".

independent monitoring on policy developments, promote buy-in by society to these reforms, and overall strengthen participatory democracy.

10.2 Better Regulation

10.2.1 The use of the Commission's Better Regulation tools is another way to ensure further mainstreaming of sustainable development in European policies. All Commission impact assessments, fitness checks and the REFIT Platform's recommendations must evaluate environmental, social and economic impacts so that sustainability is duly considered and factored in. Ex post evaluations must also analyse all three dimensions in a strong integrated approach. A "sustainability check" should also be more explicitly incorporated into the REFIT programme³² and policy coherence for sustainable development should be ensured.

10.2.2 The EESC calls on the Commission to integrate sustainable development and the SDGs into the evaluation processes.

10.2.3 Social partner consultations are also required, respecting Treaty provisions requesting the specific consultation of labour and management in relation to legislation on social issues (Article 154(2)); consultations with the EESC, the Committee of Regions and national parliaments form another component of the better regulation toolbox to meet the inclusiveness requirement that is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda.

11. EU targets and better indicators

11.1 The overarching strategy should establish EU targets for achieving the SDGs. These targets need to be monitored with a set of indicators that: 1) are sufficiently comprehensive to measure the distance to targets and to provide an appropriate progress review; 2) provide a basis for policy planning and policy shaping. The current EU SDG set of indicators³³ fails to do this.

11.2 The EESC reiterates its call for the major involvement of civil society in the definition of indicators and in assessing the EU's progress towards the goals³⁴.

11.3 The EU SDG set of indicators should fully integrate other existing sets of indicators, e.g. the European Social Scoreboard³⁵ following the example of how the Scoreboard has been already incorporated into the Semester.

³² MSP report.

³³ Eurostat on EU SDG indicators.

³⁴ EESC Opinion "Indicators better suited to evaluate the SDGs", [OJ C 440, 6.12.2018, p. 14](#)

³⁵ Eurostat on Social scoreboard.

12. **Monitoring and Accountability**

12.1 Regular inclusive and transparent monitoring and accountability systems must be put in place to measure progress in the EU's SDG implementation. The EU must actively participate in the UNECE Regional Sustainable Development Forum each year and provide leadership in accelerating regional progress towards achieving SDG goals and targets. The EU should also commit to regularly presenting an overarching joint EU report on SDG implementation at the UN's HLPF, complementing the "Joint Synthesis Report" on EU development policy. The EU's overarching report needs to cover all external and domestic EU policy and the governance aspects, as well as an analysis of the EU's current position and how it will achieve the SDGs by 2030.

13. **Implementing the SDGs in EU External Action**

13.1 Many EU internal policies can result in spill-over impacts outside the EU, with positive and negative impacts on other countries' attempts to achieve SDGs. The EU's external action policies, including investment, trade, development, peace and security and human rights policies, must be reviewed to ensure that they support the achievement of the new global sustainable development agenda. For example, the sustainability chapters of current EU trade agreements lack teeth and are hard to enforce. Sustainable development must become central to EU trade policy, for example by introducing formal complaint procedures when violations of the sustainability commitments of trade agreements occur. Trade should be a tool for sustainability and for the implementation of the SDGs in the context of international cooperation. This could be regulated through multilateral agreements. The power of EU trade can drive sustainability along the global value chain, for example focusing on sustainable sourcing.

13.2 EU External Action must ensure greater integration between the implementation of the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement. No consideration is given under the current framework on the EU's spill-over effects and/or footprint. Furthermore, the current EU framework and SDG indicators focus primarily on progress in implementing the SDGs within the EU and do not measure the EU's contribution towards achieving the SDGs at the global level. Sustainable investment in the value chain should also be ensured.

Brussels, 26 September 2019

Luca Jahier

The president of the European Economic and Social Committee

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N.B.: Appendix 1 overleaf.

APPENDIX I

to the Committee opinion

The following amendments, which received at least a quarter of the votes cast, were rejected during the discussion:

New 13.3

Add a new point as follows:

The EESC also points out that all the EU's efforts could be in vain and fail to produce the desired results if they do not at the same time succeed in properly addressing the unchecked growth of the world's population.

Result of the vote

For	47
Against	108
Abstentions	5