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**EESC seminar for journalists on "Safe, Sustainable and secure European Union at the heart of the debate on the CoFoE"**

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Dear ladies and gentlemen, honourable guests, dear colleagues,

It is a real pleasure to be with you today. We, at the EESC are fully committed and actively involved in the civil society mission to the European Green Deal, and therefore the safety, sustainability and security of the EU.

What kind of Europe do you dream of? This is a question we’re asking ourselves today. A question that doesn’t have a right or wrong answer. A question where the answers differ in the east, west, south or north of the EU, a question that highlights our incredible diversity.

I believe we have plenty of reasons to be proud of the European Union and of what we’ve achieved so far. Despite inefficiencies and imperfections, European integration is a unique success story. We should be proud of it and we should dare to dream about even more.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If you ask me what is a Europe of my dreams I would answer as following: Europe that is economically prosperous, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable, Europe with well-respected rule of law.

At the EESC, we believe that the future of the European Union will not be without challenges, at all levels and these will call for all of us to work together.

We know the EU will need to be efficient and able to take decisive actions when needed. We must also maintain a good level of communication and transparency towards citizen.

The biggest challenge we currently face is ensuring a balanced recovery throughout Europe while laying down a path towards a resilient and sustainable future. The EU should bring the benefits of sustainable and inclusive growth to all European citizens through upward convergence and a strong Single Market. This requires successful green and digital transitions, which will increase Europe's resilience, competitiveness and social justice.

In this situation, if the goal is clear, the desire to achieve a resilient, green, digital, inclusive, social and competitive Europe, the route needs to go through an honest discussion about the future; not just among ourselves, but also with everyone who will listen.

In line with the green transition, Europe's recovery must incorporate climate action. Otherwise economic damage, exacerbated inequalities and loss of life due to climate-related extreme weather effects will continue.

Therefore, the Committee fully supports the European Green Deal target of climate neutrality and resilience by 2050. But let's be clear: climate change can only be successfully tackled if concrete action is taken by all relevant countries at global level. Here, I see a lot of work for Europe, but also the EESC in convincing our international partners to turn to action.

Following this, the digital transition should serve as a catalyst to increase competitiveness of Europe's businesses, furthering the skillset of Europeans to drive the twin transitions. Therefore, when it comes to investing in future technologies, the EU must develop its own vision and strategy for digital sovereignty.

Going hand in hand with strategic autonomy is the development of the European Health Union. Supporting a strong and coordinated European healthcare ecosystem is crucial to the EU's industrial strategic autonomy, technological sovereignty and better quality of life for EU citizens.

Finally, I would like to emphasise the need to protect, maintain and reinforce our democratic systems. Fundamental rights and rule of law are under pressure, outside and within the Union.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This brings me to the Conference on the future of Europe – a unique opportunity for Europe and all of us to shape the Europe we dream of.

Today, many European citizens see the EU as far away from their lives: they do not know it, speak its jargon or fully understand how it works. They also do not simply want to be the passive objective of institutional communication; they want to be actively involved.

The Conference on the future of Europe is an experiment in addressing this issue. At the European Economic and Social Committee, we believe that the Conference will only be a success if we manage to get the EU closer to its citizens and make them rediscover an emotional link with the EU.

As the house of the European civil society, one of the main priorities of the EESC for this Conference and I believe one of the keys to its success is as already mentioned- to define a new narrative for Europe, one that puts civil society back in the driving seat.

The good news is that we can not only dream about Europe but shape its future according to our dreams. The ongoing conference on the Future of Europe is an excellent opportunity for every one of us to contribute to making dreams come true.

Thank you very much for your attention.