

**DECLARATION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCILS (ESCs) OF THE  
MEMBER STATES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC  
AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE**

**AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THEIR PRESIDENTS AND SECRETARIES-GENERAL, 13 NOVEMBER 2014**

***ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCILS AND THE EXPECTATIONS OF CIVIL  
SOCIETY***

**Paris, 13 November 2014**

Following broad consultations at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the ESCs of the EU Member States in 2014<sup>1</sup>,

As part of the active and permanent cooperation of the network of ESCs, reflecting the capacity of representative civil society organisations in Europe to work together to improve European policies and facilitate their implementation at national level,

Having regard to the serious economic and social crisis of recent years, which is fuelling and accentuating a current of general distrust within public opinion towards the European venture and its political institutions,

Convinced that the renewal of the European Parliament and the arrival of the new European Commission offer an opportunity for change,

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<sup>1</sup>

The qualitative study was carried out in 2014. Eighteen of the 22 national ESCs existing in the EU took part: Belgium (2 councils), Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Finland. The study was based on a questionnaire focusing on the involvement of the ESCs in framing their respective countries' European policy, the involvement of other consultative bodies in shaping European policies, the role of national ESCs in the European Union, national public opinion regarding the EU and expectations relating to the new European governance (Parliament and Commission).

The European ESC and the presidents and secretaries-general of the ESCs<sup>2</sup> of the EU Member States wish to emphasise three key objectives for the next five years.

## 1. **For a more social and solidarity-based Europe**

*Underlining* that the EU is a political venture based on values and fundamental social rights, including the defence of a "*European social model*" that people believe in,

They consider that:

- constructive social dialogue is an inherent part of the European project and of the growth and unemployment policies and measures aimed at overcoming the crisis, since economic growth in the EU goes hand-in-hand with social progress,
- the joint declaration on governance adopted by the EU social partners on 24 October 2013 must be fully implemented, and the Commission in particular must facilitate European and national social dialogue and help put its achievements into practice.

## 2. **For a more competitive Europe that creates high-quality jobs**

*Welcoming* the announcement by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, of a EUR 300 billion public/private investment plan to strengthen Europe's competitiveness and to stimulate investment in order to create high-quality jobs, particularly in energy efficiency, transport, digital technology, research and education,

*Reaffirming* the validity of the Europe 2020 strategy "for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" to overcome the crisis. The mid-term review of the strategy must strengthen policies for employment and social cohesion, and for combating global warming in Europe, while making it more competitive,

They hope that:

- greater attention will be focused on monitoring the social objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy in parallel with the economic, budgetary and environmental objectives, so that the development model can be renewed in order to address, on the one hand, the financial, economic and social effects of the economic crisis and, on the other, the global challenges of, in particular, strengthening international competition, technology development, population ageing and climate change;

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<sup>2</sup>

While supporting the report on the consultation noted above, and recognising the importance of the issues involved, the presidents of the Irish NESC, the Hungarian NGTT and the Dutch SER commit to the ongoing work of the interactive network of ESCs on the Europe 2020 Strategy, but believe that a final report on this should be the sole responsibility of the EESC, and are not in a position to adopt policy declarations not formally endorsed by their national councils.

- a real process of enhanced consultation will be introduced at all levels (national, regional and local) in order to ensure ownership of national programmes by civil society as a whole, as a key factor for success;
- special attention will be given to the contributions of the interactive network formed by the EESC and the national ESCs, which has been carrying out important work for several years on the implementation of the EU 2020 strategy. *Its proceedings will be presented in Rome on 4 and 5 December at a high-level conference in the run-up to the March 2015 European Council*<sup>3</sup>.

### 3. For a Europe closer to citizens

*Agreeing* that there is a widening gap between the concerns of Europe's people and the work of the European Union, clearly reflected in the distrust of its institutions,

*Emphasising* the importance for the European Union of nurturing permanent dialogue with European civil society,

The EESC and the national ESCs of the Member States must be better equipped to act as the bearers of civil society's aspirations to national and European decision-makers, while being aware of the challenges that must be met in order to embrace developments in an ever-changing world. Many of these councils have consequently alerted the authorities to the disastrous state of youth employment since the onset of the crisis, or to current questions concerning immigration<sup>4</sup>.

They would like to see:

- better use made of the mechanisms for participatory democracy enshrined in the Treaties;
- the development of all forms of constructive dialogue and consultation with civil society encouraged at European and national level;
- support for proposals for democratic reform in the area of institutional governance in favour of transparency, efficiency and subsidiarity; here, they point to the key role of economic and social councils in reducing the democratic deficit.

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<sup>3</sup> High level conference *Towards a more effective Europe 2020 strategy: civil society's proposals for boosting social inclusion and competitiveness in Europe*, in the run-up to the March 2015 European Council which will be given over to the mid-term review of the EU 2020 strategy.

<sup>4</sup> The latest Eurobarometer survey (June 2014) shows that immigration remains the fourth most important concern at European level, just behind economic issues.