

# ***ENGAGING PEOPLE FOR A SUSTAINABLE EUROPE***

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## **President's work programme and priorities for 2010-2013**

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### **- A role for civil society organisations -**

I have identified three priorities for my presidency of the EESC:

***Dialogue and participation – sustainability and growth - solidarity and development***

These, together with the section work programmes, will form the focus of the Committee's work.

Staffan Nilsson

**Europe:**

*In Greek mythology, Europa was a Phoenician princess. Homer describes Europa as a mythological queen of Crete. According to the saga, there was once a beautiful young girl who was abducted by Zeus disguised as a bull; he carried her out across the sea and around the continent, which thus received the name Europe.*

For centuries, Europe has been a site of perpetual strife, with a hotch-potch of ethnic groups waging war against each other. The quest for power, dominion and empire has resulted in shifting borders, laying waste and subjugation. Only a short time has elapsed, in historical terms, between the Europe of last century's two world wars and the Europe of sustained mutual cooperation, the Europe that we call the European Union and which works for a future of peace in Europe.

- *We must hold on to a vision of a peaceful and prosperous Europe.*

**European Union**

Since the 1950s, European integration has been pursued with great success. After centuries of discord, wars and constantly shifting frontiers and population movements, the European project has made it possible to establish peace, security, prosperity and solidarity, though much still remains to be done.

The initiative of creating a single internal market followed by a single currency has been an unparalleled undertaking. Two enlargements, to absorb a total of twelve new members, have taken place in the past seven years. After several years marked by both progress and setbacks, the Union has agreed on a new treaty in which civil society's role is consolidated and which provides for a permanent Council president and a high representative for foreign affairs and security.

**The challenges facing Europe**

The world has gone through a severe financial crisis in the past few years. Confidence in the incipient recovery is still weak and there are persistent warning signals of recession, a continuing slowdown and an aborted recovery. Unemployment has reached unprecedented levels, even though jobless rates vary widely between countries and regions. Youth unemployment in particular is painfully high. Poverty also continues to be an all too serious problem in Europe. The focus has switched from the catastrophic problems in the financial sector to the position of public finances in the Member States. Large government deficits and therefore public debt have created enormous tension as a result of spending cuts, reduced wages and other measures taken to address the crisis in many Member States.

Political commitment to sustainable development and tackling climate change has waned. Long-term development has had to give way to a more short-sighted policy. The international community is not paying sufficient attention to and adequately addressing global equality issues, democratic development, and the right to food and clean water. Interest in the Millennium Development Goals for reducing global poverty is flagging. Years of negotiations in the WTO have failed to produce a new multilateral trade agreement.

### **A strong social Europe**

Under my presidency, the Committee will continue efforts to reinforce and consolidate the social dimension of the EU, efforts that will improve employment conditions and promote social integration. We will go on fighting the poverty and exclusion that are afflicting already vulnerable groups. New challenges are arising here as a result of the adjustments needed to create a low-carbon society, but new knowledge and skills will also be needed.

### **A civil society**

The new treaty provides for civil society involvement in the EU's work, albeit there are clear indications that people in Europe are far from feeling a real commitment to European cooperation. The 27 Member States must still find solutions and reach decisions jointly in the Council, and there is a risk that the final outcome will be determined purely on the basis of national advantage or disadvantage. European affairs are most often notable by their absence from national policies and election campaigns. Political leadership that still sees European integration as a policy objective is needed at national and EU level.

*We need* a civil society that can explicitly defend the values of the Union, and build support for and take part in the collective construction of Europe.

*We need* a vision and commitment from civil society organisations that will raise issues and push for them to be included on the political agenda.

*We need* people in organisations who are willing to contribute their skills, expertise, commitment and interest.

*We therefore need* the EESC, the only formal EU body representing organisations of employers, employees and other civil society stakeholders that gives them the opportunity, anchored in the treaty, to take part in and influence the internal workings of the Union.

## DIALOGUE and PARTICIPATION

*Dialogue is the art of talking, with rather than at people, but above all it is the art of listening.*

### A new treaty

<p>Treaty on European Union          Title II          Provisions on democratic principles          Article 11</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action.</li> <li>2. The institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society.</li> <li>3. The European Commission shall carry out broad consultations with parties concerned in order to ensure that the Union's actions are coherent and transparent.</li> <li>4. Not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States may take the initiative of inviting the European Commission, within the framework of its powers, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Treaties.</li> </ol> <p>The procedures and conditions required for such a citizens' initiative shall be determined in accordance with the first paragraph of Article 24 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.</p>
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The Lisbon Treaty has given the EESC new opportunities and broadened competences. For the first time the institutions are obliged to give civil society and representative associations the possibility to express their views and engage in open, transparent and regular dialogue. Dialogue also means listening, not just voicing one's own views. Even if there have always been opportunities for dialogue and open expression in the EESC's everyday work, the treaty also encourages it to develop its role and relations with the other institutions. Under my presidency the Committee will work actively to implement the treaty. The EESC will also continue to pursue an active communication strategy.

· *Actively implementing Article 11 of the treaty*

The EESC has set up a liaison group for contacts with representative organisations in the EU and their networks. This liaison group needs revitalising, and my presidency will make it a priority to find new approaches to this cooperation and to jointly identify issues where there is a shared interest and need to discuss and take action.

- ***Revitalising work in the liaison group, as a meeting place with European civil society organisations***

Voluntary work is an active expression of civil responsibility that strengthens European values such as solidarity and social cohesion.

Europe must set an example in matters of gender equality, intergenerational equity and integration. These are prerequisites for democracy and social cohesion. The problem of an ageing population is both a challenge and an opportunity for Europe.

- ***Active involvement in work relating to the European Year of Volunteering 2011***
- ***Active involvement in work relating to the European Year for Active Ageing 2012***

### **Diversity and culture**

The EU is still young, and it needs to grow and to see its diversity as a means of finding the right balance between different national characteristics and of establishing common rules for the good of all citizens. European civil society must allow more equity between citizens, between generations, between men and women, between different religious practices and between different cultures. This is a prerequisite for social cohesion based on universal freedom and mutual respect. Culture in all its forms is a reflection of diversity; it provides perspective, raises questions and challenges, and it can give us new ways of looking at ourselves and our environment. Europe's diversity is reflected in its cultures. For instance, music in all its forms transcends language barriers.

## **SUSTAINABILITY and GROWTH**

*Photosynthesis drives all the earth's biological processes. No artificial system has been invented that can convert carbon atoms in the atmosphere into organic material so effectively. Plant photosynthesis captures energy from sunlight. Oxygen is also released during this process, which is the most important cycle in nature. It is plant cells that signify growth in the real sense of the word.*

### **Sustainable development**

Sustainable development is a strategy broadly defined as a way of meeting everyday needs without jeopardising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It is based on environmental, economic and social sustainability. The EU's 2006 strategy for sustainable development is an umbrella strategy embracing all policy areas. With its Sustainable Development Observatory acting as coordinator, the EESC must develop a position in preparation for the UN follow-up conference on the global strategy Rio+20 to be held in 2012. The EESC will take the initiative in trying to coordinate a number of joint positions from European organisations, to represent civil society's input.

- *Focus on the sustainable development strategy for Rio+20*
- *Bringing together European organisations and networks to secure joint input into Rio+20*
- *Seeking shared positions and joint statements with the EESC's current international contacts*

### **A smart Europe 2020 strategy**

The European Commission has asked the EESC to play an active role in the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, which is also a strategy for achieving economic recovery and reducing unemployment. The Committee will work on ensuring achievement of the five overarching objectives laid down by the European Council in June 2010. Civil society organisations will have the opportunity to propose new and innovative methods, and to seek a common understanding on matters such as social and economic cohesion, sustainable development, innovation, research, energy efficiency, the potential of SMEs, and the internal market in the new globalised world.

In order to strengthen its involvement in the reform process, the EESC has turned its Lisbon Strategy Observatory into the "Europe 2020 Steering Group", which will continue the successful work carried out by the Observatory. The steering group will help to coordinate section work

relating to Europe 2020 and also enhance cooperation with national economic and social councils and similar organisations in the Member States. This will support progress under the strategy and serve as a platform for exchange of good practice, benchmarking and networks between all players.

- *Strong focus in the Europe 2020 Steering Group on cooperation with national economic and social councils and similar organisations*

### **Green business and green entrepreneurship**

Employment and green economic growth are based on entrepreneurship. Incentives and regulatory simplification are needed to make people more willing to start and run businesses. The EU has not yet managed to agree on common rules for a European patent, or for businesses, associations and mutuals. The report drawn up by former Commissioner Mario Monti at the request of the European Commission shows that the internal market is still far from complete in many respects. Businesses must be much more geared to sustainability and social responsibility. And the EU must develop and implement its programme for small and medium-sized businesses.

- *The Small Business Act must be made into a legally binding instrument*
- *Focus on legal simplification, especially for small and medium-sized businesses*

### **Social economy**

It is important in a market economy context to also bear in mind the range of different enterprise forms. There are types of company in the social economy - e.g. cooperatives, mutuals and associations - that offer more sustainable business models than traditional listed companies.

There is also a type of ethical business that is designed to further social inclusion but can also involve other perspectives. Such businesses can also provide a counterbalance to the strictly market model, with a view to realising social objectives. The EESC's study on the social economy in the Member States gives a good overview of such types of business.

- *Spotlighting different business types in the social economy*
- *Spotlighting the International Year of Cooperatives 2012*

### **2014-2020 financial perspective**

The financial crisis and its aftermath have shown that the economies of the EU Member States are highly interdependent. Solutions to shared problems must therefore also be largely joint solutions.

In addition, targeted measures are needed in many countries to reduce national debt in a socially acceptable way.

Europe faces big challenges that can also be used as a basis for growth that takes us out of the crisis. By investing for example in innovation, new technologies (especially in the environmental and energy sectors) and infrastructure, and with clever tax incentives, the EU will be able to achieve sustainable development in the long term. This could also make the EU very competitive internationally.

Discussion of the upcoming financial perspective will take up a lot of time and energy, both for the Member States and for civil society, including the social partners. Under my presidency, we will make a constructive contribution to the discussion of the budget for the next financial period, a budget that could help provide responses to all the challenges facing the EU.

### **The Common Agricultural Policy to 2014**

The natural resources needed for agriculture, forestry and fishing must be used but not exhausted. The common agricultural policy is an important element of EU cooperation. During my presidency, the prerequisites on the basis of which the policy is to be developed before and during the next financial perspective will be discussed and determined. The Common Agricultural Policy must continue to be based on the principles of a common market, joint financing and a joint support system. The CAP must be geared to improving the EU's food safety and ensuring that the market provides a stable income for farmers. Efforts must continue to increase transparency in the food chain in relation to prices and contracts. The coupling of subsidies with past production should be dropped so as to harmonise support across the whole EU.

The value of Europe's rural economy must be maintained and the potential for sustainable growth harnessed. More attention should therefore be paid to the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy, with a view to using rural development resources both to strengthen the rural economy and to address environmental and climate challenges.

Agricultural production in the EU must also be seen in the light of global food supply requirements.

- *Conference on the future Common Agricultural Policy: "Winners and losers from CAP reform"*

### **Consumer policy**

All policy areas must have a sustainability and growth dimension. Strong consumer organisations can play an important role in steering all types of consumption, both private and public, so that goods and services become safer and more environment friendly. Their impact can be particularly

effective and prompt since consumer response feeds directly into production. Consumer rights are an important aspect of a healthy market economy, and this is a subject that has long been of interest to the EESC and where its efforts have been successful.

Under my presidency, the Committee will continue to hold European consumer days with the Commission and the presidency-in-office of the Council. This is an effective way of drawing attention to consumer rights.

- *Holding of European consumer days every year*

## **SOLIDARITY and DEVELOPMENT**

*For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me...*

### **The EESC and the wider world**

Europe is like a tree that is acquiring new branches, but it is also connected to the rest of the world. Through a dynamic internal process, the EU has at the same time also grown to include 27 Member States. The EESC is involved in different types of cooperation with civil society organisations in countries and regions outside the European Union, including the Euromed partners, China, India and Brazil. The Committee is also tasked with contributing to the accession of candidate countries such as Turkey and countries in the Balkans, through strengthening their partnership with the EU.

- *The EESC will continue to be actively involved in relations with the rest of the world and with civil society organisations*

### **Aid and development**

Through their aid and development efforts, the EU and its Member States play a key role globally in combating poverty and hunger. The EESC must be involved in analysing EU policy areas and in efforts to improve coherence between these and development policy. The effectiveness of development aid must be improved. The EESC will work to ensure that resources are also available for small operators in this sphere. There is a need to support civil society organisations and the social partners by providing better access to funding, and financial rules must also be simplified.

Trade plays a key role in global development and in the European Union's own economic development. A multilateral agreement within the WTO framework must take precedence over bilateral trade agreements. EU trade policy must be adjusted so as to also promote development in multilateral, bilateral and regional contexts.

### **Combating poverty and hunger**

The food crisis is hitting harder as the financial crisis compounds existing problems. The FAO estimates that the number of undernourished people in the world has risen to over one billion and that the chances of achieving the goal of halving the number of people living in hunger by 2015 are receding still further.

The international community should now keep its pledges so that the goal is reached of halving the number of hungry people in the world by 2015.

In spring 2011, the EESC plans to hold a conference on global food safety with the FAO. The aim is to highlight the measures that organisations like the World Bank have emphasised, such as investment in agriculture and rural development in developing countries and more regional and global trade liberalisation. The EESC will endeavour to set up working relations and conclude a memorandum of understanding with the FAO, following the example of EESC-ILO cooperation.

- *Conference on global food security*
- *Establish relations with the FAO*

### **Human rights**

Security and justice policies must safeguard the values of freedom. These policies should take protection of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights as their starting point. EU policy and legislation on immigration and borders must give due respect to human rights and place the freedom and security of all centre stage.

## **THE EESC AND OUR WAY OF WORKING**

Openness, cooperation and credibility will be the hallmarks of my presidency. I intend to work closely with the vice-presidents, the presidents of the three groups and the section and CCMI presidents to ensure that the EESC continues to be a legitimate, credible and effective consultative body representing civil society.

Whatever we include in the work programme for the next two-and-a-half-year term, we know that the circumstances around us cannot always be foreseen. It is therefore important for the EESC to be able to take stock more quickly and be prepared to adjust its priorities and be flexible in its internal processes and decision-making.

For a long time the EESC has been taking various steps to streamline its work. A number of measures have also been taken to ensure more systematic follow-up to the Committee's opinions, but there is room for improvement. The EESC Bureau must receive regular, comprehensive reports from the sections with follow-up of their work.

The EESC must be consulted by the Council and the Commission, and under the new treaty also by the European Parliament. We must find ways of continuing to set priorities in our work and to improve quality, but also to produce opinions more rapidly in certain situations. It must also work out time frames for its work and fix these in consultation with the European Parliament and the

Council. If the Committee wishes to enhance its potential to influence Parliament, it must have its positions ready before the first reading in the EP committee. We must also look into possibilities for concluding a cooperation agreement similar to that between the EESC and the European Commission.

During my presidency, the EESC will continue examining the options for drawing up a reliable and fair system for reimbursing members' travel and other expenses.

The EESC must have a modern and effective administrative structure, with properly functioning budgetary arrangements, that gives members the best possible support in achieving their political goals and that ensures the Committee can meet its institutional remit and cooperate with other institutions. Cooperation between members and staff must be good.

- *Prioritising, quality and a more effective procedure for adopting opinions*
  - *Identifying ways of streamlining EESC internal procedures*
  - *Seeking cooperative arrangements with the European Parliament*
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