



European Commission - Speech [Check Against Delivery]



Speech by Vice-President Šefčovič at the First Plenary Session of the Fit For Future Platform

Brussels, 26 November 2020

It is an honour to be chairing this **first plenary meeting of our new Fit For Future Platform**, and I would like to welcome you to this **initiative of great importance to European policymaking**.

There is a **huge amount of expertise** around this virtual table – from civil society, social partners, business, public authorities at national, regional and local level – and you represent the **cream of the crop**, the stakeholders having been selected from the **136 applications** we received.

The Fit for Future Platform will play a central role in our efforts over the coming years to create a more efficient and effective regulatory system; a **key ingredient in the recipe for any democratic society**.

The ongoing COVID-19 crisis has again underlined the need to eliminate unnecessary regulatory burden. Simplification has become more important than ever as we seek to kick-start Europe's economy.

So even though our **regulatory policy is recognised as one of the best in the world** – the OECD, for example, singled it out as among the best of its members in this regard – we can still do better.

We must ensure that EU laws provide their intended benefits for the society and economy, while **simplifying existing legislation and cutting red tape** wherever possible.

This can have real effects on the ground. Take for example the Commission's recently launched **Access2Markets** portal, which helps SMEs navigate and make the most of the EU's extensive trade deal network.

Burden reduction, meanwhile, was already included in the **SME strategy** we published earlier this year, and the **Single Customs Window proposal** also strives to make things easier for this critical sector of the EU economy. The 2021 Commission Work Programme, meanwhile, has **41 initiatives** with the potential for simplification.

The Fit For Future Platform, then, is a **key part of delivering** on our Better Regulation ambitions – and it will not be possible without all of you. By bringing together Member States' national, regional and local authorities, the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Committee and other key stakeholders, we can help **identify and reduce burdens at all levels**. I would particularly like to welcome the involvement of **RegHub**, given the importance of local and regional expertise. I also welcome the expertise of the SME Envoy.

I look forward to our close cooperation over the coming years.

Your work will be especially important as **the world is changing fast**.

After all, it is hard to make something 'Fit For Future' if we have no idea what that future might look like.

For example, who would have envisaged a year ago us having to our first plenary session online like this?

That is why we have committed to **making better use of strategic foresight**; equipping ourselves with the means to tackle whatever challenges may arise in future, while keeping a political eye on any warning signs on the horizon.

This platform has an important role to play in this work.

As Vice-President in charge of foresight, I often talk about what kind of future Europe we want to build. That not only means **working on our weaknesses**, but also **maintaining and improving our strengths**.

Our law-making most definitely falls into the latter category. The EU is a **regulatory superpower**; our CE trademark represents quality products around the world. I want this to stay that way, which means **keeping our legislation modern and state-of-the-art**.

So while your work in the platform will focus on existing legislation, I would ask you to **always keep the future in mind**.

We can start by building on the experience gained from Fit For Future's predecessor, the **REFIT platform**, which provided much valuable output.

Where it fell slightly short, however, was in a **lack of close alignment with the Commission's policy agenda**.

So while I was personally – like many stakeholders – very pleased with the work and results of REFIT, we need to avoid the situation where **feedback arrives at the wrong time**. That means it is vital that **Fit For Future's annual work programme is closely aligned** with that of the Commission.

It is also key that members work together to produce evidence-based opinions.

To that end, I propose we set up **working groups** to look in more detail at items where we might have the most impact. Each group would work on **specific items from the Platform's annual working programme**, perhaps including policy initiatives in that year's Commission Work Programme.

As one policy area, I would want to propose **digitalisation**. This is a headline priority for the von der Leyen Commission because there can be no doubt that the world's future is digital. But it can also provide us with an essential path towards reducing the complexity of EU legislation. For example, there is **significant potential for burden reduction** if we can help businesses take up digital solutions and accelerate the modernisation of the public sector.

A second potential policy area is around issues relating to **efficient labelling, authorisation and permitting procedures**. This too is crucial for the future, in areas like agriculture, health or state aid. Simpler procedures are especially important when it comes to **investing in our future infrastructure**. Planning and permitting takes too long. The platform's evidence could help the Commission to reduce burdens by **identifying possible bottlenecks and suggesting solutions**, making full use of the vast knowledge and experience of its members.

Third, it would be important to look at **reporting obligations necessary to assess the performance of EU legislation**. These obligations can weigh heavily on businesses, especially SMEs.

But the application of **the 'once only' principle**, for example in the field of statistics, can significantly reduce burdens, while allowing for good reporting. For example, there are several areas identified by the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and 'Doing less more efficiently' where simplification of reporting obligations could be achieved.

Finally, the working groups should work on the **simplification of EU legislation**. Different European laws can sometimes overlap in certain areas, creating coherence and consistency issues for people and businesses alike. Multiple layers of legislation may also make it difficult for businesses, in particular SMEs, to have a complete overview of their obligations under different pieces of legislation.

I believe these four policy areas would help us **focus our efforts where they can have the most added benefit**, whilst ensuring they are fully in alignment with what the Commission as a whole is doing as we look to recover from this crisis.

Thank you. I will be listening to you now.

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