

Resolutions

Economic, Social
and Environmental Council

Resolution on the White Paper on the future of Europe presented by the European Commission

presented by the Office
June 2017

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RESOLUTION ON THE WHITE PAPER ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE PRESENTED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Résolution of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council
presented by the Office

Matter referred to the Economic, Social and Environmental Council by its
office on 9th May 2017, in accordance with article 24 of the Internal Rules.

Contents

■ Resolution	<hr/>	3
■ Grounds		3
■ Resolution		5
■ Vote	<hr/>	7
 Appendices		
9		
■ Appendix 1: Summary of the five scenarios		9
■ Appendix 2: Recommendations selected in the recent ESEC opinions		11

Resolution regarding the European Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe¹

Grounds

On 1st March 2017, the European Commission presented its White Paper on the Future of Europe. In setting out the state of its discussion on the European Union (EU) and five scenarios for Europe by 2025, it made a positive contribution to the debate of the European Council held in Rome on 25th March 2017 for the anniversary of the founding Treaty of the European Union. The ESEC is pleased with the will expressed by the Commission to open a wide debate on the way in which Europe should evolve over the next decade. The ESEC also applauds the initiative of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) that wished to organise 27 national debates in member States in order to consult organised civil society on the White Paper and the various scenarios being considered.

In his speech before the European parliament on the State of the Union on 14th September 2016, the President of the Commission stated: "Our European Union is, at least in part, in an existential crisis, ... But never before have I seen such little common ground between our member States. So few areas where they agree to work together".

This clear observation about the current situation must not make us lose sight of the Commission's numerous initiatives showing that the European project supports concrete measures and achievements (Juncker Plan, European Youth Guarantee, European Pillar of Social Rights) and of its intention to move forwards. In the Rome Declaration of 25th March 2017, the leaders of the 27 member States as well as the European Council, European Parliament and European Commission observe that "*Taken individually, we would be side-lined by global dynamics. Standing together is our best chance to influence them, and to defend our common interests and values*". Moreover, as a result of Brexit, relaunching the European project with 27 member States represents an opportunity for both a critical review and detailed discussion for a new start.

In this context, the five scenarios presented by the Commission bring the necessarily open debate back to the table at an auspicious moment. A summarised presentation is available in appendix 1. The pedagogical statement of these five scenarios can be summed up as follows: Carrying on; Nothing but the single market; "*Those who want more do more*"; "*Doing less more efficiently*"; "*Doing much more together*".

The ESEC notes with interest that, from the Commission's point of view, these scenarios "*are not detailed blueprints or policy prescriptions*" and they are not mutually exclusive. It supports the extensive consultative approach of the Commission around these scenarios so that the public debate initiated as a result contributes to restoring the credibility of the European project and invites the Commission to extend the consultation to all of the related documents (Reflection Paper on the Social Dimension of Europe of 26th April 2017, Reflection Paper on Harnessing Globalisation of 10th May 2017 and similar documents to follow on the future of the Economic and Monetary Union, defence and finances of the EU).

¹ The whole of the resolution was adopted by open ballot of 161 votes for, 1 against and 7 abstentions (see the result of the vote in the appendix).

Nevertheless, the ESEC draws attention to the numerous opinions (cf. in appendix 2 the recommendations selected by the ESEC in its recent opinions) in which it has underlined the ways and the means whereby the EU can achieve results enabling adhesion to a European project to be consolidated.

Wishing to follow up its proposals, the ESEC notes that the social and environmental dimensions of the EU are not sufficiently prominent, alongside the economic pillar of sustainable development, as central features in all of the scenarios presented. In the Commission's "Reflection Paper on the Social Dimension of Europe", it appears clearly that the social ambition does not have the same scope according to the scenarios selected. In accentuating the completion of the single market or in giving priority to actions that are far removed from Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a harmonisation of social and fiscal policies, scenarios 2 and 4 do not address the concerns expressed by our assembly. For the ESEC, they are default or failsafe solutions that risk either to lead to the destruction of the EU, or to confirm Europe as a place of social dumping and distorted competition.

Furthermore, although scenarios 1 and 3 do refer to these aspects, they also present obvious limits. The first relies upon constant, if not, increased cooperation between the member States which, for the time being, does not appear to be forthcoming. The third, based on reinforced cooperation between volunteer States, may lead to better fiscal and social convergence between the States concerned. However, it is also likely to sustain competitive distortion phenomena within the EU between the countries taking part in reinforced cooperation and the rest of the EU. Moreover, the open coordination method provided for in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union may incite the member States to a longer-term convergence in the EU with 27 member States.

With regard to Scenario 5, it is the most ambitious and opens with perspectives that may boost the positions of current European governments. It is also the most coherent with regard to overcoming the existential crisis referred to by the President of the Commission and to have citizens become involved in a common future.

The ESEC further considers that the fields of action selected by the Commission for each of the scenarios studied are insufficient: it is unwise to avoid more detailed discussion on the emergence, together with the single market, of a large field including social and environmental policies, that would enable adherence to the wide-ranging objectives set out by the United Nation's SDGs. Within the Economic and Monetary Union, the budgetary and financial instruments must be used to promote these objectives. Rebalancing the policies founded on the three pillars thus implies opening the debate on funding. Likewise, certain fields of action have been analysed with an overly restrictive point of view. Managing migration must be thought of as an economic and social policy, and no longer only in terms of border management.

Resolution

The ESEC considers that enriching the European project by contributions from organised civil society and the citizen's initiative procedure are conducive to greater support by citizens in the pursuit of European construction, in all dimensions, be they economic, social or environmental. The social dialogue held on a European level is a normative vector that is not sufficiently taken into account when European legislation is drawn up and should be reinforced. Furthermore, in consulting the various components of civil society, the European institutions should award greater consideration to their diversity and respective position.

The ESEC considers that the necessary re-founding of the EU requires better governance and particularly greater attention to be paid to civil society and to its representative organisations. This must mean easier access to participation in these organisations, ahead of decisions made by the community.

Our assembly is ready, in partnership with the EESC, and alongside other similar national institutions, to contribute to the consultation of organised civil society, and in addition, to participate in informing the public on European affairs and on how skills are distributed in the European construction.

The ESEC considers that sustainable development, in all three elements it comprises, namely economic, social and environmental, must remain at the heart of the European project, whichever scenario is selected. In response to the social crisis and to the rise in populism, the ESEC considers that the Union must further encourage social cohesion in order to ensure the success of the various transitions underway (ecological, digital, migration, etc.) and to come. Conversely, limiting ourselves to attempts to buffering the effects of crises is not a rallying project and will lead to accentuating the rejection of Europe and to attitudes of withdrawal. None of the scenarios presented provides an answer to the ability of the EU to act and to adapt to comply with the world agenda on sustainable development and to remedy social dumping.

Furthermore, the ESEC excludes scenarios that do not address what is at stake: the current challenges facing the EU require spontaneous reaction, which is not compatible with the "Carrying on" scenario (scenario 1). Moreover, the need to reinforce social and environmental pillars means not remaining with a single market such as suggested by scenario 2.

Thus, if the debate can turn towards scenarios 3 and 5, these can be improved by the inclusion of strong social and environmental dimensions. They can serve as a basis for an alternative scenario by showing the legal means and ways of achieving that aim.

The ESEC reaffirms, as in its opinion *The construction of a Europe with a European Pillar of Social Rights*, that a transversal approach is required in defining the social rights of European citizens, in accordance with article 9 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). This is why a systematic assessment of the application of the horizontal social clause, which requires the social dimension to be taken into account in all EU policies, is indispensable.

In the same opinion, the ESEC identified priority projects of economic and social convergence so that the European Pillar of Social Rights can be expressed in concrete terms in the life of its citizens. It is recommended that the examination of these projects be open at the time of the next social summit in November 2017 so that the EU can move forwards,

with 27 members, in promoting the social and environmental dimension of European construction.

For our assembly, the EU must also encourage social and territorial cohesion. The ESEC observes that the White paper on the Future of Europe does not address the question of its public services, nor of education and culture, that may be an important factor in reinforcing European social cohesion. It wishes that all relevant provisions of the TFEU be used to reinforce the EU's territorial cohesion, particularly with regard to relations with ultra-peripheral regions and overseas countries and territories. Likewise, social and professional insertion of young people, a category that is particularly exposed to unemployment and to precarity, must be the subject of a funding effort for their training and to accompany them towards employment. Thus, the European Youth Guarantee financed by the Youth Employment Initiative Fund is a first step in this direction and must be reinforced. The EU must also continue its youth mobility programmes, such as Erasmus and/or the European Voluntary Service, whose advantages have been demonstrated. These actions enable a strong European identity to be created.

Lastly, based on the principle that the EU can be neither satisfied with the status quo nor fail once again, the ESEC encourages willing parties, including the heads of State and of government, to be daring in order to portray a dynamic and progressive vision of Europe. To avoid becoming disillusioned and to boost the European project, a scenario must be agreed upon that enables the ambitious objectives to be continued with 27 members, together with a progressive method giving priority to projects that have been identified as consolidating EU social achievement, reinforcing social cohesion and staying on track of the SDGs.

Vote

Vote on the draft resolution as a whole

Number of voters	169
Voted for	161
Voted against	1
Abstained	7

The ESEC adopted the resolution.

Voted for: 161

<i>Agriculture</i>	Ms Beliard, Messrs. Cochonneau, Dagès, Ms Dutoit, Mr Épron, Ms Even, Mr Gangneron, Ms Gautier, Messrs. Roguet, Verger, Ms Vial.
<i>Craft Industry</i>	Mrs Amoros, Mr Crouzet, Ms Foucher, Mr Le Lann, Mrs Marteau, Mrs Teyssedre.
<i>Associations</i>	Messrs. Deschamps, Jahshan, Ms Lalu, Mr Lasnier, Ms Martel, Ms Sauvageot, Mr Serres, Ms Trellu-Kane.
<i>CFDT Trade Union Group</i>	Mr Blanc, Ms Blancard, Ms Duboc, Messrs. Duchemin, Gillier, Ms Hervé, Ms Houbairi, Mr Mussot, Ms Pajeres y Sanchez, Messrs. Quarez, Ritzenthaler, Saint-Aubin.
<i>CFE-CGC Trade Union Group</i>	Ms Biarnaix-Roche, Ms Couvert, Mr Dos Santos.
<i>CFTC Trade Union Group</i>	Ms Coton, Ms Lecerf, Messrs. Thouvenel, Vivier.
<i>CGT Trade Union Group</i>	Mr Bride, Ms Chay, Ms Cru, Ms Farache, Mr Fourier, Ms Garreta, Ms Lamontagne, Ms Manière, Messrs. Marie, Meyer, Naton, Ms Robert, Mr Teskouk.
<i>CGT-FO Trade Union Group</i>	Ms Derobert, Ms Desiano, Ms Fauvel, Ms Gillard Messrs. Kottelat, Legagnon.
<i>Cooperation</i>	Mr Argueyrolles, Ms Blin, Mr Lenancker, Ms Lexcellent, Mr Prugue, Ms Roudil.
<i>Businesses</i>	Messrs. Asselin, Bartholomé, Ms Boidin Dubrule, Ms Castéra, Messrs. Chanut, Cordesse, Ms Couderc, Ms Dubrac, Ms Duhamel, Ms Duprez, Mr Dutruc, Ms Escandon, Messrs. Gailly, Gardinal, Guillaume, Ms Ingelaere, Messrs. Lejeune, Nibourel, Ms Pauzat, Messrs. Pfister, Pottier, Ms Roy, Ms Tissot-Colle.

<i>Environment and Nature</i>	Messrs. Abel, Badré, Beall, Bonduelle, Bougrain Dubourg, Compain, Ms Denier-Pasquier, Ms Ducroux, Mr Genty, Ms Martinie-Cousty, Mr Mayol, Ms Popelin.
<i>Mutuality</i>	Mr Caniard, Ms Vion.
<i>Student Bodies and Youth Movements</i>	Mr Coly, Ms Delair, Mr Dulin, Ms Weber.
<i>Overseas</i>	Mr Antoinette, Ms Bouchaut-Choisy, Messrs. Edmond-Mariette, Guénant-Jeanson, Lobeau, Vernaudon.
<i>Qualified Individuals</i>	Messrs. Adom'Megaa, Amsalem, Ms Autissier, Messrs. Bennahmias, Bontems, Ms Brunet, Messrs. Cabrespines, Cambacérès, Ms Collin, Ms Djouadi, Mr Eledjam, Ms Gibault, Ms Goujon, Ms Grard, Messrs. Grosset, Guglielmi, Ms Jaeger, Messrs. Joseph, Keller, Ms Lechatellier, Ms Léoni, Ms Levaux, Ms Mathieu Houillon, Messrs. Molinoz, Pilliard, Ms Rudetzki, Ms Thiéry, Ms Verdier-Naves, Mr Wargnier.
<i>Liberal Professions</i>	Messrs. Chassang, Lafont, Noël, Ms Riquier-Sauvage.
<i>UNAF</i>	Ms Allaume-Bobe, Ms Blanc, Messrs. Clévenot, Feretti, Ms Gariel, Ms Koné, Messrs. Renard, Tranchand.
<i>UNSA</i>	Ms Arav, Messrs. Bérille, Chevalier, Ms Vignau.

Abstained: 7

<i>Qualified Individuals</i>	Ms Adam, Mr Bussy, Ms Le Floc'h, Messrs. Pasquier, Roustan, Thomiche, Ms Mignot-Verscheure.
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Voted against: 1

<i>Qualified Individuals</i>	Mr Bocvara.
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Appendix 1: Summary of the five scenarios

Scenario 1, entitled "*Carrying on*", represents the continuation of the programme of reforms in the EU.

This scenario attaches importance to the EU focusing on employment, growth and investment in a single market and on intensifying investments in digital technology, transport and energy infrastructures. Improving the functioning of the single currency aims to stimulate growth and to guard against shocks starting in Europe or overseas. This scenario relies upon the continuing cooperation between member States to intensify the exchange of intelligence in the fight against terrorism, as well as efforts by the 27 members to speak as one and to exert positive influence on the world agenda.

Scenario 2, "*Nothing but the single market*", suggests that the EU gradually centres upon completion of the single market.

Having observed that it has become difficult for the 27 member States to move forwards in a number of domains, this scenario recommends concentrating efforts on completing the single market. Beyond the free movement of capital and goods resulting from having done away with customs barriers, this scenario recommends that there be less regulation of products and services and notes that it is difficult to agree upon new rules on worker mobility or access to regulated professions. The return of border controls of individuals is a risk associated with implementing this scenario due to insufficient cooperation between member States. This scenario may give rise to a retreat of European positions in the various international fora due to lack of coordination.

Scenario 3, entitled "*Those who want more do more*", suggests that the member States that wish to move forwards together do so in specific domains.

This scenario recommends using existing provisions of the Treaty enabling member States to agree on specific legal and budgetary means to deepen their cooperation in certain selected domains. Among the domains concerned, the White Paper refers to common ground, identifies operation in matters of defence, security and justice (the fight against terrorism) but also in fiscal and social domains, with a view to moving towards greater harmonisation of the rules and the rates on taxation. This scenario of reinforced cooperation does not rule out a deepening of the single market and a reinforcement of the four EU freedoms.

Scenario 4, entitled "*Doing less more efficiently*", is based on the hypothesis of a EU that concentrates on selected fields of action where it supplies more results more quickly and reduces its interventions in other sectors.

By 2025, the EU27 is expected to have intensified its action in key areas such as innovation, trade, security, migration, border management and defence. It is drawing up new rules and instruments to meet the objectives it has set itself. That can be done, with regard to the fight against terrorism, for example, by creating a European agency for the fight against terrorism. But in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the EU is investing in fields where its action brings real added value and is ceasing to invest in fields where results are more uncertain. Policies such as regional development, public health, social and employment policy are particularly concerned, except where such policies also concern the single market.

Scenario 5, entitled "*Doing much more together*", is the one in which the member States rally together to get European public policy going again in all fields of action.

This scenario supposes that the competences of the EU27 and community resources are increased. It calls upon member States to express a clear political will to "*do much more together*" and that in practice, decisions on a European level be adopted in the shortest time possible and be implemented as soon as possible. It suggests that Europe talks and acts as one in trade and that the European Parliament has the last word on trade policy. The EU could consolidate its presence on the international stage by a European Defence Union and by affirming its driving role in the fight against global warming, humanitarian aid or development aid. In not contenting ourselves with the objective of finishing the single market, this scenario is also the one that pushes coordination between member States furthest on budgetary, social and taxation matters to give the European Union the means to stimulate economic development and to react to shocks on regional, sectorial and national levels.

Appendix 2: Recommendations selected in the recent opinions of the ESEC

Over the last few years, the ESEC has drawn attention to the necessity for a European construction incorporating the three pillars of sustainable development and, in doing so, granting a major position to the social dimension, long-overlooked.

From May 2014, on the occasion of the latest European elections, the ESEC had thus affirmed in its opinion *The European Union at a crossroads*, the necessity of "basing a political framework on a major priority, namely establishing a form of development that is [both] sustainable", and of promoting the social dimension of the EU to give it new legitimacy to the European project. The opinion recommends the setting up of a "*fiscal and social European*" to determine the margins within which the compulsory deductions ought to be set in each member State.

Our assembly repeated its position on the importance of building a more inclusive Europe and of dealing with the social stakes without subordinating them to objectives that are financial and that aim to reduce the deficits, in its opinion of June 2015 *Perspectives for revision of the Europe 2020 Strategy*.

More recently, our Assembly was called upon by the government during the public consultation launched by the Commission on its outline of a European Pillar of Social Rights. In its opinion of December 2016, *The Construction of a Europe with a Pillar of Social Rights*, our Assembly underlined that the nature of this initiative could "*re-launch Europe's social dynamics founded on a will for upwards convergence, at a time when economic and social divergences are increasing, including within the euro area*".

Indeed, in these opinions and many others, the ESEC has made calls to:

- re-found the European project, in particular by recognising fully the role of civil society organisations and by making the project clearer and closer to the expectations of the European citizens;
- support the implementation by the EU of the 2030 agenda setting the SDGs and the climate commitments of the Paris Agreement;
- promote social dialogue, an indispensable factor in the development of the social aspects of the EU;
- fight against distortions of competition within the EU, in other words, social and fiscal dumping practices by opening the way to fiscal and social harmonisation in Europe;
- within the framework of the adoption of a European Pillar of Social Rights, select ambitious projects (high quality standards of employment, minimum European wage, securing transition pathways in professional life);
- make gender equality effective by encouraging reconciliation between professional, personal and family lives, and, more generally, the freedom of choice for women with regard to maternity;
- act for reform of the directive regarding posted workers to limit current abuses;
- seize the opportunities offered by the ecological transition in the field of training and employment;

- reinforce democratic control of the euro area by setting up a “euro area assembly” comprising European deputies from the euro area and members of the finance commissions of national parliaments of countries in the euro area or called to join;
- ensure better targeting of the refinancing policy of banking institutions such as the European Investment Bank by the European Central Bank, so that loans be directed towards small and very small-sized businesses according to criteria of employment and added-value and so that the investment objective of 100 billion euros dedicated to small and very small-sized businesses set by the Juncker Plan may be reached;
- bring Europe closer to its citizens by full recognition of the role of civil society organisations and the granting of a European status to foundations, associations and mutual organisations;
- make access of young people to employment and training, as well as lifelong training, a priority action of the EU, in particular through an increased financing effort on the basis of European funds;
- fight against the abandon of care and treatment through a treatment protocol that any individual living in a member State should be able to benefit from, better coordination of care and treatment covered by the different national health insurance schemes, as well as an extension of the duration of rights to care and treatment covered under the European health insurance card scheme;
- make the fight against exclusion and poverty a main focus of European policies in accordance with the EU 2020 Strategy and the SDGs, in particular based on an annual assessment of the annual rate of poverty made public on the occasion of the Social Week.

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