

Contribution to the consultation on the future “Europe 2020” strategy

GENERAL

First of all we would like to thank the Commission for its first forward looking, horizontal approach to the future. There is a clear need for Europe as well as the Union to move away from the old-fashioned way of looking different policy sectors through a narrow sectoral policy point of view and to define the common goals more horizontally. As the Lisbon treaty has finally been accepted, it is time for the Union and its member states to concentrate on substance and content and the reasons for its existence.

First and foremost, it is necessary to look outward and acknowledge the tasks created by the changing world and this has been done in the draft strategy. The guiding vision should be the idea that Europe could be the world's most successful, modern and environmentally responsible economy, which would also strengthen its European character. Social structures, outstanding systems for the redistribution of income, high general level of education, large investments in R&D, and readiness for change, a high level of social contentment and an environmentally responsible operation model are often attached to the success story of the Nordic states, but this model can also be applied to the European level.

In order to the European welfare model to remain and gain in strength, the position of Europe in the global economy has to be reinforced through investment in employment, growth and competitiveness at all levels in the EU, the member states and the regions. The most effective way of contributing to this is by increasing the financing of research and product development to at least the target level of three percent of the national product of the EU nations. And it should always remember that especially innovations and innovative ideas do not demand large centers or resources as traditional research does but can be operated and implemented regardless of any specific place.

We generally do agree on the 3 priorities proposed by the Commission, creating value by basing growth on knowledge, empowering people in inclusive societies and creating a competitive, connected and greener economy as the greatest challenge faced by the Europe will be at least the following:

- * How to ensure relatively higher participation in labour force?
- * How to ensure broad increases in know-how and research in the whole EU?
- * How to create a framework for growth in productivity both in the public and in the private sectors?
- * How to strengthen the role of Europe in the markets for products and services with the highest value added?
- * How the most modern technology (including modern models and systems in services sectors and also in public sector services) can be used to aid in achieving the prior goals?
- * How to secure above average increases in living standards for the most underprivileged?
- * How to make the prospering Europe to search its identity and functional models from environmentally friendly options?

ROLE OF THE REGIONS

All these questions have been already discussed at the regional and local level. Unfortunately this has not been mentioned in the draft strategy. Role of the regions has been totally undermined, which is difficult to understand as regions have been the only level in Europe which has been implementing Lisbon strategy in the last years. Most of the problems have

occurred in national level, not at the regional. If the delivery system of strategy is based on national and sectoral level, results will be thinner than when doing it with the regions.

Also delivery system of the strategy needs to be clear. The areas of responsibility and powers of the various institutional, economic and social players in the EU, member states and regions need to be clarified. This is essential if there is to be a feeling at the appropriate levels that one can really make a difference and also in order to reinforce the visibility and responsibility of the different levels. Without a strong institutional framework taking all players into account it will not be possible to increase confidence levels among citizens as to the EU's activities and chosen path forward.

SPECIFIC TOPICS

The biggest of all changes in Europe over the coming years will be the ability of each individual to change and remain competitive in the constantly changing labour markets. The society must acknowledge that workers need constant education in order to be able to change from one category of tasks to another without periods of unemployment in between. Foresight knowledge from the regions is needed to develop new ways of educational models. Every region is different and that's why the solutions should also be flexible enough so that they can be used in different circumstances.

Environment is one of those issues which are unquestionably European because even if one country would function immaculately there would be no real benefits if the neighboring countries do not take any actions. The demand for environmentally friendly technologies is significant. A European low-energy lifestyle means looking for changes in all areas of activity that impact on energy use. The regions can be used to promote and support many of the above-mentioned solutions.

At the first sight, global, skill-based economy should favour diverse metropolis that offer a sufficiently large "critical mass". Thus regional development would expand the difference between centres and isolated areas. This kind of vision spurs from the assumption that a central authority is needed. Its alternative is networking and a decrease in the central control and the view that different regions have different possibilities. This vision, called regional specialisation, highlights the meaning of local know-how and specialisation. From this point of view specific regional development brings out new possibilities rather than threats also for the small, and in geographical terms more secluded agricultural or urban areas.

No matter what kind of a view we have about the future of Europe, one of its most important resources will be its regions. These regions exist within states but they also spread out across borders to the neighbouring countries of the EU, in the north, south and east.