

*European Economic and Social Committee*

Brussels, 28 February 2003

**RESOLUTION**

of the European Economic and Social Committee

To

**the Spring European Council**

**of 21 March 2003**

At its 397th plenary session (meeting of 27 February 2003), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Resolution by 126 votes, with 1 abstention:

The Lisbon strategy is in trouble.

The Commission Report to the Spring European Council on the Lisbon strategy of economic, social and environmental renewal makes it evident that although some progress has

been made, implementation of the strategy is falling seriously behind schedule. With the Lisbon strategy (and its objective for the EU to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion) in trouble, the EU strategy for sustainable development based on the interdependence of economic, social and environmental considerations is also falling behind. The Report indicates growing disparities between Member States in the implementation of the strategy as a whole.

The EESC calls for efforts to be made to implement the Lisbon strategy (as completed by the Göteborg European Council) comparable to those deployed to bring about the single market and the single currency. It calls for a much stronger commitment by Member States, but also by European institutions, regions, social partners and civil society as a whole to work towards the Lisbon objectives, including presentation of detailed progress reports.

The EESC strongly believes that the Lisbon objectives remain relevant and necessary. Efforts need to be made to rebuild confidence among European citizens and to create a positive vision for the future, based on citizens' involvement, ensuring a more balanced distribution of the wealth produced and the surplus created by modern technology.

The Göteborg European Summit established a new approach to policy-making, stipulating that the economic, social and environmental effects of all policies should be examined in a coordinated way and taken into account in decision-making. The integration of sustainable development into the Lisbon strategy presents a particular challenge not yet met by the European institutions or by Member States.

The EESC considers that in the present political and economic climate it is all the more important that the EU gives a stronger message on the importance of pushing ahead with the Lisbon objectives and with sustainable development.

The new Member States will automatically be partners in the Lisbon strategy and the EU sustainable development strategy, although neither were included in the discussion of the *acquis communautaire*. The EESC considers it is essential to facilitate efforts by the accession countries to speed up implementation of the strategy.

## **THE ECONOMIC SITUATION**

The economic situation has worsened in the last two years and current international tensions are not favourable to an up-turn. Without strong and sustainable economic growth it will be difficult to reach the other objectives agreed in Lisbon. The EESC therefore recommends:

- better targeting, in the current circumstances, of the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines and of the application of the Stability and Growth Pact, stressing the growth element, to favour sustainable economic activity, the preservation of individual purchasing power and employment;
- assuring in particular a more efficient co-ordination in the euro-group and on that basis a strengthening of its role in European bodies and institutions;

- balancing the system for taxes and social security charges to ensure both better investment and adequate and sustainable social protection;
- relaunching the single market in key sectors such as the Community Patent, and a fully simplified, quality regulation;
- encouraging business innovation, competitiveness and entrepreneurship, including an optimal use of the opportunities offered by the Sixth Framework Programme for Research.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

The EESC supports the three objectives (full employment, quality and productivity at work, cohesion and an inclusive labour market) in the proposal on the future of the European Employment Strategy and fewer, more stable and better targeted employment guidelines. The Committee reiterates its demands for improved coordination between the Economic Guidelines and the Employment Strategy in order to achieve these three objectives.

The EESC calls for the Member States to involve the social partners and other civil society organisations to draw up more precise objectives and measures at national and regional level. These should contribute to the fulfilment of the European objectives and be followed up by the European Commission. Actions taken within the employment strategy should be adapted and differentiated to the needs of the individuals and enterprises. This calls for partnerships between actors at all levels.

The EESC calls for particular focus on actions to implement guidelines on

- Basic education and life long learning
- Entrepreneurship
- Management of migratory flows
- An inclusive society for disabled and other disadvantaged groups
- Gender balance.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The EESC regrets that sustainable development is still not fully integrated in the Lisbon strategy and recognised as one of the EU's most important and wide-ranging challenges.

The EESC calls on the Spring European Council to firmly re-establish sustainable development as an overarching priority for the European Union, underlining the

interdependence between sustainable development and economic growth and employment as emphasised in the Göteborg Summit conclusions. It emphasises the crucial role of research and development for sustainable development and the implementation of the Lisbon strategy.

The EESC emphasises that it is of high importance that sustainable development be integrated in practical and concrete terms in the Lisbon strategy. It emphasises some of the issues where integration is particularly essential: more vigorous support for private and public investments in new and clean technology and equipment, new efforts for improving quality of work, and a new wide consultation on setting prices on the use of natural resources.

In a longer-term perspective, the EU will have to find new strategies for energy supply and conservation. The EESC calls on the European Council to signal the start of a coherent action to lower dependence on fossil fuels.

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In conclusion, the EESC recalls that the Lisbon Summit called upon enterprises, social partners and civil society in general to take an active part in the implementation of the Lisbon strategy. The EESC will pay particular attention to ensuring that this happens.

Brussels, 27 February 2003.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the

of the

European Economic and Social  
Committee

European Economic and Social  
Committee

**Roger Briesch**

**Patrick Venturini**

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