



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

EU foreign policy in a new geopolitical reality, with **Iratxe García Pérez** and **Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann**, Members of the European Parliament; **Fabian Zuleeg**, Chief Executive and Chief Economist at the European Policy Centre; and **Pierre Haroche**, Associate Researcher of Defence at the Institute Jacques Delors and Senior Lecturer at the Catholic University of Lille

Speech by Civil Society Organisations' Group President Séamus Boland

EESC plenary session, 29 April 2025

Esteemed speakers, dear colleagues,

- I would like to begin my intervention by stating that I am **very proud to be European**;
- I am proud, that in this '**Age of Chaos**', volatility and confusion, which is our new reality since the beginning of this year, the EU is the only global trading block still attached to **moral norms** and **predictable rules**;
- I am proud, that we are still committed to the **UN SDGs**, to the **Paris Agreement** on Climate Change and to respecting the edicts of the **WTO**;
- And I am proud that the EU continues to be a place where there are **guaranteed rights** for what **citizens** of other continents yearn for;
- Namely: **life, liberty** and the **pursuit of happiness!**
- It is certainly not in the EU, that universities will be subjected to the witch-hunt that we see across the Atlantic!
- Regrettably, at the global level, it will take a very long time to **rebuild what has been lost** in the last few months, in terms of trust, collaboration and sustainable development;
- And although it is not the EU that is making daily headlines, nonetheless, the **world needs EU engagement**;
- The **Euro** is the second strongest currency in the world;
- And we are **the largest single most wealthy global trading block**, with a population far exceeding that of the US;
- Let us not forget, that we have entire nations clambering to join the EU;
- We have **70% of EU citizens** saying that Europe is the safest and most stable place to live;

- Crucially, every crisis that the EU has weathered, has made us **stronger**;
 - **Jointly borrowing 750 billion euros** during the Covid pandemic -unimaginable in the past!
 - And since 2021, we have **increased our collective defence spending by 30%**;
 - And Europe is a **peace project**, but peace without defence is regrettably only an illusion.
 - So, my messages today are very simple;
 - **Firstly**, to weather the turbulence of current geo-political storm, the EU should continue to **keep our values at the centre of decisions and actions**;
 - This means maintaining the **climate** and **social sustainability** as our overarching goals;
 - Defending the **European social market economy**;
 - Tackling the root causes of **poverty, inequality** and the housing crisis, whilst investing in skills, education and innovation.

 - **Secondly**, alongside our defence preparedness, the EU must urgently invest in **crisis preparedness**;
 - **Security and crisis preparedness go hand in hand**;
 - The EU Preparedness Union Strategy aims to build **enabling societies of resilience and self-organisation**;
 - Involving **local communities** and **developing a culture of preparedness**, at the same time as respecting the principle of **subsidiarity**.

 - My third and final message is that civil society organisations have a pivotal role in **preserving democracy, building social cohesion** and **trust** within our European societies;
 - Let us not forget that every Euro that governments cut from democracy-building, **costs much more in military spending**;
 - In that context, it is imperative that CSOs are effectively involved and further helped, including **financially**;

 - As the Civil Society Organisations' Group, we of course very much welcome the EC's decision to adopt an **EU Civil Society Strategy**, later this year;
 - Thank you for your attention.
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