

2014-12 THE EUROPEAN UNION AT A CROSSROADS

The EU must be reinvented by putting the people back at the heart of a restructured political framework. Reaching out to them and taking steps towards a more open, more united Europe that is also more powerful on the international stage are among the objectives we must strive to achieve. With this in mind, 2014 marks a major milestone for the European Union (EU) in that the European Parliament and the Commission will be reinstated for another five-year term following the appropriate elections, the results of which will be examined and analysed with the greatest of care.

This series of events, which will put Europe in the spotlight for a number of months, represents an important opportunity to give it new impetus. In this respect, the European Union is by no means lacking in appeal. The unique, modern way in which Europe is constructed is an unprecedented way of organising interdependencies between States. Furthermore, the EU is a major economic power in global terms, contributing some 19% to global wealth production, with some 500 million consumers and the second-largest reserve currency in the world.

Nevertheless, the fact that the crisis, globalisation and changes in political and economic balances of power on the international front have shaken people's faith in the EU's ability to deal with the challenges with which it is faced cannot be undermined. Furthermore, it has reinforced doubts regarding its very future.

With this in mind, the Economic Social and Environmental Council (ESEC) wishes to contribute to ways and means of giving the EU a new impetus that is both inspiring and ambitious.



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ESEC proposals

ASSERTING A POLITICAL WILL

Europe has been gradually shaped by its alternation between specialisation and expansion, but the time has come for clarification, with Europe in urgent need of a better-defined political framework.

➤ **Basing a political framework on a major priority, namely establishing a form of development that is both sustainable and based on the following:**

- promoting its model based on humanistic values and an intelligent, inclusive and sustainable growth objective;
- defending the principles of respecting human rights, the rule of law, democracy and solidarity on the international stage, a strong stance on the major political and strategic issues of the 21st Century and a European defence policy;
- exploring and encouraging closer cooperation by means of the following:
 - a necessary halt in expansion for the purposes of establishing a real feeling of belonging to a system that is both politically and geographically defined;
 - greater incentive for those States that so wish to forge further ahead with the incorporation of what are practical and tangible issues for the people;
- reinforcing the democratic control of the Eurozone by means of the following:
 - the establishment of a 'Eurozone Assembly' comprising Members of the European Parliament from within the Eurozone and members of the Finance Committees of national parliaments in countries within the Eurozone or those called upon to join it;
 - greater involvement on the part of national parliaments..

👉 **Bringing Europe closer to the people by means of the following:**

- full recognition of the role of civil society organisations and the granting of a European status for foundations and associations;
- the development of mobility systems in the framework of formal or non-formal education, with an increase in exchange and a strengthening of the European Voluntary Service, or even the creation of a 'European Civic Service';
- improving understanding of how the EU works by means of a pro-active communications policy, implemented by the policy-makers themselves and not by administrations or by their spokespersons, and driven by a need to explain the way in which the EU works and a need for a response to the day-to-day concerns of the people;
- the recognition of European elections as the highlight of the discussions regarding the future of the EU based on political programs that focus on European issues;
- promoting the right to European Citizenship Initiative (ECI) introduced by the Lisbon Treaty as a tool for participating in civil society.

AIMING TO BOOST ACTIVITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The European Union is faced with a dual challenge to overcome, this being consolidating the foundations of the EMU with the aim of providing it with the means to deal with any potential future crises and at the same time, outside of the Eurozone, outlining an actual growth strategy for the EU as a whole.

👉 **Consolidating the integration of the Eurozone by means of the following:**

- a commitment on the part of public authorities to involving social partners and players in civil society in the scheduling, outlining and evaluation of the economic and budgetary reforms to be implemented;
- adapting objectives for reform to the distinctive features and constraints specific to each State;
- examining the opportunity to create a fiscal capacity within the EMU as an initial step towards a fiscal union.

👉 **Investing in inspiring strategies by means of the following:**

- the completion of the internal market with the aim of optimising the way in which it functions;
- the launch of a long-term investment policy designed to favour an offensive industrial strategy,
- the development of high-technology industries, support for research and development and promoting social economy and the energy transition; calling upon all possible sources of public and private funding and co-funding in order to achieve this.

PROMOTING THE SOCIAL ASPECT OF THE EU

As far as the ESEC is concerned, it is essential that the notion of solidarity be given back its full meaning in order for it not to become a mere slogan but rather to contribute to re-legitimising the European project in the eyes of the people, who are currently, at a difficult economic time, displaying a sense of the disintegration of the European model based on economic growth and improving working and living conditions.

👉 **Reinforcing the place of European social dialogue by means of the following:**

- recognising the negotiation of sector-specific collective agreements as a formative component of social dialogue;
- taking full account of consultations undertaken with social partners, notably in the framework of the annual Tripartite Social Summit and macro-economic dialogue.

👉 **Fighting unfair competition and actively promoting employment by means of the following:**

- exploring avenues for fiscal and social convergence, potentially in the form of a 'tax and social snake' within the Eurozone, inspired by the former European monetary snake;
- including the issue of the eventual introduction of a minimum wage in all Member States on the EU's social agenda;
- reinforcing, in the framework of the latest directive, measures relating to the inspection of postings of workers by means of closer cooperation between inspection bodies in the various Member States, and even the eventual introduction of a European employment inspection body.

👉 **Implementing a dashboard of indicators recently adopted to encourage a more qualitative approach to convergence objectives where employment and social policies are concerned.**