Building a resilient Europe in a globalised world

OPEN LETTER TO EPSC AND JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE, EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear Ms Mettler, dear Mr Sucha,

Firstly congratulations on an excellent conference. The efforts of the Joint Research Centre and the European Political Strategy Centre to push EU leaders to new levels of systemic thinking is very welcome. I strongly support Ms Mettler’s concluding remarks when she referred to the need to develop our foresight capabilities and move away from a language of competitiveness to the language of resilience.

There are two points I would like to contribute to the debate, not being physically present at the closing session.

1) The importance of civil society. The right to association is a fundamental right. In relation to resilience of the ‘EU system’ I would like to emphasize the importance of supporting and strengthening a vibrant and representative civil society voice. Andre Sapir talked about the need to better master the EU’s multi-level governance system. At all governance levels civil society are essential in ensuring the interests of people (particularly the most vulnerable) and the environment are reflected in policy making. Michel Servoz mentioned the need to strengthen social dialogue. This is essential for the world of work, but we also heard how the nature of work is changing, how people may have different careers in the life-cycle as well as long periods outside the labour market, not to mention the growing number of retirees. Organised civil society has to be supported to voice these interests. It is worrisome that across the EU institutions there is no common understanding of civil dialogue and quite different attitudes to engaging and supporting civil society organisations.

2) Individual resilience. Much attention was given to the role of education in building resilience. As a representative of a network promoting children’s rights, I can only support this observation. Investment in education as well as education reform must be a priority. In
particular we strongly support more learner-centred education models, that build self-awareness, critical thinking, creativity and confidence. However, my point is that education per se is only part of the picture. Our capacity to cope with change, to face uncertainty with confidence is very linked to childhood experience. Experience of poverty in childhood is associated with many poor outcomes - health, education, and ultimately employability - leading to an intergenerational cycle of disadvantage. Breaking this cycle requires a broad child-centred investment strategy that goes beyond education. It would take in early childhood policies - not only childcare provision but how to support families during this critical phase of a child’s life, health promotion and more market regulation to protect children as consumers, more and better family support services at community level to prevent family separation and better social welfare and protection policies. Crucially acknowledging children as fully-fledged rights holders to be listened to and respected can provide the quantum leap our society needs to become more resilient.

I trust these two points can be taken on board as you reflect on how to build on the outcomes of the conference.

Kind regards,

Jana Hainsworth

Secretary General of Eurochild

In May 2015 Jana was elected President of Social Platform the largest platform of European rights and value-based NGOs working in the social sector. We aim to promote social justice, equality and participatory democracy by voicing the concerns of member organisations. www.socialplatform.org