

30 Jan 2019

## COMMISSION'S REFLECTION PAPER ON A MORE SUSTAINABLE EUROPE BY 2030

### IEEP'S REACTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONCRETE POLICY ACTION

**For further information please contact:**

Céline Charveriat ([ccharveriat@ieep.eu](mailto:ccharveriat@ieep.eu)) and Marianne Kettunen ([mkettunen@ieep.eu](mailto:mkettunen@ieep.eu))

---

IEEP welcomes the urgency and the scope of the European Commission's (EC) most ambitious proposal for the EU SDG strategy (i.e. Scenario 1), as put forward in the long-awaited SDG reflection paper "[Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030](#)".

To ensure a timely delivery of the 2030 sustainability agenda, European leaders, the new European Commission and European Parliament must decide to turn the SDG strategy into *THE* new strategy for the EU. On the contrary, should the SDG strategy be seen as a separate sustainability plan and serve as an add-on to what will replace the Juncker 10-point Plan, then it would most likely fail in realising its ambition.

---

The EC's SDG reflection paper calls for a reinvented form of sustainable economic growth. In the core of this approach are four key elements of sustainability: a circular economy; sustainable food and agriculture system; sustainable energy, building and mobility; and ensuring a socially fair transition in 2030. As a way forward, the paper outlines three different scenarios for the EU implementation of the SDGs, including an overarching EU SDG Strategy for the EU and its Member States (Scenario 1), mainstreaming SDGs into EU policies without enforcement at Member States level (Scenario 2), and focusing on implementing SDGs in the EU external context (Scenario 3).

The most ambitious option of the EC's SDG reflection paper (Scenario 1) envisions the following possibilities:

- Specific SDG implementation targets defined at EU level and an overarching EU SDG Strategy is implemented by the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council;
- Comprehensive national SDG strategies developed at national level;
- Concrete and time-bound deliverables for 2030 proposed by the Commission and endorsed by the European Council;
- The "sustainability first" principle is integrated into the Better Regulation Agendas of the EU and its Member States;
- A mechanism of reporting and monitoring of SDG progress at EU and Member State level established and coordinated, for instance in the context of the European Semester;
- The role of the Multi-stakeholder Platform on the SDGs is strengthened with a specific role in the monitoring of the implementation of the SDGs;
- The EU further strengthens its external action on sustainability and gears all external policy actions towards the implementation of the SDGs.

**IEEP strongly endorses developing an overarching EU SDG strategy, with concrete and time-bound targets in place that guide both the EU and its Member States' measures** (i.e. Scenario 1), including the monitoring of progress towards these targets. Using the SDGs to simply 'inspire' the EC decision-making without any enforcement at the Member States level (i.e. Scenario 2) or treating the SDGs as an element of EU's external policy only (i.e. Scenario 3) will lead to a failure in delivering the EU's collective commitments by 2030.

The SDG strategy should not only be in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, but also long-term goals to 2050 contained in the Paris agreement as well as other key MEAs (such as the CBD). It should be supported by a set of science-based quantified targets to 2030 and by policies fully integrating the environmental, social and economic and security dimensions of sustainability. It should include urgent short-term actions and map out the transition required.

The EC's proposal for the establishment of a 'European process for SDG policy coordination' (Scenario 1) is particularly welcomed. This is foreseen to regularly assess and monitor progress in implementation, reflecting the cross-cutting nature and inter-connectivity between the SDGs. However, the EU still lacks a robust methodology to assess progress against, not simply trends towards, science-based targets. Therefore, 'upgrading' the EU's assessment methodology and framework should be a key part of the future SDG strategy.

Table 1 below captures in more detail IEEP's initial assessment of the pros and cons of the key policy elements put forward in the EC's vision. Several positive aspects can be identified, ranging from increasing EU's climate ambition to implementing policy coherence for SDGs. One of the most substantial failures of the paper, however, is its lack of emphasis on biodiversity and well-functioning ecosystems in delivering the EU's 2030 vision. While the reflection paper captures the urgency of stopping biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, it misses an opportunity to position the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems as concrete policy solutions to deliver SDGs both in the EU and globally.

In October 2018, IEEP and partners launched the [Think 2030 platform](#), with a view to identify science-policy solutions for a more sustainable Europe. Table 2 below takes the key elements of the Commission's SDG reflection paper and, within the scope of those elements, provides an example of a recommended concrete policy action to implement the 2030 vision. For further recommendations to implement the 2030 sustainability agenda, please see the full list of [Think 2030 recommendations](#).

**Table 1:** Quick assessment of the EC SDG reflection paper's policy foundations

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>From Linear to Circular Economy</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>😊 Emphasis on the practical implementation of existing policies, with several horizontal enablers identified that could support further development of circular economy, such as the use of environmental taxation and blockchain technology.</li> <li>😊 Explicit recognition of the need for and opportunities provided by circular bioeconomy, with measures needed to be put in place to protect ecosystems and avoiding overexploitation of natural resources</li> <li>😞 Lack of concrete funding for a shift to circular economy.</li> <li>😞 Lack of concrete policy measures linking circular economy to sustainable consumption.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Sustainability from farm to fork</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>😊 Recognition of the role of agriculture in meeting EU's climate and environmental goals.</li> <li>😊 Recognition of the need for change in EU's consumption patterns, including not only what we consume but also how we consume ...</li> <li>😞 ... but failing to provide a vision and concrete measures for changing EU's consumption.</li> <li>😞 High reliance on the political will for further reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP).</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Future-proofing energy, building and mobility</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>😊 Recognition of the need to increase the EU ambition beyond 2030 in order to reach the goals of the Paris Agreement.</li> <li>😊 Recognition of more progress needed to help the decarbonisation of the building sector.</li> <li>😊 Emphasis on mobility in cities, including modal shift, and full life cycle view of battery and vehicle production.</li> <li>😞 Complacent about the degree to which emissions have been decoupled from economic growth as well as emissions reductions to date</li> </ul>   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>☹️ Limited emphasis on social implications of unsustainable transport, e.g. health impacts on the poor and the socially inequitable tax structure of transport fuels and access to transport.</p>  |
| <b>Ensuring a socially fair transition</b> | <p>😊 Recognition of the importance of promoting social rights and well-being within the sustainability transition.</p> <p>😊 Reference to potentially affected sectors beyond coal (automotive and food)</p> <p>😊 Reference to the sustainability challenges facing households linked to gender, geographical location and income.</p> <p>☹️ Insufficient recognition of the links between rising inequality, overexploitation of natural resources, and current model of economic growth.</p> <p>☹️ Few solutions to the twin challenges of sustainable consumption and social justice.</p>   |
| <b>The EU as a global trail blazer</b>     | <p>😊 Explicit recognition of the need to <i>implement</i> policy coherence for SDGs, including the impact of internal policies on the external dimension.</p> <p>😊 Possibility of the EU initiating binding global agreements in the areas of circular economy, resource use and biodiversity.</p> <p>☹️ No explicit emphasis on conflict prevention, e.g. environmental and ecosystem protection and restoration, as part of EU's foreign and defence policy to support peace and security.</p> <p>☹️ Lack of concrete measures to ensure the foreseen more assertive use of the trade sustainability chapters.</p> <p>☹️ Missing an opportunity to position the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems as concrete policy solutions to deliver SDGs.</p> |

**Table 2:** Examples of recommended policy actions to implement the future EU SDG strategy

| <b>EC REFLECTION PAPER'S POLICY FOUNDATIONS</b>   | <b>EXAMPLE OF POLICY ACTION REQUIRED TO IMPLEMENT THE EC VISION, as according to IEEP</b>  |
|---|--|
|   | <p>For further policy actions recommended by IEEP and partners, please consult the <a href="#">Think 2030</a> platform</p>   |
| <p><b>From Linear to Circular Economy</b></p> <p><i>"Make the circular economy the backbone of EU industrial strategy, enabling circularity in new areas and sectors."</i></p>  | <p>Moving towards a <b>comprehensive European policy for sustainable consumption</b> aiming at an 80% reduction in per capita material footprint by 2050.</p>  |
| <p><b>Sustainability from farm to fork</b></p> <p><i>"We need a comprehensive approach entailing a genuine change in the way we produce, transform, consume and distribute food by accelerating the transition to a sustainable food system."</i></p>   | <p>The development of coherent and synergistic policies that take a <b>combined view of the production and consumption of bioresources</b> for food, materials and energy. Specific sectoral interventions will be necessary, for example to define the safe operating space for livestock production and consumption.</p> |
| <p><b>Future-proofing energy, building and mobility</b></p> <p><i>"More is needed to live up to the letter as well as the spirit of the Paris Climate Agreement, exploiting the full economic potential of the energy transition [...] promoting improved energy efficiency of buildings and [...] transitioning towards a clean, resource efficient and carbon-neutral future in the mobility sector."</i></p> | <p>A <b>coherent mid-century decarbonisation strategy</b> supported by <b>sectoral industrial strategies</b> and a <b>carbon floor price</b>.</p>  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Ensuring a social fair transition</b></p> <p><i>“Sustainability change is about promoting social rights and well-being for all and in turn contributing to social cohesion in the Member States and across the EU.”</i></p>   | <p>Strengthen the <b>European Social Pillar of Rights and reform tax systems to support a Just Transition for all</b></p>  |
| <p><b>The EU as a global trail blazer</b></p> <p><i>“It is in the EU’s interest to play a leading role in the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda also globally through its external action.”</i></p>  | <p>Sharpening the <b>targeting of EU external assistance</b> vis-à-vis delivery of SDG implementation in third countries, whilst <b>addressing the negative spillover effects</b> of EU’s own economic model.</p>  |
| <p><b>EC REFLECTION PAPER’S ENABLING ELEMENTS</b></p>   | <p><b>EXAMPLE OF POLICY ACTION REQUIRED TO IMPLEMENT THE EC VISION, as according to IEEP</b></p> <p>For further policy actions recommended by IEEP and partners, please consult the <a href="#">Think3020</a> platform</p>   |
| <p><b>Education, training, science, technology, research, innovation and digitisation</b></p> <p><i>“Research and innovation have an important role as a catalyst for change... as a tool for analysing the impacts of change and a means for ensuring that any transition leads to an increase in our well-being.”</i></p> | <p>Establish a <b>European Panel for Sustainability (EPS)</b>, an independent, high-level scientific multidisciplinary body, based on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) model, reporting to the European Council.</p>                                   |
| <p><b>Finance, pricing, taxation and competition</b></p> <p><i>“ [...] the sustainability transition entails significant investments in the short run and a comprehensive shift in how the financial system works.”</i></p>   | <p><b>A clean macro-economic, monetary and growth framework</b> enabling decarbonisation, promoting greater resilience to financial shocks and natural disasters as well as mobilizing public and private investments necessary for the ecological transition.</p>         |
| <p><b>Corporate social responsibility</b></p> <p><i>“Businesses have a vital role to play in the sustainability transition. [we need to] identify appropriate measures and tangible ways in which more sustainable business conduct can be promoted.”</i></p>   | <p>Incentivizing businesses to go beyond compliance through a <b>new sustainability certification scheme for European companies aligned with SDGs</b>, independently verified and based on best available environmental footprint methodologies.</p>                       |
| <p><b>Open and rules-based trade</b></p> <p><i>“If we want to be successful in achieving a sustainable Europe in a sustainable world, it is important [...] to shape global standards.”</i></p>   | <p>Moving towards using <b>the EU’s trade policy to push for harmonized and ambitious environmental standards worldwide</b> and cooperation agreements around low-carbon and other environmentally friendly technologies.</p>  |
| <p><b>Governance and policy coherence</b></p> <p><i>“Policy coherence across the board is essential, grounded in planning, evidence-based policies, inclusiveness, effectiveness, respect for subsidiarity and proportionality, and measurement and monitoring.”</i></p>  | <p>Tackle gaps in implementation of legislation and in transparency and accountability through more effective use of <b>Member State and European enforcement mechanisms</b>. Facilitate more systematically <b>public access to justice on environmental matters</b>.</p> |