



**European Economic
and Social Committee**
Civil Society Organisations' Group

Debate 'Priorities of the upcoming presidency of the European Council: presentation and exchange of views', with António Costa, President of the European Council

Speech by Civil Society Organisations' Group President Séamus Boland

EESC plenary session, 4 December 2024

Dear Mr Costa,

I would like to warmly congratulate you for your appointment as **President of the European Council** - having only formally taken over on Sunday!

I have not had the pleasure of working with you, but I do hear that you are a man **skilled in negotiating** and the **art of compromise**;

Your vast experience at **many levels of government**, is of course testimony to your qualities;

This at a time when there is quite a lot of **mistrust** between pro-European political parties;

Leaving the door open for **anti-European parties** to edge further within our societies;

So as President of the European Council, your **skills** will be **fully utilised**!

As you are fully aware, the **EU** is, once again, **facing a constellation of challenges**, whose scale and scope are immense;

Trump 2.0 is at the forefront of these challenges;

In my opinion, his return to power is **bad news** for the **EU's security, democracy and economy**;

And if there is **one word** that characterises his economic and foreign policy approach, it is **'confrontation'**;

It is imperative that the **EU maintains its unity** as much as possible;

There is a clear **mutual interest in closely collaborating** among Member States and EU Institutions.

We can also expect that Trump will **link together issues**, such as **tariffs, NATO funding** and the **war in Ukraine**;

And even if there is a ceasefire in Ukraine, the EU will have to **increase its joint defence spending and arms production;**

For with the extension of the conflict into the **Asia-Pacific region** through the involvement of North Korean soldiers, who knows what **role China** will also play?

In all scenarios, the EU will have to **invest in arms, in order to invest in peace!**

This brings me to my final point, which concerns **EU priorities;**

In recent interviews, you have commented that you see your role as bringing together the 27 Member States, "...for the *benefit of the Union and its citizens*";

I am certain that your qualities in **talking to and listening to people**, finding ways to work together, are skills that you sharpened as Mayor of Lisbon;

So please **do not forget the European citizen**, now that you are President of the European Council!

Last week we had **elections in Ireland**, my own country;

And what citizens were most concerned with, was the **cost-of-living crisis, energy poverty, affordable and qualitative housing, efficient healthcare;**

In summary, they are interested in **social justice** and a **just green transition;**

So my plea to you, Mr Costa, is to keep these **topics** on the **agenda of the European Council;**

We must take people with us – or the Radical Right will do for us!

Thank you for your attention.