**Speech by Christa Schweng,**

**President of the European Economic and Social Committee**

**Seminar on Opportunities and Challenges of the Green Transition – the example of Northern Sweden**

**15th Nov 2022**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Honoured guests,

Dear EESC-Members,

It is my pleasure and privilege to speak to you on behalf of the European Economic and Social Committee, the bridge between organised civil society and the EU institutions. We represent the voice of grassroots Europe, with around 90 million businesses, workers, and other NGOs representing, amongst others, farmers, environmental and human rights NGOs.

In view of the upcoming Swedish Council Presidency, I am delighted that we have come here to Sweden with our EESC Bureau to build on our good connections with Swedish colleagues and organisations. Our seminar this morning will address the opportunities and challenges of the green transition, with particular focus on the example of northern Sweden. I am looking forward to hearing more from the distinguished speakers on our agenda!

With the COP27 taking place in Egypt as we speak, the climate crisis and the urgent action required are on all our minds. The green transition is a question of survival for both Europe and the world at large. It is enshrined in the European Green Deal as one of the top policy priorities of the European Union.

Since the invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops on 24 February this year, the EU's independence from third countries' energy has become one of the most pressing issues on the agenda of the European Union. The Commission's recent REPowerEU Plan aims at making Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels as soon as possible – by diversifying the energy mix, boosting renewable energies and finding viable alternatives for an affordable and sustainable supply of energy. This is why achieving the energy transition is key in ensuring the EU’s energy independence: we need to secure an independent, sustainable energy supply while keeping energy prices affordable for everyone.

But how can we achieve this ambitious goal when the energy crisis is putting such a huge strain on EU businesses, people and communities and once the inflation continues broadening price pressures? Recent economic forecast shows inflation peak to year-end at 9.3% in the EU and is remain high at 7.0% in 2023.

Clearly, the response can only come from mobilising a wide range of policy and technological measures, well beyond the energy lever. The EESC believes that it is essential to apply the very principle of sustainable development to develop integrated and participatory approaches to foster the energy transition that business and citizens can follow.

At the beginning of this year, the European Economic and Social Committee identified the energy transition as its key political priority in order to develop a comprehensive approach across our different thematic bodies. In the last months, we have adopted seven opinions on our own initiative to address various aspects of the energy transition (geopolitics, energy poverty, infrastructure, rural areas, climate objectives, SMEs and the social economy, carbon removal technologies). All of them fed into an umbrella opinion entitled "A strategic vision on energy transition to enable the EU's strategic autonomy", that the EESC adopted in October.

It emerged clearly from the discussion that we need to adapt our energy markets, and we must intensify our diplomatic efforts, trade and international agreements to tackle climate change and the energy transition jointly.

However, to reach a true strategic autonomy, we need to go even further by producing as much as possible of our own energy, and in particular renewable energy. A huge challenge is to ensure a just transition for all. In order to make the energy transition happen in a sustainable and fair way, we need to pull together all the social and economic forces of our society. And we need to do it while thinking of the global context. We need to think of the situation within the EU but also outside as the green transition and the climate protection are international obligations.

In preparing the various energy opinions in the different Sections of the Committee, we realised how Sweden was committed and advanced on such goals. Allow me to congratulate Sweden on your consistent path towards making the green transition happen by seeing it as an opportunity rather than a risk – this is how the Swedish green model can really integrate business and sustainability. Sweden was one of the first countries in the world to pass an environmental protection act already back in 1967. More than half of your national energy supply already comes from renewables, and there are plans for Northern Sweden to become home to Markbygden, one of the world's most powerful onshore wind farm with more than 1000 wind turbines and a capacity of about 4GW. Your government has set ambitious goals for sustainability, including going fossil-free by 2045 and 100% renewable – this is 5 years ahead of the EU target.

And yet, we are all aware that there are huge challenges associated with this transition: Think about ever increasing energy demands, think about industry and technology, think about the socio-economic challenges related to skills, labour and energy poverty.

We know that civil society organizations are the key actors to help resolving these challenges. Thanks to their expertise and network on the ground, they can help devising the most efficient and fair measures, making sure that no one is left behind.

We welcome the proactive and inclusive approach of the Swedish green model, and we are delighted that Sweden is placing great emphasis on a just transition. We know that Sweden will receive €155 million in EU grants under the Just Transition Fund Programme, and that you are planning to mobilise a total investment of €311 million to ensure that this transition will not leave anyone behind in the local economy and society.

I am very much looking forward to hearing more details about the Swedish green transition, particularly in the northern regions, in the course of our seminar today. I am sure we will see the fruits of our joint efforts as we work together during the Swedish Council Presidency to make a just green transition happen.

Thank you!