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CONCLUSIONS

From words to action: The role of organised civil society in implementing and assessing public policies

ANNUAL MEETING of the presidents and secretaries-general of the Economic and Social Councils of the EU and the European Economic and Social Committee

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From words to action: organised civil society's role in implementing and assessing public policies - The Twin Transition

CONCLUSIONS

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Organised Civil Society's contribution to the design, implementation and assessment of public policies – The Twin Transition

<u>NESCs perspectives</u>: 1. A context of changes and challenges

<u>Statements:</u> EU countries are facing **critical socio-economic challenges** linked to the **emergence of new issues**: rising geopolitical tensions on a global scale, climate change and the twin ecological and digital transition, a slowdown of productivity growth, necessary resilience of value chains, risks to social cohesion and the sustainability of social protection systems, enhanced training and education needs. Policy coordination between EU Member States and stakeholders is essential, in order to maximise socio-economic well-being by promoting resource efficiency, territorial integration, sustainability and collaboration in pursuit of common goals.

2. Need for a global and well-balanced approach

<u>Recommendations</u>: the **transition towards a fair, inclusive and prosperous society** with a competitive and financially sustainable economy requires a **global approach** where all relevant policies should contribute to the agreed **environmental objectives**. Economic and social well-being must be considered as inseparable and, therefore, **social investments and investments in innovation must be kept together**. In fact, economic growth can contribute to the reduction of inequalities and poverty, **if there is the political will to do so**.

It is paramount to strike a balance between the **three Ps of sustainable development**, namely the environmental pillar (Planet), the economic pillar (Prosperity) and the social pillar (People). This balanced approach will make it possible to reduce the risk of poverty, improve the living conditions of all citizens and strengthen social inclusion and social protection while ensuring the competitiveness and viability of businesses.

3. The role of social partners and other civil society organisations

<u>Statements</u>*:* experience from European Governance shows that the involvement of social partners in governance is essential to **anticipate and manage change**. This is a *sine qua non* condition to ensure good policy making and broad societal support for the policies pursued. Moreover, European coordination increasingly covers the traditional field of social dialogue (revision of the wage bargaining system, retirement age, control of age-related expenditure, health expenditure, etc.).

NESCs (National Economic and Social Councils), where they exist, have been actively participating in drafting society's responses to today's challenges, and they are **willing to do more**. The twin transition creates a wide range of issues. Consequently, the involvement in these transitions can take various forms.

In some countries, NESCs have been involved in **specific consultations related to the green transition** or on legislative proposals regarding the climate. Moreover, **NESCs have the ability, according to their institutional role and competences, to address a wide range of issues closely linked to the twin transition**. In this respect, particular attention is being paid to the **National Recovery and Resilience Plans** (NRRPs). Transparency all along the different stages of the implementation of these plans is a key element of the process. Other relevant issues addressed by the NESCs relate to energy and climate, Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs), agriculture, mobility, restructuring, innovative forms of work organisation and platform work, mental health in the context of digitalisation and homeworking.

New approaches are being initiated or tested by certain NESCs. Some of them organise public consultations on issues of importance to society, inviting citizens, other civil society organisations, experts and other stakeholders to contribute to decision-making. In order to facilitate participation and exchange of information, they also open their meetings and events to the public and civil society organisations, or set up online platforms or discussion

forums. NESCs publish reports and documents setting out their work, recommendations and opinions, as well as contributions from external stakeholders. All these modalities aim to promote citizen participation and open dialogue between the NESCs and civil society.

4. Strengthening further the involvement of NECSs in public policies: a strong base to pursue balanced objectives in the context of the twin transition

Recommendations: to be shared and understood; the on-going transitions and reforms should rely on a cooperative and balanced model enabling the participation of all components of society and at all decision-making levels. **Dialogue** between civil society and political authorities **ahead of the decision-making process** is essential to successfully manage changes related to today's transitions.

Statements*:* by their composition and expertise, NESCs have the required knowledge and know-how to address the above-mentioned challenges in their various dimensions and to seek adequate and forward-looking responses, as well as to accompany measures to be taken in terms of **anticipation** of and **support** for the transition. NESCs' work is to nurture social dialogue, to guide political decisions and, with the support of academic/scientific experts, to chart long-term perspectives. They conduct open debates with a wide audience and aim to establish a consensual and shared diagnosis of the issues examined, thereby formulating guidance for political decision-making.

Recommendations: all in all, social partners possess in-depth expertise and tools at different levels (e.g., interprofessional and sectoral collective agreements, sectoral training funds, etc.) to meet the concrete challenges of the transition and should therefore be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies. Social partners and other civil society organisations want to be co-actors in these transformations and allies in the changes underway, in order to seize the **opportunities** they offer and reduce the **risks** they entail. This is essential to achieve the objectives pursued, such as well-functioning, interrelated and interconnected economies based on fair rules, reciprocal access to markets, sustainability, quality jobs, a healthy living and working environment, well-functioning labour markets, performing social protection systems and other means of socio-economic integration.

The **dialogue** supporting the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies must be **ensured at all levels**: European, national, regional and local. Special attention must be devoted to the coordination between these levels and to the interface between EU and national level. NESCs, in **close collaboration with the EESC**, also contribute to the coherence and the harmonious articulation of the measures taken at these different levels. Exchange of information and experiences among the NESCs and the EESC is beneficial to all stakeholders.

In order to ensure and improve the involvement of civil society, **governments** should clearly communicate with NESCs, where they exist, **very early on in the policy making process** and agree on a realistic timeframe allowing all parties involved to **contribute effectively** and **meaningfully** to the process. In order to ensure that their contributions are effectively taken into account in a democratic and legitimate decision-making process, it is essential that **governments** adopt a transparent and accountable approach, and that they **provide feedback** to stakeholders. It could also be useful to explore the **establishment of NESCs** in those Member States and candidate Member States where they do not yet exist.

EESC perspectives: 1. Shaping a future-proof European social model – the vital contribution of organised civil society

Statements*:* the EESC has, on numerous occasions, highlighted the key role of social partners in anticipating and addressing the employment and social consequences of today's challenges such as the digital and green transition.

Recommendations: the speed and scale of the impact of greening and digitalisation on our societies and labour markets require the **early and effective involvement of the social partners**, **in line with national industrial relation systems**. Social partners can identify solutions that can be tailored to sectors at the local level, and their negotiations can cover, for example, the impact of the green and technological transformations as regards work organisation, changing occupational profiles and the skills of employees, as well as the protection of workers from the effects of the climate change and digitalisation, including artificial intelligence and algorithmic management. Social dialogue is a beneficial tool to drive **economic and social resilience**, competitiveness, **upward convergence of living and working conditions** across Member States and sustainable and inclusive growth.

The specific role of social partner organisations should be fully recognised and respected in social dialogue structures and processes, while acknowledging that **civil dialogue**, involving a broader set of stakeholders on a wider range of topics, is a separate process. Civil society organisations are also fundamental to representing the **general and specific interests of groups of citizens** and encouraging participation in social life and defending the rights of the groups of citizens that they represent.

2. Advancing on an EU just transition policy framework as part of a European Green and Social Deal

Statement: the European Green Deal stands as one of the most ambitious and courageous initiatives ever undertaken by the European Union to propel Europe into becoming the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050, and the EESC is fully supportive of these objectives. At the same time, from the outset, the EESC claimed that the **green transition is social or will not happen**.

Recommendations: the EESC has been the first European institution to advocate for a European Green and Social Deal to address environmental challenges and unfold a force of social progress that benefits everyone and delivers a better quality of life for all.

Recommendations: a concrete policy measure the EESC proposes is to advance a holistic, coordinated and integrated policy framework at EU level on the just transition, as developed in the exploratory opinion 'Advancing the EU's just transition policy framework: what measures are necessary', requested by the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU. The EESC observes that current EU efforts toward a just transition are positive, but primarily appear as fragmented additions to the climate and environmental measures of the Green Deal. In this regard, the EESC lays out an **EU policy framework proposal on the just transition** structured around six pillars and that encompasses over 70 EU-level policy proposals and measures to achieve it.

3. The role of organised civil society in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of reforms and investments across the EU

Recommendations: strengthening national ownership through a closer involvement of national parliaments, regional and local authorities, social partners and civil society organisations, **needs clearer provisions in EU and national formal proceedings for implementing the new economic governance framework**. A formal, permanent and structured consultation process must be put in place, in which national governments would work closely with authorities at all levels and in partnership with trade unions, employers, civil society organisations and other responsible stakeholders throughout the whole cycle of preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the political process. Moreover, the lessons learned from the **experience with the Recovery and Resilience Plans** based on performances and a reinforced national ownership, should become a key element for the implementation of the revised EU economic governance rules and the future European Semester. The central objective of the latter should be to **strengthen public debt sustainability** while promoting sustainable and inclusive growth in all Member States through reforms and investment.

4. Increasing needs for social investments

To boost long-term inclusive growth through reforms and investment, strengthening the social dimension of the European Semester through the **European Pillar of Social Rights** is crucial. Existing financial resources should be used more efficiently, while public-private collaboration should be promoted. There is an urgent need for discussing the feasibility of an **EU financial capacity by 2026** to meet **investment needs** for common priorities. The positive impact of **social investments** on economic growth and productivity cannot be understated. A coherent investment strategy in social infrastructure across Member States is needed to ensure the necessary reforms and investments in key social areas. For this, the proper involvement of social partners and civil society organisations throughout the process is indispensable.