



An award on our past work, to give the EESC more strength to build the future EU

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Speaker

Aquí Europa Vocento Award - Acceptance Speech [Check against delivery]

Distinguidos invitados,
Damas y caballeros,

Gracias por conceder el premio Aquí Europa-Vocento al Comité Económico y Social Europeo por su contribución a la integración europea.

Como presidente de esta institución, es para mí un honor aceptar este galardón.

In the year in which the EESC celebrates its sixtieth anniversary, this award encourages us even more to continue our work of making the voices and interests of civil society heard in decision-making at European Union level.

For the EESC represents the very spirit of our European democracies. It is a house of debate, consultation and compromise. It is an intermediary force, carrying Europe back into local and national environments and representing their needs and hopes.

As numerous decision-makers are succumbing to the mirage of a so-called digital participatory democracy, blindly following the erroneous belief that clicks and likes, the shift to digital in all domains constitutes a form of future post-modern democracy.

We remain convinced however, that true civil dialogue needs this House of Civil Society. A structure which certainly also draws upon new technologies, but where listening, debate and the patient search for converging opinions remains the constructive way of making our democracy thrive.

Our members volunteer every day, on top of their duties as farmers, unionists, business representatives, leaders of Civil Society Organisations, because they believe in a United Europe.

With more than 2000 meetings annually, many of them in Member States or outside the EU, feeding into an average of 200 opinions per year, we contribute to strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the EU.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When the EESC was founded, it was driven by a generation, which had seen how fascist governments had suppressed the independent voices of civil society. Today again, the percentage of populist votes is constantly rising.

There are countries in Europe that are infringing on the rights of civil society to meet and organise themselves politically.

Therefore, we must increase our efforts to preserve and secure our main achievements in terms of rights, values, liberties, democracy and the rule of law.

The fact of being worthy of such a prestigious prize confirms that we are working in the right direction and encourages us to continue confronting the challenges facing European integration.

We must reinforce our efforts to listen to the ideas and concerns of the citizens. We must make sure that these voices represent the voices of all citizens, men and women, people with minority backgrounds, people of different educational and socio-economic backgrounds, city- and rural inhabitants- old and young.

We must follow up on our promises.

For 'European integration' is not a status quo, it is a constantly evolving, passionate process which we at the EESC are contributing to - with the citizens of Europe.

I often refer to the Renaissance, a period which established man as an active actor of his own destiny, and created invigorating synergies between governance, science, arts and economy. Let us drive a second

European Renaissance, a rEUnaissance, together.

I thank you again, in the name of the EESC, its members and staff, for this prize. Muchas gracias.