

Let engineers build Europe

The world and Europe-wide economic crisis of the past few years has created severe difficulties for the majority of EU member states and has had serious economic-social repercussions for the quality of life of the population; the worst unemployment figures for years - for youth unemployment in particular - and more and more families living below or on the poverty line are the consequences of ill-conceived economic policies, which often put the interests of lobbyists over those of the general public.

There is good reason to doubt that the cure-all of *'save at any price'* is the only right one. The question arises as to whether a healthy economy can be at all possible without investment; investments not only of an economic nature, but also in innovative thinking, new technologies and sectors and, last but not least, in the academic education of young people.

The European engineers, unified under the umbrella organization of *ECEC, the European Council of Engineers Chambers*, are convinced that they can show some ways and pointers towards successfully overcoming the crisis and kick-starting the economy once more. The necessary economic recovery and way out of the crisis will not be possible without innovation and a rethink in some economic areas, however. The European engineers put forward the following as concrete solutions:

- **Measures for boosting the labour market**
- **The promotion of companies with innovative thinking and new technologies**
- **The protection of small businesses and intellectual professions**
- **Investment in infrastructure and the safeguarding of territory**
- **The upgrading and renovating of existing building stock**
- **Investment in the *'green economy'* and the renewable energy sector**
- **Increasing the efficiency and accessibility of public administration**
- **The simplification of legislation**

The engineers thereby understand that austerity measures, such as the dismantling of overstuffed administrative bodies, the reduction of the cost of politics and the huge fight against corruption and tax evasion in many member states are just as important.

The proposals of the engineers in more detail:

1) Measures for boosting the labour market with emphasis on youth employment:

The lowering of the tax burden on workers in general and for the recruitment of young people in particular is unavoidable, as well as favouring the granting of credit to companies recruiting new staff, if necessary with government guarantees.

Young people in employment are definitely an enrichment for society, as they actively and creatively participate in the generation of wealth, even if they temporarily pay lower social security contributions and taxes.

2) The promotion of companies with innovative thinking and new technologies:

New, upcoming companies with well-thought-out business concepts that bank upon innovation and new technologies need the same kind of advance funds as young people out of work do, plus support and state guarantees concerning the granting of credit, along with tax and social security payment relief. No progress can be made without the spirit of invention, innovative thinking and the real opportunities to put all this into practice.

3) The protection of small businesses and intellectual professions:

Small businesses and micro-enterprises are, along with intellectual professions, one of the fundamental pillars of the economy, especially in rural areas; they act as a guarantee for quality and sustainability, as it is only thanks to these characteristics that they are able to reinforce their position daily on the free market. As dismissals mean a loss in knowledge and quality, which these companies cannot afford if they want to stay competitive, these companies are the best guarantees of workplaces in times of crisis.

The huge efforts, Europe-wide, to deregulate this sector by means of unlimited liberalisation in the name of a misunderstood market economy will inevitably lead to these companies losing their competitiveness and having to relinquish their market shares to large businesses and companies. All of this will eventually be borne by the end consumer, who will not be able to make a choice based on criteria not exclusively governed by the cheapest offer. Today's trend towards fundamentally changing the market economy simply on the basis of a lobbyist mentality and unrestricted efforts to deregulate without also working out the real consequences in detail must therefore be firmly reconsidered. Not least, this will also be necessary in order to prevent the intellectual professions from losing their appeal and therefore not being taken up by young people. The latter would have disastrous consequences for the educational efforts and academic instruction of future generations.

4) Investment in infrastructure for the safeguarding of territory and our habitat:

Floods, mudslides, avalanches and earthquakes are unfortunately frequent events and have consequences that place a great burden on the finances of many member states every year; not to mention causing irreversible damage, such as the loss of human life.

Prevention is much less costly and traumatic than repairing the damage, yet much too little is being done in this area. Investment in infrastructure for the safeguarding of our territory and habitat should therefore get priority, if necessary through the participation of private investors. There is more than enough of the required engineering expertise and technical know-how available, as long as there are genuine intentions of investing in safety.

5) The upgrading and renovating of existing building stock:

The topic of safeguarding territory hand in hand with that of the building development and 'cementing over' of former agricultural land and the advancing expansion of urban centres. Long-standing buildings in city centres often lose their appeal as housing in the process, not least because of unsustainable differences in property prices between the peripheries and centres of towns and cities.

Here too, a need for action is required: by means of tax concessions when purchasing and reclaiming old buildings; an appropriate financing policy; the promotion of social housing. This would have the declared purpose of the upgrading of historic city centres, limitations placed on urban sprawl and developments, the safeguarding of urgently needed agricultural land and, last but not least, the creation of new jobs in the building sector.

6) Investment in the 'green economy' and the renewable energy sector:

Despite heightened awareness amongst the population about renewable energy and energy saving measures resulting in an emphasis placed on more energy-efficient construction, there is still a need for action and investment in the area of the 'green economy', which is to be understood as an umbrella term for new technologies which reprocess waste in order to gain raw materials from waste and thus resources. New jobs and new possibilities for an upcoming economy could be created in this area, to which engineers make a crucial contribution, too. Tax breaks for new businesses and for youth employment set the right conditions to arouse the interest of private investors.

7) Increasing the efficiency and accessibility of public administration:

Transparent administration with disclosure of all decision-making processes, resolutions and expenses are necessary to break down the widely-felt mistrust amongst the population towards '*bureaucratic machinery*'.

With the help of the technologies available today, such as '*open data*', citizens can be provided with the means of following administrative goings-on at any given time and inspecting administrative expenses, with the simultaneous result of forcing the administrative bodies to optimize their internal organization and employees' spheres of jurisdiction and to meet actual needs.

8) The simplification of legislation:

Legislation, mainly for public tenders, has, under the guise of an economically dubious deregulation process, in recent years assumed a degree of complexity which is also barely understandable any more, without having achieved its desired goals. One only needs to think of the soon-to-be-introduced '*professional card*', which, though worth supporting in principle, without standardisation of degree courses will bring hardly any advantages for the mobility of service providers in the member states on a practical level.

From the point of view of engineers, the said legislation can and should be simplified, also in the interests of more efficient mobility for companies and service providers within the EU. Representatives of businesses and professional groups should be involved in this simplification process.

The European engineers hereby show their readiness to make a crucial contribution to this process!