



Message from Maastricht

Towards the 2030 Agenda and beyond: European cooperation within a new citizens–science–policy interface

The European Network of Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC) held its 25th Annual Conference in Maastricht, the Netherlands, on 12 October 2017. The conference focused on the impacts of the persistent hurdles, and the effects of the current political and societal climate and the changing science-citizens-policy interface on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

In this *Message from Maastricht*, we – the chairs of the EEAC member councils – have set down our conclusions, based on the outcomes of the conference, the deliberations we had and the reflections we received. We share our thoughts on some of the issues raised and we highlight the actions we intend to take to contribute to the implementation of sustainable development by means of the 2030 Agenda, and beyond.

Chairs' concluding thoughts and actions

2030 Agenda rooted in Europe

The 2030 Agenda strongly reflects European thinking. It took four decades to transform the concept of sustainability into concrete goals and targets, adopted by the UN. All the elements for successful implementation are in place. The technologies exist, the necessary financial mechanisms are known. What is needed is to scale up, to accelerate the transformation. Our councils have the ambition to take an active part in creating national and regional contributions to a sustainable Europe. The missing link, as we see it today, is the EU level where we would like to see an ambitious and strategic approach to a sustainable European community.

The social dimension of sustainability

The environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development have long had a strong basis in the European treaties. The social dimension has developed significantly slowly throughout the European integration process. Our councils have a role to play as guardians of a balanced approach (integrating the environmental, societal and economic pillars of sustainability).

Aligning the financial system with sustainability

An important contributor to the acceleration of the sustainability transformation in Europe is the integration of ethics and transparency into the checks and balances of our financial system. The SDGs need to be integrated into the risk perceptions of financial markets. The multi-annual financial framework of the EU needs to be aligned with the aims of the 2030 Agenda. Our councils can act as honest brokers, bringing people with different perspectives together, creating platforms for debate and the exchange of experiences with sustainable financing.

Transformative cities

Cities have a transformative power that needs to be acknowledged. These places are crucial, especially when it comes to implementing and connecting the various goals of the 2030 Agenda. We need to acknowledge the importance of concrete and inspirational missions – such as climate-resilient cities – to get people involved. Our councils can act as facilitator encouraging concrete translation mechanisms of goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

Keeping step with transformations

There is a legitimacy crisis which jeopardises institutions and reinforces a latent identity crisis among the population. This sense of distrust is exacerbated by social media networks which both spread fake news and its opposite (fact-checking groups), leaving citizens quite disoriented. This new dynamic needs to be linked to the sustainability debate, which needs to keep step with these transformations. Only then can the 2030 Agenda be implemented successfully. Through their EEAC advisory work, our councils can fulfill the role of guardians of long-term visions in policy-making, while at the same time playing a pivotal role in mobilising society for sustainable development.

Society-science-policy interface

An ongoing shift is taking place in environmental and sustainable development policies: from topdown regulation to governance in networks, from a focus on regulation to an emphasis on a stronger and active role taken by citizens, from words to actions. This necessitates rethinking the interfaces between science, society and policy. There is widespread agreement that we need more transparent approaches to policy advice, more co-creation between scientists, policy-makers and citizens, new types of institutions to handle these co-creations, and where possible shared responsibility between the involved actors and the regulators in the form of co-regulation. We are well aware that within this new interface, our councils need to be in tune with public and political perceptions, while safeguarding the credibility of a strong evidence base.

A new narrative for Europe

We – the chairs of the EEAC member councils – have identified a need for a new narrative for Europe. A narrative that mobilises creativity and imagination to bring stability to people's perspectives when they look to the future. Technical solutions are necessary, but they do not automatically convince people. Narratives connect people's hearts and minds, and bring life to the 2030 Agenda. Without this mobilisation, there will be no implementation. Our councils have a task in bridging the gap between the local and EU levels by focusing on what is just and appropriate in light of the needs of European citizens. Our councils are committed to contributing to this process at the sub-national, national and European levels, by sharing our unique insights and knowledge, by

launching new concepts, and by overcoming persistent hurdles on the road to sustainability.

As councils we would welcome a European strategy for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a framework for our joint actions.

On behalf of the EEAC-network,
signed by the organising council chair's and the chairman of the EEAC network



Magda Aelvoet
Chair of the Federal Council for Sustainable Development in Belgium



Jan Jaap de Graeff
Chair of the Dutch Council for the Environment and Infrastructure



Arnau Queralt i Bassa
Chair of the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Council's Network



Francis Schartz
Chair of the Luxembourg Council for Sustainable Development



Jurgen Tack
Chair of the Environmental and Nature Council of Flanders