

Brussels, 24 November 2009

Commission launches consultation on EU 2020: a new strategy to make the EU a smarter, greener social market

The Commission today issued a public consultation document on giving the EU economy a brighter future through the EU 2020 Strategy. EU 2020 aims to deliver greener and socially inclusive growth, as outlined by President Barroso in his Political Guidelines. The new Strategy will build on the achievements of the Lisbon Strategy, while learning its lessons. The consultation paper sets out a vision for how EU 2020 will focus on entrenching recovery from the crisis, helping to prevent a similar one in future and on three thematic objectives: creating value through knowledge; empowering people in inclusive societies; and creating a competitive, connected and greener economy. The deadline for responses to the consultation is 15 January 2010. The new Commission will then make a detailed proposal to the Spring European Council.

Commission President José Manuel Barroso said: "EU 2020 means the EU working together over the next decade to overcome some of the toughest economic challenges that Europe has ever faced. A smart economy and a wise society based on strong European values go together. Growth, sustainable public finances, tackling climate change, social inclusion, a strengthened industrial base and a vibrant services sector are not alternatives. They reinforce each other. Europe reduced unemployment from 12% to 7% in the decade to 2008. We now need new sources of growth to replace the jobs lost in the crisis. We have set out in this paper the keys that can unlock Europe's potential. At the same time, we can increase our influence in the world and on globalisation by showing our partners that the social market economy is the most efficient and the most equitable. We want stakeholders' views on our EU 2020 Strategy before presenting our proposals to the Spring European Council."

The Commission believes EU 2020 should focus on the following areas and is seeking views on how best to deliver this.

Creating value by basing growth on knowledge

Education in Europe must improve, from pre-school to higher education, to increase productivity, support vulnerable groups and help fight inequality and poverty

The framework conditions for innovation and creativity can still be much improved in Europe, for example by modernising the EU's intellectual property rights system. Access to credit should be boosted, including through pooled public and private sources of growth capital.

The EU needs a European Digital Agenda to deliver a real online single market, so consumers can benefit from competitive prices offered in other Member States and SMEs can break into larger markets. Internet access and skills are becoming necessary for full participation in daily life. Achieving "digital inclusion" is a key part of overall social inclusion.

Empowering people in inclusive societies

The crisis has "changed the game". Many pre-crisis jobs have been destroyed and will not return.

Europe cannot prosper unless workers have the skills to contribute to and benefit from a knowledge-based economy. Supply and demand need to be better matched, through labour mobility across and within borders and through better anticipation of future skills needs.

The Commission is determined to advance the flexicurity agenda and to ensure it is better understood in terms not only of flexibility from employees but also of employers and governments shouldering more responsibility for investing in and protecting people. Those who cannot find a job should be supported both financially and through individualised help to regain access to the labour market.

Creating a competitive, connected and greener economy

The future will see high energy prices, carbon constraints and greater competition for resources and markets. All of these are risks but also present opportunities to create a "new" EU 2020 economy with a strong global competitive advantage. New greener technologies can stimulate growth, create new jobs and services and help the EU meet climate change goals. On the other hand, failure to adapt to the 21st century would see Europe decline.

The policies at EU and national level to promote eco-innovation and energy-efficient products and systems should include emission trading, tax reform, subsidies and loans, public investment and procurement and targeting of research and innovation budgets.

Europe needs smarter transport infrastructures and an EU wide 'smart grid' for energy, as well as 100% broadband coverage as soon as possible. The EU and Member States should work together to make the right strategic investments to make two-thirds of electricity generation both low carbon and more secure by the early 2020s.

Manufacturing will remain critical to the EU's future economic success. But Europe needs a new industrial policy emphasising innovation capacity, new technologies, skills, fostering entrepreneurship and "internationalising" SMEs. Excess capacity in some sectors must be tackled. Those adversely affected will need to be supported.

Governance - making EU 2020 work

The Commission proposes that the European Council should steer EU 2020, making the key decisions and setting the objectives based on Commission proposals. The Commission wants the European Parliament to play a significantly greater role. National parliaments will also be invited to take a strong interest and assume ownership.

The consultation paper proposes that the 2010 Spring European Council conclusions underpin the so-called 'integrated guidelines', confirming the policy priorities which should be pursued by the EU and Member States in partnership. The new guidelines would replace those in force under the Lisbon Strategy since 2005.

For each of these objectives, Member States would be invited to set national objectives for five years corresponding to their different situations and their starting points. The Commission and the European Council will monitor progress every year in Member States and at EU level.

The deadline for responses to the consultation is 15 January. Responses can be e-mailed to EU2020@ec.europa.eu.

The full consultation document will be made available via:
http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/index_en.htm and
<http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020>