

Public consultation on the Europe 2020 strategy

Name of the Organization: Cooperatives Europe asbl

Contact person: Agnès Mathis – Deputy Director

E-mail: a.mathis@coopseurope.coop

Telephone: + 32 2 743 10 35

Transparency register ID number: 16999985032-07

A. Background for the consultation

The Europe 2020 strategy was launched in [March 2010](#) as the EU's strategy for promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It aims to achieve a knowledge-based, competitive European economy while preserving the EU's social market economy model and improving resource efficiency. It was thus conceived as a partnership between the EU and its Member States driven by the promotion of growth and jobs.

The Europe 2020 strategy is built around five [headline targets](#) in the areas of employment, research and development, climate and energy, education and the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The strategy also set out a series of action programmes, called "[flagship initiatives](#)", in seven fields considered to be key drivers for growth, namely innovation, the digital economy, employment and youth, industrial policy, poverty and resource efficiency. The objectives of the strategy are also supported by action at EU level in areas such as the single market, the EU budget and the EU external agenda.

The Europe 2020 strategy is implemented and monitored in the context of the [European Semester](#), the yearly cycle of coordination of economic and budgetary policies at EU level. The European Semester involves discussion among EU institutions on broad priorities, annual commitments by the Member States and country-specific recommendations prepared by the Commission and endorsed at the highest level by leaders in the European Council. These recommendations should

then be taken on board in the Member States' policies and budgets. As such, together with the EU budget, the country-specific recommendations are key instruments for the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy.

After four years, the Commission has proposed, and the European Council of 20-21 March 2014 has agreed, to initiate a review of the Europe 2020 strategy. On 5 March 2014, the Commission adopted a Communication "Taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" ([Communication](#) and [Annexes](#)) drawing preliminary lessons on the first years of implementation of the strategy. Building on these first outcomes and in a context of a gradual recovery of the European economies, it is time to reflect on the design of the strategy for the coming years.

Through these questions, we are seeking your views on the lessons learned from the early years of the Europe 2020 strategy and on the elements to be taken into account in its further development, in order to build the post-crisis growth strategy of the EU.

B. Questions

1) Taking stock: the Europe 2020 strategy over 2010-2014

Content and implementation

For you, what does the Europe 2020 strategy mean? What are the main elements that you associate with the strategy?

The 2020 strategy provides the orientation and direction for all EU policies and initiatives. It should be the translation of the EU's mandate and general objectives into a comprehensive, comprehensible and inclusive action plan based on a sound mapping of current challenges and opportunities.

The main elements of the strategy need to be linked to the EU's general objectives of providing peace and prosperity for all EU citizens with a main focus on the Single Market as the EU's current main responsibility. Most prominent in this respect are on the one hand the development of a sound and sustainable EU investment market, which serves the interests of the 'real economy' and not vice-versa. Next to finance, energy is another key element for supporting a functioning real economy by providing reliable and quality (ie non-destructive) energy at affordable prices. Finally the use of research and development in developing and integrating new technologies into a modern economy to serve EU citizens is of major importance.

Overall, do you think that the Europe 2020 strategy has made a difference? Please explain.

Given the mostly non-binding targets of the current strategy, plus the fact that many of its pillars are out of the EU's direct responsibility, the overall impact has been non-decisive.

The EU's early achievements on the energy transition have been most remarkable due to binding targets at member country level stimulating investments into renewable energy in particular. Lessons should be learned from this for other policy areas, in order to achieve greater impact.

Has the knowledge of what other EU countries are doing in Europe 2020 areas impacted on the approach followed in your country? Please give examples.

The integration of inclusive growth with the local and national dimension of Member State is a key factor to attain the goals and target of the EU 2020 strategy.

Has there been sufficient involvement of stakeholders in the Europe 2020 strategy? Are you involved in the Europe 2020 strategy? Would you like to be more involved? If yes, how?

A much wider involvement of stakeholders will be necessary in future on a regular basis, in order to foster collaboration and joint commitment. No single institution alone can deliver on these targets. New ways of dialogue & collaboration need to be developed.

Cooperatives have been pretty much left out of this approach so far, although they could certainly contribute through their experience of a participatory and democratic business approach. Their good practices need to be acknowledged and given the appropriate attention.

Tools

Do the current targets for 2020 respond to the strategy's objectives of fostering growth and jobs? [Targets: to have at least 75% of people aged 20-64 in employment; to invest 3% of GDP in research and development; to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20%, increase the share of renewables to 20% and improve energy efficiency by 20%; to reduce school drop-out rates to below 10% and increase the share of young people with a third-level degree or diploma to at least 40%; to ensure at least 20 million fewer people are at risk of poverty or social exclusion].

The targets are sometimes rather a consequence of growth than a prerequisite (like for employment). Many targets are more desired outcomes (like employment or poverty reduction) rather than required outputs making them meaningless or simply wishful thinking. A target of employment is meaningless when not linking it to concrete outputs (such as employment driven and not financially driven economic growth), which then can be used for very concrete policy measures (such as a taxation system, which supports employment creation). That is one of the reasons, why there has not been much progress.

The 20% renewable share is rather an exception as it is a true target, on which the EU can deliver.

Among current targets, do you consider that some are more important than others? Please explain.

The primary focus of the targets needs to be on human development stressing the employment and youth targets (through education, training, information and active participation)! The market economy will then be a good servant!

Do you find it useful that EU-level targets are broken down into national targets? If so, what is, in your view, the best way to set national targets? So far, have the national targets been set appropriately/too ambitiously/not ambitiously enough?

National targets are crucial, in order to have member states committed. EU-level targets can serve to stimulate additional investments from outside one member state, which is lacking behind targets.

How appropriate or ambitious those targets are is a matter of the underlying objectives the EU and member states want to or simply have to achieve to prevent future economic, social & political crisis at the least.

What has been the added value of the seven action programmes for growth? Do you have concrete examples of the impact of such programmes? ["Flagship initiatives": "Digital agenda for Europe", "Innovation Union", "Youth on the move", "Resource efficient Europe", "An industrial policy for the globalisation era", "Agenda for new skills and jobs", "European platform against poverty"].

Consumer cooperatives via Euro Coop have been particularly active in contributing to the "Resource Efficient Europe" flagship initiative, which was of fundamental importance to gear economy towards a holistic concept of sustainability as intended in its economic, social and environmental pillars. Against this background, it calls the EU to recognise sustainability as one of the big horizontal themes of the Europe 2020 strategy.

2) Adapting the Europe 2020 strategy: the growth strategy for a post-crisis Europe

Content and implementation

Does the EU need a comprehensive and overarching medium-term strategy for growth and jobs for the coming years?

The EU certainly requires an overarching strategy to prove its worth to the citizens. However, that strategy needs to be aligned more with citizen expectations, which is more about recovery from crisis and renewed prosperity than growth for example.

What are the most important and relevant areas to be addressed in order to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth?

- * A transparent and fair taxation system in Europe to which everyone and every organisation contributes according to their capabilities & capacities
- * A new role of the state in the economy, which is not simply about retreating through liberalisation and privatisation, but which is purpose focused, based on a sound set of values and principles.
- * Cooperative enterprises have been guided by the cooperative principles for more than 120 years, in order to serve its members and society in general.
- * A sound, fair and open business environment providing a level-playing field for all types of businesses & initiatives

- * Smart, sustainable and inclusive investments into health & education as the basis for a human capital driven growth
- * Special attention to the young generations and to the challenges they face in the context of historic-high unemployment and erosion of trust towards decision-makers on national and EU level.
- * The respect of the proportionality and subsidiarity principles as key factors to develop sound and fair European rules.
- * The respect and the practical implementation of the values and the priorities set forth by the Europe 2020 strategy within the European legislative proposal. A good example in this respect is given by the social provisions embedded into the new public procurement Directives and into the State aids general block exemption regulation.
- * Invest in culture and creativity (cultural and creative industries) as crucial actors to increase innovations and to strengthen the competitive capacity and capabilities of territories and businesses belonging to the traditional excellence sectors (agro-food, mechanics, ceramics, bio-medical, health, etc) as well as to develop innovative solutions for the benefit of people and public Institutions.

What new challenges should be taken into account in the future?

Economic development and integration with the EU's neighbours in the East and South, in order to ensure peace and stability including the question of migration

How could the strategy best be linked to other EU policies?

The strategy needs to be overarching like a roof, under which EU policy is situated and all policies need to be linked to it. It is necessary to promote further synergies among all the European policies, programmes and tools to implement them, in the light of the challenges the EU has to face.

What would improve stakeholder involvement in a post-crisis growth strategy for Europe? What could be done to increase awareness, support and better implementation of this strategy in your country?

At EU level, there needs to be a policy forum for all stakeholders on a regular basis to exchange and discuss progress on the strategy. To promote opportunities of exchanges, meeting and strategic thinking with a participatory and inclusive approach to the decision-making process at European level and of the member States.

Tools

What type of instruments do you think would be more appropriate to use to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth?

Difficult to judge without proposer stakeholder discussions

What would best be done at EU level to ensure that the strategy delivers results? What would best be done at Member State level?

EU needs to coordinate and facilitate the strategy implementation and use its policy and programme tools to support certain elements of strategy implementation, in particular in supporting the weaker parts of the system to catch up. EU should also facilitate the exchange between member states to learn from each other and thereby accelerating progress. Member states have the operational responsibility to deliver on jointly agreed binding targets.

How can the strategy encourage Member States to put a stronger policy focus on growth?

By involving them in the strategy formulation and implementation via a participatory approach, which does not only include the national governments, but also social and economic actors and institutions at national and regional level.

National specificities need to be accounted for when setting the national targets in the wider context of EU policies. A one-size-fits-all approach will not be useful.

Are targets useful? Please explain.

They are critical to provide direction and to measure progress!

Would you recommend adding or removing certain targets, or the targets in general? Please explain.

See above

What are the most fruitful areas for joint EU-Member State action? What would be the added value?

Focus on youth unemployment!! If one single Member-State cannot resolve the issue, then joint expertise and good practices are required! This is one of the key challenges, as it has been spinning out of control since 2008. Added value? – economic growth, social inclusion, future stability, pension fund security, Research and Development investments, higher education optimisation to meet market needs.

Financial policies to support credit access to SMEs; digital agenda to contribute to overcome the digital divide in many areas of population- territories-businesses

Brussels, 31st October 2014