

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL 2021-2025

The Economic and Social Council (ESC) is “an advisory body expressing the will of the civil society structures for economic and social development” and during its new term 2021-2025, which officially began on 25 January 2021, hereby presents its strategic priorities.

ESC’s term began in difficult conditions due to the current pandemic situation caused by the coronavirus, as well as the growing economic, social and political crisis in the world. Through this document ESC strengthens its commitment at national, European and international level and makes every effort to respect the relationship between society and government, whilst contributing to the well-being, rights, freedoms and dignified life of European citizens by actively expressing opinions and positions, as well as to ensure transparency and sustainable development of civil dialogue.

The diverse interests of Bulgarian citizens are represented in ESC, which demonstrates the strength and will of all members to unite around the strategic goal – by 2030 to develop a greener, more digital and smarter Europe, of which Bulgaria will be a part.

In this context, ESC's Strategic Priorities for the period 2021-2025 include:

1. The European Green Deal and the sustainable development of Bulgaria.

The Paris Agreement of 2015 and the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development with the new agenda “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” marked the beginning of the transformation of the economic model and a new social pact. The European Green Deal is the EU roadmap that must lead to increased economic prosperity and cohesion. To this end, it is necessary to involve various sectors of the economy, such as investing in environmentally friendly technologies, supporting industrial innovation, introducing cleaner, cheaper and healthier forms of private and public transport, decarbonising the energy sector, improving the energy efficiency of buildings, working with international partners to improve environmental standards worldwide.

Bulgaria faces a number of challenges related to climate, environment and economy, and the European Green Deal is a response to these complex and interconnected challenges. This, in turn, creates a certain task for the current generation to transform our country into a just and prosperous society with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy.

In this regard, ESC can contribute to the formation of a bolder and more comprehensive policy with a significant emphasis on quality of life, protection of health, well-being and sustainable development.

For ESC, one of the main priorities is sustainable growth, identifying two main lines of action. One relates to the present and the task of restarting the economy in the current pandemic situation, and the other relates to the post-pandemic period of recovery and strengthening of the economy as per the objectives of the Green Deal.

Last but not least, the Green Deal represents not only a major change for energy, transport, industry, agriculture and others, but also an opportunity to increase economic prosperity and cohesion within the euro area and the EU as a whole.

ESC as an expression of the will of civil society can play a key role in this direction at national and European level.

2. Technological transformation and digitisation of the economy and society.

In her speech, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen said that significant investments in innovation and digital technologies are planned in the coming years and set the period until 2030 as a “Europe’s Digital Decade”.

In this regard, ESC believes that technological transformation and digitisation of the economy and society should be a means and investment to achieve a more competitive economy and a fairer society. In view of the ongoing process of cohesion, it is necessary for the approach of the transition to digitalisation to combine the technological and social progress, respecting the European principles of liberty, democracy, equality, respect for fundamental rights and human dignity. For civil society, the debate on how to respond to the digital revolution politically will be one of the most crucial discussions of the next decade. In this sense, it is necessary to show solidarity with the efforts of our entire society - the institutions, the scientific community, the social partners and civil society organisations. Through constant dialogue and communication, trust in digitisation can be achieved and smart adaptation to the new can be ensured.

Digitisation creates fragmentation of work, but also of many activities that lie ahead. Timely analysis and in-depth dialogue are needed, as well as ongoing discussions to strike a balance and find solutions that can enhance business competitiveness. At the same time, the change should not be accompanied by social exclusion and inequality of employees, as well as to predispose conditions for transformation not only of technology but also of education, skills, human capital competences, operational efficiency, financial management, digitisation as a business strategy, the inclusion of young people and disadvantaged people.

It is vital to successfully validate and upgrade the digital skills of the workforce in Bulgaria for the forthcoming new phase of industrialisation, which can be achieved through continuous training and qualifications/retraining.

In this context of technological transformation and digitisation of the economy ESC should analyse the impact of these processes in different sectors of socio-economic relations and propose solutions.

3. The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) - the European Action Plan for the EPSR and its projection for the first national plan of Bulgaria.

For ESC, the European Pillar of Social Rights is a reliable mechanism for improving the balance between the economic and social dimension in the progress of the EU and each Member State. The 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights are a generalised and compressed expression of the shared ambition to make the European Union not only a common market but also a union of shared values. An action plan is needed not only at European level but also at national level, because without concrete action these principles remain only general intentions. In order for this Action Plan to bring about real change, serious interaction is needed between the structures of organized civil society, on the one hand, and the legislative and executive powers, on the other.

It is a shared responsibility to ensure the fulfilment of the objectives of the EPSR and to make

sure that they become a reality, as ESC actively participates in the implementation and monitoring mechanisms - the European Action Plan for the EPSR and its projection for the first national plan of Bulgaria, as well as to strengthen its role in the European Semester.

The forthcoming summit in Porto in May, dedicated to social issues, will also be extremely decisive. It is expected to focus on how to strengthen Europe's social dimension so as to meet the challenges of climate change and the digital transformation, as well as the adoption of an Action Plan implementing the EPSR.

In conclusion, the presented strategic priorities will be in line with the new strategic agenda of the EU for the period 2019-2024 adopted at the June European Council, which will identify the construction of a climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe as one of the leading priorities.