



## European Economic and Social Committee

### Ideas and proposals for the Working Group on EU in the World of the Conference on the Future of Europe

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The EESC, as an active partner on the Conference on the Future of Europe representing the organised civil society, has identified concrete proposals regarding five topics on EU in the world, as listed below.

#### 1. Enhancing trade policy

- **The EESC supports the principle of promoting an "Open, Strategic and Assertive" trade policy** as a way of improving market access and levelling the playing field. In practice, it must drive sustainable growth, competitiveness, decent jobs and better consumer choices in Europe. Positive economic development needs a sound combination of external and internal policies. Trade policy is only one part of solution.<sup>1</sup>
- The EESC supports the EU continuing with its **primary trade policy mission**: to open markets for European goods, services, investment and public procurement, reducing and eliminating unjustified trade barriers in third countries, and levelling the playing field with international and bilateral trade regimes. Furthermore, the EESC finds it essential that trade policy promote EU values and international standards, boosting sustainable development, combatting climate change, and strengthening security.
- The EESC calls for smoother process between **negotiation and ratification** of EU trade and investment agreements for the sake of EU's reputation as a trading partner. Starting from the mandate and throughout the negotiations, the Commission must engage with the European Parliament and civil society, notably via the EESC, to take account of concerns and, by addressing them, to ensure smoother ratification processes.
- **The EESC welcomes concrete actions to implement, advance and ensure effective implementation of existing EU FTAs.** These are a valuable tool for the EU to support the flow of goods and services in global supply chains and to guarantee better resilience for the EU. The Chief Trade Enforcement Officer should boost the consistency of implementation and enforcement of EU and WTO agreements, including TSD chapter.
- **The EESC has long called for sustainability to be one of the drivers for trade policy given the key role trade can play in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).** It thus welcomes

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<sup>1</sup> [OJ C 364, 28.10.2020, p. 108](#); [OJ C 47, 11.2.2020, p.3](#).

the sustainability focus of the EU trade policy, and the Paris Agreement becoming an essential element of future trade and investment agreements. The EESC reiterates its call for this essential character to extend to International Labour Organization (ILO) core conventions.

- Ensuring that the EU remains **open to trade and investment is a prerequisite for achieving resilience**. Trade can help diversify supply chains and allow the EU to have unobstructed access to inputs critical for our capacity to innovate and scale up production.
- It is crucial that Member States and the EU act decisively to **tackle strategic dependencies**, including through reindustrialisation, the circular economy, trade policy and through skills-related measures. Additional weaknesses, dependencies and gaps in supply chains have been revealed and need evidence-based assessment to be addressed successfully. In general, businesses are best placed to review and revise their supply chains and should be supported in this endeavour.

*Related EESC opinions: REX/539 - [Trade Policy Review - An Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy | European Economic and Social Committee \(europa.eu\)](#); INT/935 [Updating the new industrial strategy](#)*

## 2. Trade and sustainable development

CoFoE is a milestone to re-think EU trade governance to drive growth, decent job creation and sustainable development.

Current trade and sustainable development (TSD) provisions are not living up fully to their legally binding commitments. The EESC proposes **an ambitious review**, featuring a revamped sanctionable enforcement approach with stronger civil society monitoring, using innovative instruments and enhancing the leverage for TSD.

Some concrete ideas are:

- a revamped Panel of Experts mechanism with the possibility of financial penalties or **sanctions**
- **an active role for DAGs** in its activation
- the **suspension of preferential tariffs for companies** that breach agreed international standards
- **conditional public procurement allocation** to companies from countries that comply with ILO core standards and the Paris Agreement
- an **ambitious EU Directive on mandatory due diligence** acknowledging responsibility based on current standards and offering a clear and secure legal framework for EU businesses and non-EU businesses operating within the EU.

Another important message is that there is no sustainability without civil society. This includes an **empowering framework** for Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs) to enhance their visibility, institutional channels and resources so they may actually advise the parties on implementation and enforcement.

This "next generation TSD" must be an integral part of the EU trade strategy, applying to current and future negotiating mandates alike.

Both at the bilateral and the global level, the EU should set ambitious **TSD benchmarks** with like-minded trade partners ready to lead.

*Related EESC opinion: REX/535 - [Next Generation Trade and Sustainable Development – Reviewing the 15-point action plan \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)*

### 3. New foreign policy & values

The EESC strongly believes and is an advocate for social market economy with fundamental values: respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality, justice, and the rule of law. The European Union's common foreign policy must be based on safeguarding these values, maintaining peace, global responsibility, and solidarity. Furthermore, the EESC will continue to support policies that seek to continue to eradicate poverty and in world terms become a leader in the promotion of policies that achieve this objective.

The crackdown on Belarusian civil society following the fraudulent presidential elections in Belarus in August 2020 has led to a creation of a sub-group on Belarus within the EESC. One of its flagship initiatives of the sub-group is planned **conference on Belarus** to take place in spring 2022. Its objective will be to raise awareness about the situation of Belarusian civil society both in the country and in exile (mostly Poland and Lithuania) and to strengthen links between EU and Belarusian civil society organisations such as business associations, independent trade unions, media representatives and others.

The EESC has a grave concern over the escalation of tensions in **Ukraine** and stresses the need to find a diplomatic resolution. Strong EU support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity is essential.

*Related EESC reports: Ongoing information report on supporting independent media in Belarus, to be adopted by REX Section in April 2022; [Statement](#) by the EESC and REX President on the Belarussian forced landing of a civilian plane and on the detention of journalist Roman Protasevich, May 2021*

### 4. Enlargement/Western Balkans

- To rebuild confidence in enlargement and strengthen the ways in which the EU reaches out to its natural allies in the region, the EESC is convinced that the EU should allow political leaders and citizens from the Western Balkans to join the activities and discussions held in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), on a consultative basis.
- Given the difficulties experienced by the Member States in reaching unanimity on enlargement, the EESC considers that the Council should revisit the possibility of introducing qualified majority voting, at least for all intermediary stages of the EU accession process.
- The EESC calls for High-Level Civil Society Conferences or Fora to be organised just before, or as side events to, the regular EU-Western Balkans Summits in order to allow the voice of civil society to be heard on subjects addressed at the summits.
- We call for the production of a clear, tailor-made accession partnership roadmap for each of the Western Balkan countries and their integration into existing EU mechanisms and stress that it is vital to better ascertain how the Western Balkans could progressively and conditionally access the right and benefits of EU membership.

*Related EESC opinions: [REX/533 Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans](#); [Final declaration of the EESC's 8th Western Balkans Civil Society Forum](#)*

## 5. EU Security Union

Europe's security environment is highly complex. Today's security threats are often multi-faceted, transnational, rapidly evolving and difficult to predict. They can hit a broad variety of targets throughout the Union (e.g. mass events, transport, critical infrastructures, institutions) and come from an equally broad variety of threat actors (e.g. individual perpetrators, criminal organisations, terrorist groups, nation states) that may have very different motivations (such as geopolitics, religious or political extremism, economic or financial interests, or mental disorder) and use all kinds of means to carry out their malicious intent (such as firearms, Improvised Explosive Devices, CBRN materials, cyberattacks or disinformation).

**The EESC welcomes the determination of the European Commission to enhance the Union's technological sovereignty and strategic autonomy** and stresses the importance of the security sector in this respect. There is no security without technology, and Europe must master the technologies that are crucial for its security.

*Related EESC opinions: [CCMI/173: The industrial dimension of the Security Union \(own-initiative opinion\)](#)*