



President Oliver Röpke Speech on “Beyond the poly-crisis: Towards a global pact for a better future for people and planet”

[check against delivery]

- Distinguished Under-Secretary-General, dear Commissioner, dear Minister, Distinguished speakers, Ladies and Gentlemen,
- Thank you for inviting the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) to this event, which marks a very important step towards the preparation of the UN Summit for the Future.
- As many of you know, the EESC serves as a tripartite advisory body to the European institutions, representing employers, workers, and civil society organizations, including NGOs, consumers, and farmers' groups, across the 27 Member States.
- Let me recall that last year was an important year for the UN Agenda 2030:
 - For the international community, with the mid-term review and the opportunity to reinvigorate the Agenda at the SDG Summit in September in New York;
 - And for the European Union, with the presentation of the **first EU Voluntary Review on SDG implementation** at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in

July. On that occasion, the EESC prepared and presented the **civil society's contribution to the EU VR** highlighting the importance of the Agenda to promote well-being and as a driver of change. On that occasion, we have worked well as a "Team Europe" with Commissioner Urpilainen and we also had the opportunity to meet Under Secretary General Guy Ryder at the UN.

- **As much as 2023 was a pivotal year for the 2030 Agenda, 2024 gives us a new opportunity to reinvigorate the Agenda.** In a moment of feeble multilateralism, we need to keep reminding ourselves of the value of this Agenda as the compass and shared vision of the future we want.
- In my speech today, I would like to convey two key messages while expressing two deep concerns that I can summarize as follows:
 - **The UN "Summit of the Future" needs to make a difference**
 - **The meaningful involvement of civil society is critical to gather support and accelerate the implementation of the Agenda 2030**
- Allow me to develop these two ideas:
- **Summits need to make a difference and to deliver.** We are fully aware that in current times of complex geopolitics and tensions, the mere grouping of Parties together is of value for multilateralism and the UN system in itself. But let's also be frank. More needs to be done to address the challenges we are facing. We need these Summits (such as the SDG Summit of last year and the Summit of the Future this year) to make a difference and deliver – otherwise the credibility of these international processes will be undermined.
- In a moment of uncertainty and fear about how the future will look, extreme populism is hijacking the meaning and purpose of the Agenda 2030, often spreading misinformation. We see it in several countries, in Europe and in other parts of the world. **We need to counteract and stop this misleading narrative and highlight that the Agenda can not only give hope for a better future, but also lay the foundations and set concrete steps for achieving progress for the wellbeing of people and planet, leaving no one behind.** Let's use the preparations for the Summit also to make a strong case for this.



- In the EU, we know that a third of the SDG targets will not be achieved by the EU by 2030, with stagnation and reversal in progress in many European countries on **social targets**, with growing issues around access to and quality of services for all, as well as poverty and material deprivation. For the EESC, it is crystal clear **we need decisive action to avoid environmental and social "tipping points"** and to maintain the promise of achieving the SDGs, including through social policies ensuring poverty eradication, quality jobs and education for all.
- Globally, the international financial architecture is failing to channel global savings to SDG investments at the needed pace and scale, which leads to a reversal in SDG progress in many parts of the world, especially in the poorest and most vulnerable countries. **We need citizens worldwide to gain hope in the SDGs and in the capacity of Governments and the UN system to deliver.**
- As EESC, we acknowledge the importance and value of initiatives, such as the special meeting of the Economic and Social Council on ['The future of work: towards a productive, inclusive and sustainable global society'](#) in Chile this January. However, we need to see that that this work is truly onboarded into the 2024 Summit of the Future and potentially into the World Social Summit - if convened - in 2025.
- **This a critical year for democracy. More than half of the world will vote.** In June, EU citizens will not only elect the new European Parliament and chart the way to the formation of the next European Commission, both in charge until 2029, but also lay the foundations for the future of the EU and its global role well into the next decade. It would be great if in Europe and elsewhere **elected Governments were using the Agenda 2030 as the main action plan for their political mandate.**
- Our **three EESC key demands** for the EU to shape the next mandate are straightforward:
 1. We call for **an EU comprehensive strategy for the SDGs** – covering both the internal and external dimensions. We want the EU to invest in SDG credibility and lead international efforts to accelerate SDG implementation.
 2. **We must go beyond an SDG by SDG approach** and ensure policy coherence. Governments and institutions, as well as financial institutions, need to speak



the same language and align messages in the different international and regional fora.

3. We ask for structured and meaningful engagement of civil society

- This is my second message and concern that I want to convey to you. **Meaningful and structured involvement of civil society is critical to broadening support and credibility on the Agenda and accelerating implementation.**
- More than 30 years ago, in 1992, **Rio+20 recognised that sustainable development requires the meaningful involvement and active participation of all Major Groups representing civil society at the UN.** It is important to remember that paragraph 43 of the outcome document recognised that *"broad public participation and access to information and judicial and administrative proceedings are essential to the promotion of sustainable development."*
- However, we see with great concern how this is being too often neglected, and we have difficulties understanding why the same notion of Major Groups and the number of Major Groups are being challenged or questioned now and then. At the High-Level Political Forum, the space of Major Groups is insufficient - as we have heard several times during our bilateral meetings in New York - but at least it is being granted.
- **We are very much alarmed by the shrinking space for civil society engagement in UN Fora and in the various countries, in terms of participation and representation.**
- We see numerous events and meetings proposed for civil society on the Summit of the Future. Still, we perceive a general frustration that these events are simply conversations amongst civil society and not truly a debate with the Parties. Without clarity on how these events or the written consultations will feed into the intergovernmental process, these events can create fatigue amongst the believers and supporters of the agenda. This worries us.
- We fully understand that it is an intergovernmental process. Still, it is hard to know why the informal consultations are closed doors and why civil society cannot sit there as observers. Here, we are convinced that **the EU has a significant role to play, both in pledging for the role of civil society in the process, and also to "walk the talk".**



- In this regard, the best example would be for the EU to make concrete steps to establish and ensure a regular and structured civil society consultation mechanism for implementing the 2030 Agenda. **The EESC stands ready to play a convening role**, as stated in many forums and as I expressed last year to the Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres when I met him during the EESC mission to the HLPF.
- We provided concrete recommendations in this context through dedicated opinions on the [EU and Agenda 2030: strengthening the implementation of the SDGs](#) and on [Strengthening Multilateralism and core international principles for a rules-based order in a rapidly changing world – The importance of Civil Society contribution to the UN system](#)
- To come to an end, looking at the [Zero-Draft for the Pact of the Future](#), the problem of the need for recognition is evident—**just one mention of civil society, just one, and no mention of Major Groups**. But let's be clear: the important for us is not the number of times civil society appears in the text. It is about democracy and how societies function and are structured.
- **The people and the planet cannot afford a lost decade. This is not the time to backtrack on the 2030 agenda. It is time to accelerate action and take everyone along on this journey.** The world needs to move in the right direction. It is not a task to be left to future generations, nor a job to be left to incoming governments. It is our task for now. It is a task for those who hold responsibility at this precise moment. The EESC is engaged with the Agenda, and we are prepared to act as a bridge between the EU institutions and civil society in the Member States. **With only six years to go until 2030, this may be our last chance.**

