



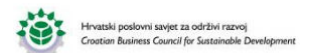
# **An inspirational view for a sustainable economy in Europe:**

**taking on the Sustainable Development Goals**



**Developed by 19 European business associations  
striving for sustainable economic development**

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# Index

1. Key messages	4
2. A new vision for europe	5
3. The SDG and the European Union	6
4. Business & other stakeholders	7
5. Conclusion	8
Acknowledgments	9





# 1. Key messages

**The signing organizations represent a network of 19 independent national and regional business councils based in Europe. Our members are forward-thinking enterprises that galvanize the business community to create a sustainable future.**

With this common paper, we want to encourage European countries and EU institutions to embrace the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda as the main framework driving policy development and priority setting.

**We appeal governmental and EU representatives and policy makers to foster progress under the SDGs lenses and to promote balanced and fair economic growth that can reinforce the European values and respect for human life, rights, peace and democracy<sup>1</sup>.**

As progressive business networks, we embrace the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda as the framework that can help European countries to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth.

We wish to highlight the need for inclusive forms of governance and encourage politicians and policy-makers to recognize the private sector as a key partner in this endeavor.

## **We take this opportunity to:**

- ▶ acknowledge the European institutions efforts and those of other European governments and to offer our support in cooperating to move forward in this matter, especially around the adoption of the Communication on the next steps for a sustainable European future launched in November 2016;
- ▶ congratulate the EU for taking action and playing a central role in the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and thus recognizing its role in achieving long-term prosperity and wellbeing of coming generations;
- ▶ congratulate the EU for putting human rights at the forefront and pledging to bring 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020 and actions beyond;
- ▶ invite all European countries to embrace the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs as a key framework for policy development, priority setting goals and management metrics as well as to offer regular updates on their implementation;
- ▶ appeal to EU representatives and all European countries to provide consistent and reliable frameworks for business action on contributing to the implementation of the SDGs in all dimensions, including human rights, social justice, environmental protection and economic stability;
- ▶ state our interest and that of our members in being an active partner in working in partnership with the public institutions towards achieving the SDGs worldwide.

The private sector has played an active role in developing activities that link with the 2030 Agenda. Therefore, we put forth examples of business activities from European countries which can be seen in this link (note: this link will point for the document with the SDG examples available online).



1. Standard Eurobarometer 77 (2012) The Values of Europeans. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb77/eb77\\_value\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb77/eb77_value_en.pdf)



## 2. A new vision for Europe

Europe is at a crossroads. The financial crisis that began in 2007 deeply affected European countries, many of which are still struggling to find a way out of high unemployment and poor economic growth. Short-term goals linked to the financial and economic recovery of European countries have been the main policy drivers over the past years. The fact that those policies have failed to deliver has led to a decrease in trust in the EU,<sup>2</sup> parliaments and national governments since 2009<sup>3</sup>. The latest available data indicates that 68% of Europeans tend not to trust national governments and 55% tend not to trust the European Union<sup>4</sup>. In fact, 53% of the Europeans believe things are going in the wrong direction in their own country and 50% also believe so for the European project. The good news for the European project is that EU citizens place greater trust in EU institutions than national parliaments and governments. Also, 50% of Europeans believe Europe means freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the EU<sup>5</sup>.

**Furthermore, European countries are in serious ecological overshoot and have an increasing dependency on resources that are only available in other parts of the globe<sup>6</sup>.**

**The EU is still using too many raw materials, emitting too much greenhouse gas into the atmosphere, overfishing the world's oceans and rapidly losing biodiversity<sup>7</sup>.**

It is time for all European institutions (EU and non-EU countries) to reconcile economic prosperity with the fundamental rights of the European Union: dignity, freedoms, equality, solidarity, citizen's rights and justice<sup>8</sup>. The SDGs and the Agenda 2030 provide a frame for connecting them. With this common vision of prosperity, business can be encouraged to find solutions that can help solve both human and environmental problems; governments can develop incentives that enhance SDGs achievements; and youth can learn about the economic opportunities that sustainable development can bring.

All SDGs are relevant for an equitable and competitive economy, and all stakeholders – public sector, civil society, academia and business community – can strengthen their efforts in specific areas. In this context, the sustainable European business community is working actively especially on: SDG7 – affordable and clean energy; SDG8 – decent work and economic growth; SDG9 – industry, innovation and infrastructure; SDG11 – sustainable cities and communities; SDG12 – responsible consumption and production; SDG13 – climate change; SDG 17 – partnerships; although there are regional and local differences in SDG priorities.

2. In 2007, 57% of Europeans tended to trust the European Union. In 2016, those figures dropped to 33% (Source: Standard Eurobarometer 85 (2016) Public Opinion in the European Union, p.42. Available at: file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/eb85\_first\_en.pdf)

3. Standard Eurobarometer 85. (2016) Public Opinion in the European Union, p.14. Available at file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/eb85\_first\_en.pdf

4. Standard Eurobarometer 85. (2016) Public Opinion in the European Union, p. 42. Available at file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/eb85\_first\_en.pdf

5. Standard Eurobarometer 85. (2016) Public Opinion in the European Union, p. 61. Available at file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/eb85\_first\_en.pdf

6. World Wild Fund at [http://wwf.panda.org/what\\_we\\_do/how\\_we\\_work/policy/wwf\\_europe\\_environment/initiatives/european\\_footprint/](http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/how_we_work/policy/wwf_europe_environment/initiatives/european_footprint/)

7. According to the European Environment Agency, “60% of species assessments and 77% of habitat assessments continue to be in unfavorable conservation status. Constant habitat loss, diffuse pollution, over-exploitation of resources, and growing impacts of invasive alien species and climate change contribute cumulatively” (source: <http://www.eea.europa.eu/soer-2015/europe/biodiversity>).

8. Official Journal of the European Union (2012) Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT&from=EN>





# 3. The SDGs and the European Union

**Sustainable development is an integral part of the EU's political agenda as illustrated by Article 3 of the Treaty on the European Union:**

***"... (The Union) shall work for the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress, and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment (...)"***

The SDGs provide a political opportunity for the EU to take a step forward and to promote its core values and socio-economic model.

In the EU alone, there are more than 120 million people at risk of poverty or social exclusion.<sup>8</sup> Millions of Europeans are still left out of the labour market and out of an inclusive society. EU leaders have pledged to bring at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020. A people-centred approach such as the 2030 Agenda will echo the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by ensuring that all human beings are able to fulfil their potential in dignity and equality.

The SDGs are an inclusive and people-centered set of universal targets. They reflect the guiding principles that characterize the EU – respect for human rights and dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination – while attempting to resolve some of the most pressing issues of our times – end poverty, promote health and well-being, achieve quality education, promote economic growth and employment and to pursue a sustainable economy.

**The 2030 Agenda “is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity”. As advocated by the EU Commission, the EU should play a leading role in implementing the Agenda. The SDGs offer a new vision for Europe bringing back the spirit and vision of the Brundtland Report: living well, within the ecological limits of our planet.**

We encourage all European Institutions (National Governments and the EU Commission) to embrace the SDGs as the new framework to achieve long-term goals of sustainable economic and social development. The SDGs provide the global umbrella for policies to tackle climate change and fostering sustainable development and encompass all matters agreed upon in an international context and, most importantly, they embody the core values of the European project.

Achieving this vision requires inclusive forms of governance, where different stakeholders are called to act and to share the responsibility of a more sustainable future. Enterprises and entrepreneurs should be part of the solution finding process.



## 4. Business & Other Stakeholders

One of the key aspects on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is encouraging citizens and relevant stakeholders to participate in this process. Only through cooperation, inclusion and transparency can progress and positive impact be achieved. SDG 17 specifically calls on governments and stakeholders to revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development, including development co-operation and development financing.

EU institutions can help to build multi-stakeholder processes that facilitate the implementation of EU strategies and goals linked to the 2030 Agenda by bringing together various stakeholders, reconciling interests and building shared solutions. The EU and national governments must create an environment that encourages action by other stakeholders.

Business has a key role as engine for economic growth, employment and wellbeing. The private sector can be a powerful promoter of sustainable development through innovative products and processes, sustainable resource management schemes and their continuous quest for minimizing negative impacts on the environment. Business can also be the driver of a new circular economic model that promotes a tangible way of reaching sustainable patterns of production and consumption.

Due to global supply chains, European businesses assess sustainability along their entire value chain and deal with different national circumstances. Increasingly, investments in developing countries are seen as business opportunities, despite the risks involved and companies clearly see the benefits of sustainability strategies. By acting sustainably, companies can increase productivity, avoid disruptions in the supply chain, gain reputation and improve employee branding, among other. The Agenda 2030 can help promote integrated thinking around the world. Having a European framework designed around the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda will prove fundamental for this global coherence.

The private sector has given a clear sign of engagement. A significant portion of the European business community is actively engaged in developing new technologies and sharing best practices in topics such as energy efficiency, smart cities and infrastructures, sustainable forests and agriculture.

The businesses represented by the signing organizations are committed to creating a sustainable economy that aims at reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcity whilst creating jobs, prosperity, economic growth and a better life for all.

Many of these businesses have a long history of addressing sustainability issues. We encourage the EU and other European governments to further enhance sustainability in the context of a competitive European industry. Further efforts to enhance innovation and finance will also be needed, which is why we welcome the creation of the High-Level Expert Group on Sustainable Finance in December 2016 by the European Commission.

**SDGs are already driving the business agenda on cross-cutting issues. Our goal is to demonstrate the transformative power of the SDGs and how the businesses we represent are willing to work with EU institutions and governments to foster sustainable growth and enhance the success of a common European project. The efforts initiated by a considerable number of European businesses need to be further encouraged by an enabling public policy framework. The EU can leverage the contribution of the private sector by helping to manage risks, by setting innovation friendly targets and by supporting effective and coherent policy and practice.**



## 5. Conclusion

**The story of Europe is one of success. The fact that we are now facing lower levels of trust in European institutions and in national governments is a reason for apprehension but it is also an opportunity to seriously evaluate our path and do the necessary improvements to enable our nations and citizens to prevail and succeed in a sustainable world, as well as to increase human wellbeing.**

The EU played a pivotal role in the adoption of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda by 193 United Nations members. It did so because the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda embody the core values that bring together EU member states. These same values and principles hold the strong link between the EU and other European countries. The SDGs are an inclusive and people-centered set of universal targets. They were adopted with the goal of accelerating sustainable development and growth and we can only benefit by putting them at the forefront of European policy development.

**We call on European institutions (EU and non-EU countries) to promote the frameworks needed to reconcile economic prosperity with human rights, social justice, environmental protection and economic stability. As representatives of a significant portion of the European private sector, we reiterate the interest of the business community in being an active partner in working in partnership with the public institutions towards the implementation of the 17 SDGs worldwide. We highlight the need for inclusive forms of governance and encourage politicians and decision-makers to recognize the private sector as a key partner.**



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## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank some of the many businesses that have shared their examples: Alpro, CTT – Correios de Portugal –, Coca-Cola Belgium and Luxemburg, Colruyt Group, D’Ieteren, Delhaize, EDP – Energias de Portugal, Fidelidade, Hellenic Petroleum, Iba, Infrabel, Elia, Lifecell, Lipor – Intermunicipal Waste Management of Greater Porto –, Nestlé Portugal, PT Portugal, Polyeco Group, Proximus, Raycap, Sekerbank, Spadel, SCM Group, Solvay, Sonae MC, Thalys, The Navigator Company, Titan Cement Co., UMI-CORE, Ukrtelecom, Van Marcke

## About this publication

Edited by: BCSD Hungary, BCSD Turkey, Business Council for Sustainable Development Portugal (BCSD Portugal), Business in the Community Ireland (BITCI), Centre for CSR Development Ukraine (CSR Ukraine), CONCITO Sustainable Business, Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO), Croatian Business Council for Sustainable Development (HR BCSD), CSR Manager Network, Czech BCSD, De Groene Zaak, FIBS, Forética (Spain), Swiss Business Council for Sustainable Development (öbu), respACT – austrian business council for sustainable development, Responsible Business Forum, SEVBCSD GREECE, The Shift, UK Business Council for Sustainable Development

2017

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