



rEUnaissance: Dare a sustainable Europe

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Luca Jahier, EESC President
Speaker



<< Il mondo non finirà per l'assenza di meraviglie,
Ma di meraviglia>>
G.K. Chesterton

<< Il giorno in cui il potere dell'amore supererà l'amore del potere,
Il mondo potrà scoprire la pace>>

Mahatma Gandhi

Mesdames et Messieurs.
Chers invitées, Chers collègues,

Permettez-moi tout d'abord de vous remercier pour la confiance que vous m'accordez en tant que votre 32ème Président du CESE.

C'est pour moi un grand honneur que j'assume avec trépidation, humilité mais aussi détermination et passion.

Merci aux membres de mon Groupe des Intérêts divers qui m'ont désigné comme leur candidat. Ce fut un privilège d'être votre Président durant 7 ans et demi et d'expérimenter avec vous les énormes potentialités que le dialogue actif des différentes composantes de la société civile organisée peut développer dans l'espace européen.

Et merci aussi aux Groupes des Employeurs et des Travailleurs pour votre appui.

Je veux souligner ici qu'avec l'élection des deux Vice-présidentes, des Présidents des Sections et de l'ensemble des membres du Bureau notre Comité devient aujourd'hui un exemple de la plus grande égalité hommes/femmes.

Je tiens à remercier mon prédécesseur, Georges Dassis, pour son dévouement et pour les résultats que nous avons acquis durant sa présidence sur des grands sujets tels que la migration, le pilier social et l'avenir de l'Europe.

Un travail qu'on doit poursuivre.

Je sais pouvoir aussi compter sur notre administration, pour livrer des résultats importants dans les deux années et demie à venir.

Chers collègues, avec l'aide de chacun d'entre vous, je vais être le Président de tous et pour tous, dans les lignes des priorités communes et d'une coopération renforcée, de plus en plus projectée vers l'extérieur du CESE.

Distinguished guests
Dear friends and colleagues,

I take up the challenge of this Presidency with a spirit of service, with passion and hope!
For did not the philosopher Aristotle declare that *'Hope is a waking dream?'*
So, I invite all of you to join me for a *strong civic engagement for our sustainable European future.*
I invite you to *dream* with me of a re-energised Europe and to work together for a second European Renaissance!

Pope Francis asked at the conferral of the Charlemagne prize in 2016: *"What has happened to you, the Europe of humanism, the champion of human rights, democracy and freedom?"*

I would not presume to provide an exhaustive answer during the next two and a half years.

But I will certainly work with all of you to improve the EESC's role in re-instilling unity, dynamism and a *new direction* in the EU.

Fighting against the polarisation of our societies and against increasing nationalistic and populist trends. A shrinking civic space, which is threatening our democracy, has no place in the Europe of tomorrow!

The European Union should be proud of its extraordinary achievement of the past 60 years, during which we preserved peace and prosperity.

Let us NOT forget that most Member States are currently living through the longest period of *uninterrupted economic growth*. Last year, consensus was reached on *key joint initiatives* such as the European Pillar of Social Rights and the EU Defence Cooperation Pact.

This is not to say that we should be complacent.

There is a lot of uncertainty on the horizon, both within the EU and externally.

It would be foolhardy and deeply unfair not to listen to and react constructively to the warning signals, such as the continuously high levels of poverty touching 24% of Europeans; the widening inequalities *between and inside* EU Member States; the low levels of trust in democratic institutions; the unresolved migration crisis that could disrupt European unity; the still incomplete and fragile economic and monetary union.

The EU is unarguably going through *five fundamental transformations*:

- Firstly, an *economic transformation* The fourth industrial revolution, accompanied by significant ethical questions, educational, social and economic challenges and opportunities;
- Secondly, an *energy and ecological transformation*, towards a circular and low carbon economy which respects the finite resources of our planet and gives a key role to citizens and local communities.
- Thirdly, a deep *social transformation*, with a changing labour market and welfare state, a greater role for new actors and social innovation and the crucial need to strengthen the European social model for all generations;
- Fourthly, a *democratic and participatory transformation*. Shrinking civic space, bias introduced by misinformation, new forms of illiberalism and growing challenges to EU values are clear threats to our democracies.
- Lastly, a *geopolitical transition in international relations*, that can be summarized in the swift change from cooperative competition to disruptive confrontation, from trade to security, from growing tensions to real wars at EU borders.

WE have to become the shapers of those transformations.

We need to engage and forge a *new positive narrative for Europe* and revive *civic engagement for a sustainable European future*.

As the philosopher Immanuel Kant said in the 18th century, we must "Dare to understand".

That is true particularly in today's world of extreme emotive reactions. We need to understand, guided by reason, humanism, science and progress. Not guided by prejudice, fears, distrust or hate.

This rationality does not negate emotions.

Hope, love, frustration, fear, joy - these emotions bind us together.

Emotions touch upon the very essence of what it means to be 'alive'.

Ignoring emotions means ignoring our humanity, ignoring our need to connect and ...dream.

I am more and more convinced that Europe needs today a new 'Renaissance'.

The Renaissance was a powerful and vast humanistic revolution, which re-established the real dimension of culture in its concrete relation with science, the art of government and the organisation of economic and social life and founded the modern transformation of Europe.

"Homo faber ipsius fortunae",

Man is the artisan of his fortune. Today, we need a similar process.

So, I stand before you, with four priorities for the next two and a half years.

Four priorities for a unifying agenda for the future.

For giving this *rEUnaissance* a real chance.

First, a European Union of sustainable development. Sustainable development can provide necessary responses to all five transformations I mentioned earlier.

It is imperative that the EU makes the 2030 Agenda the horizontal European priority.

Now is the time to rethink our growth models and to balance economic prosperity with environmental sustainability, promoting investment, innovation, competitiveness, social inclusion and cohesion, good employment and democratic participation.

The EU must maintain its momentum, embrace change.

One thing is certain: this transformation can only be achieved through bottom up initiatives by local and regional authorities, with civil society and citizens playing a key role.

Business has a pivotal role to play in this agenda for change. But without the strong involvement of our trade

unions and all other civil society organisations, we will be unable to tackle inequalities and deliver what I consider the new *Social and Economic Contract for the 21st Century!*

My second priority is the promotion of Peace.

We should not take peace for granted.

In a few months we will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War.

Reconciliation and peace are the *greatest* achievements of the European Union. By interlinking our economies and interests, by perfecting the art of compromise, we have created the most reliable system for long-term peace in the world.

But let us not forget ... as Herman Van Rompuy highlighted in 2014 at Ypres: "*War has become inconceivable. Yet 'inconceivable' does not mean 'impossible'...*".

The threat of global conflicts is flaring up in the light of recent shifts in geopolitics.

For the very first time since its creation, the EU is challenged by its first ever divorce (Brexit) and by growing tensions in its neighbourhood—the Balkans, Southern Mediterranean and Eastern borders.

At home, some fail to uphold fundamental rights, values of freedom, solidarity, democracy and rule of law. We are shattered by the rising antisemitism, racism, terrorism and protectionism.

Worryingly, the world and Europe are not prepared. And without Peace there is no growth, no decent jobs and no cohesion.

Without peace there is no sustainable Europe.

My third priority is that of strengthening the role of Culture within the European political discourse.

Culture has an *enormous untapped potential* to become a unifying and mobilising force for Europe. We share a common European heritage, composed of shared history and values, which allows us to sense our belonging to a joint space in constant evolution and openness to diversity

And also the social economy market, the European social model, subsidiarity and sustainability are today key parts of this heritage.

We have many successful cultural initiatives at the European level – the current European Year of Cultural Heritage and the 'EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations' to name just two. But it is not enough. Culture can help us overcome the current systemic, political and identity crisis in Europe and dare us to dream, to create new perspectives.

It can play a crucial role in strengthening social and territorial cohesion, in creating growth and jobs, in engaging in dialogue and in re-building trust.

Culture can bring Hope, New Narratives and a second Renaissance to Europe!

Last but not least, my final priority will be to give our *youth the space and voice that they deserve* – they must become the very first *agents of change*.

I will work with all of you to find a way to re-engage youth in the democratic system. It is unacceptable to find in most of our countries millennials that are disillusioned and isolated. In Britain and Poland less than half of under25-year olds voted in their countries' most recent general elections. In Italy an increasing majority of youth has voted in recent elections, but most of them against the current establishment.

This will further challenge our institutions.

As the European Commission's First Vice-President Frans Timmermans asked our plenary last year: "*Why can we not make these young people dream?*"

We cannot build the sustainable Europe of tomorrow without our youth!

Lastly, my dear colleagues ...

a few words on the role of the EESC in this positive change.

We already have a unifying European agenda. Not only by virtue of Article 2 of the TEU on a 'Union of Common Values'. More recently also with the Bratislava Declaration (September 2016) and the Rome Declaration of March last year.

Let us recall that the Rome Declaration states that "*We have built a unique Union with common institutions and strong values, a community of peace, freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, a major economic power with unparalleled levels of social protection and welfare*".

At the level of the Committee, we have transposed these horizontal ideas into concrete political documents, such as the 2017 'Resolution on the Future of Europe and Beyond' and the 'EESC Political Priorities' for 2018. We can count on the strong commitment of the 3 Groups, the concrete work of our sections and other internal bodies and also of the 3 new ones we have just created for dealing with key priorities: rule of law and fundamental rights, European semester and artificial intelligence.

With these instruments we have to face the upcoming strategic rendezvous: the negotiations on the EU budget after 2020, the outcome of the Brexit negotiations, the European elections, the EU Summit in Sibiu on the future of Europe and our participation in President Macron's Citizen Consultations. And of course, our contribution to the political and legislative priorities of the next European Commission, focusing also on a renewed EU Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) accompanied by a specific plan for boosting investments in social infrastructures.

We need to enhance our cooperation with other EU institutions and strengthen our "going local" initiative, for a more in-depth dialogue with our constituencies and civil society at large in all EU countries.

Our Committee faces both *opportunities* and *responsibilities*.

We have the opportunity to give a new impulse to European civil society engagement. We will be able to fulfil our responsibilities if we cooperate and stand strong and united: Groups, Sections and the Administration together.

We must improve our avenues of communication and reinforce '*competition*' in the original sense of the word - *petere cum* - to be more focused and deliver strategic actions, always adapting our methods and internal instruments accordingly.

Ladies and gentlemen: Albert Einstein once said that "*Logic will get you from A to B, imagination will take you everywhere. Only imagination has the power to make that paradigm 'leap' necessary to design the future*".

For the Europe of tomorrow, we must have the courage; we must dare to *imagine* a new world.

We must have the *ambition* to put opportunities and goals before problems.

We must have the *creativity* and *determination* to transform a vision into a positive European narrative. A profoundly human narrative. The gentle touch, the human ecology, the forgotten word of the French revolution: *fraternity*.

There is no time to waste, as so many defeats in history can be summarised in two words: *too late*.

Cari colleghi e amici,

Ciascuno di noi ha dei figli. Oppure dei nipoti, O degli amici e parenti che hanno figli e nipoti.

Ecco la nostra ecologia umana, il pensare che tutto quello che facciamo lo facciamo per i nostri figli, perché abbiano una vita buona, pacifica, sicura, piena di opportunità.

I figli ci costringono a pensare al futuro, ci spingono a scegliere ciò che conta e ciò che dura.

E così inconsapevolmente applichiamo i tre principi fissati dal grande architetto romano Vitruvio.

Egli considerava che l'architettura non fosse solo geometria, ma soprattutto il mezzo per dare forma alle relazioni umane, sia private che pubbliche. E per questo diceva che ogni opera deve essere utile e durevole. E poi deve essere bella, capace di innalzare gli spiriti e soddisfare la vista.

Dalla turbolenza delle sfide che abbiamo evocato, ci salva dunque la sete di vero, di bello e di bene che anima ogni impresa umana degna di questo nome.

Lasciamo, dunque che questo desiderio erompa e dilaghi, facendosi cultura di un nuovo progresso, forgiando così un nuovo Rinascimento europeo, con al centro gli uomini e le donne del fare.

Noi qui rappresentiamo le mille declinazioni di questa Europa del fare.

Facciamo che questa forza si mobiliti per davvero e diventiamo - insieme - gli architetti di questa grande opera.

Thank you.