Staffan Nilsson's comment

*It takes two to tango*

It's a general truth that it takes two to tango. It is high time to think the same about the partnership principle in cohesion policy. The principle of genuine and flexible partnership with local authorities on one side, and social partners and other civil society organisations on the other side, when using cohesion policy funds is a commitment shared by the EESC and the Committee of the Regions. Why are the other institutions ignoring the fact that solo tangos are just not on....

This week, Mercedes Bresso, president of the Committee of the Regions, came to speak to EESC members at our plenary session. She spoke about the crisis, the role of the regions, and the current EU challenges, and thus naturally also touched on future cohesion policy from 2014 to 2020. The challenges are huge. Together with the Committee of the Regions, we are calling for a simplified cohesion policy, tailored to the particular circumstances of the different EU regions.

I was surprised that at the opening session of the fifth Cohesion Forum last month, in the presence of President Barroso, Commissioners Hahn and Andor, and the representatives of the EU presidency troika, no-one mentioned the partnership principle and its potential impact on the implementation of cohesion policy. When I spoke at one of the forum's workshops, participants representing regions, public administrations in the Member States, and other associations involved in cohesion policy could not but support my point. Commissioner Andor did likewise. *To secure a flexible and genuine partnership, all it would take would be to change Article 11 of the current regulation relating to cohesion policy funds.*

Not least, we are urging that future cohesion funds be tied closely to the Europe 2020 strategy. For me, this is one of the main conditions for the success of the EU strategy for smart growth. As we pursue the road to recovery, we must ensure that *growth is not just smart and sustainable; it must be inclusive too.* The EU's cohesion policy is, in the end, the most tangible achievement of the EU watchword: solidarity!

We have not invented the partnership principle overnight. What the fifth cohesion report clearly shows, and what we ourselves have found, is that, where the partnership principle permeates the programming and implementation of projects and programmes, it leads to more efficient use of European cohesion funds, and to the active participation of citizens and organised civil society. This can only nurture a *genuine sense of participatory democracy and citizen involvement in Europe.* *From responsibility comes a true sense of commitment.*

We will soon be publishing our work on cohesion policy and partnership: innovative ideas, good practice and benchmarking.

In the end, this is not about a prosperous European Union protecting the weakest; this is about building a stronger Europe together.