

CONCORD's views on the reflection paper 'Towards a sustainable EU by 2030'

February 2019

CONCORD strongly supports the first scenario which sets out to develop an overarching Sustainable Europe 2030 Strategy, in combination with the elements of scenario 2 that allow for better mainstreaming sustainable development across all its work, strengthening the coherence of all policies with sustainable development objectives and principles. Sustainable development must become an overarching strategic priority for the Commission and Council. We are pleased to see that many of the recommendations and analysis of the EU SDG Multi-stakeholder Platform have been taken on board.

Given that we are approaching the end of the current legislative term, we need to make sure to set up the necessary **institutional governance structures and mechanisms** to be able take this forward in the period 2019-2024. Given the clear sense of urgency we cannot miss this unique opportunity. The **EU's Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027** currently under negotiation should also be able to support this new strategy and approach, as indicated in the reflection paper.

We welcome the honest recognition that **much more needs to be done** for the EU to become sustainable. Whether we refer to the fact that EU leaders struggle to fight rising inequalities both within and outside of Europe, EU companies eat away partner countries' tax base for public investments in sustainable development or EU citizens consume more than their fair share, as the paper highlights the job is far from done.

To operate the just and fair sustainability transition, we **need a paradigm shift, a new comprehensive approach** instead of doing more of the same but expecting a different outcome. In this light we are **disappointed with the still prevalent focus on economic growth** in the Commission's vision for sustainable development.

The reflection paper includes **various good elements we believe are ambitious enough to build on:**

1. It does not only look at the environmental dimension of sustainable development, but acknowledges the need to look at the environmental, social, economic and governance **dimensions of sustainable development in an integrated manner**, as well as the need to better take into account the **impact of EU policies on sustainable development beyond our borders**.
2. The paper acknowledges that **addressing inequalities** is crucial for the public to support the sustainability transition. While the paper focuses on inequalities within the EU, the global perspective is also mentioned as cause for serious EU concern. The principal of **Leaving No-One Behind** is a central part of the sustainable development agenda, and therefore the lack of progress on fighting both internal European and global inequalities shows that current policies are not enough to reduce inequality in any significant way. We therefore propose that fighting inequalities becomes a top priority for the next Commission, guided by an **EU Action Plan to Fight Inequalities** both internally and externally.
3. The paper acknowledges that our greater challenge is the **ecological debt - by overusing and depleting natural resources**, we threaten the ability of future generations to meet their needs. We want to see concrete proposals in the Strategy to alter this, to **decouple EU consumption from environmental degradation and ensure sustainable supply chains**.
4. It also notes the **need to accelerate the transition to a sustainable food system and to correct imbalances in our food chain**, by localising food production systems, reducing the carbon



footprint, reducing animal-based food consumption and tackling food waste. The EU should promote **also globally** the transition to a sustainable food system by supporting agroecological practices and making trade policy support and not undermine such transition.

In addition we would like to **add the following elements to the reflection**:

1. **Just economic transition and genuine measures of progress:** The paper refers on various occasions to the transition, and the need for that transition to be fair, just and inclusive. It also stresses the role of social partners - all positive points. We welcome the references to **well-being** in the reflection paper as well as the references to alternative measures of progress beyond Gross Domestic Product (such as the Quality of Life or Happiness Indexes). Europe needs to engage in a post-growth economy - the references to a decarbonised Europe and the circular economy are going in the right direction, but we need our leaders to have the courage to shift away from past mistakes, such as the dominant focus on GDP growth.
2. **Corporate accountability:** There can be no 2030 Agenda without responsible business conduct. The fact that the paper includes a chapter dedicated to that topic is implicitly acknowledging that. However, it seems as if the Commission is scared to speak about the need to regulate companies, especially large companies operating in the developing world. It is time to have a real Business and Human Rights Action Plan at EU level with a Due Diligence law at European level, to regulate imports of raw agricultural commodities (as demanded by the European Parliament), to constructively engage for a UN Treaty to ensure a gender-sensitive framework providing a level playing field at global level and strengthen access to remedy for victims. Our future cannot depend on loose incentives, but require bold regulation, especially in view of the Commission's belief that the private sector is the silver bullet to deliver on the 2030 Agenda.
3. **People-centered and gender-sensitive trade agreements:** The paper overlooked the widely documented negative impacts of EU trade and investment agreements on human rights in partner countries. Sustainable development chapters are a drop in the ocean, as long as the EU continues to deny that its trade deals are harming the most marginalised and vulnerable populations in the Global South, and are mostly benefiting large companies. As long as human rights and environmental standards have no precedence on trade and investment provisions, trade will not genuinely serve sustainable development. We would also like to see binding provisions on investors to respect such standards in EU trade and investment agreements, while Investor-State Dispute Settlement and its equivalents (Investment Court System and Multilateral Investment Court) have to be canceled because they restrain partner countries' regulatory space to promote public good and implement the SDGs.
4. **Migration and human rights:** We want the EU to adopt clear guidelines for 'development, human rights and migration partnerships' with developing countries, with specific attention for legal pathways, safe, voluntary and dignified return, providing protection, in full respect of international human rights standards, and development effectiveness principles. These guidelines should combine immediate humanitarian needs and structural sustainable development approaches. These partnerships should amongst others help tackling the root causes of forced displacement providing opportunities for decent work and livelihoods, including health education and food security. This includes forced displacement because of environmental degradation and the effects of climate change.

To conclude, similar to requests from the Council, we don't want to waste more time. We want to get the ball rolling and **start shaping that overarching Sustainable Europe 2030 Strategy** to implement the 2030 Agenda and make sure also the EU becomes sustainable by 2030. **Reflections on the future of Europe in Sibiu should embrace wholeheartedly the principle and practice of sustainable development for the future wellbeing of people and planet.**

