



Euromed Summit (Virtual, 26 November 2020)

**OPENING SPEECH Christa Schweng, EESC president**

- Distinguished Presidents,
- Ms Nezha Bouchareb, Moroccan Minister for Regional Planning, Housing, Urbanism and City Policy,
- Mr Ahmed Réda Chami, President of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council of Morocco,
- Ms Nasser Kamel, Secretary-General of the Union for the Mediterranean,
- Dear participants,
  
- I am very glad to welcome you and to open the **25<sup>th</sup> Euromed Summit** that the Economic and Social Committee organises with Mediterranean Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions.

- I would like to start by warmly **thanking** this year's **co-organizer**, the **Moroccan Economic, Social and Environmental Council**, for its support, and especially its president, Mr Réda Chami.
- We had originally planned to hold this summit in **Marrakech**, but **Covid-19** obliges us to meet **virtually** instead.
- Unfortunately, the recent resurgence of infections throughout the Euro-Mediterranean region shows us that **summits and conferences** will have to **remain online** for the next months ahead.
- **Covid-19** has a **severe effect** on the whole region. **Several industries** have been **heavily impacted**, amongst them **tourism, aviation** as well as **oil and gas** production and processing.
- The **large informal sector** in many countries of the region unfortunately **impedes targeted measures** to **protect workers**.

- **Women are disproportionately affected** by the crisis, in some cases not only by **economic** and **social hardship** but also by **increased domestic violence**. Youth is also much impacted.
- Let me also underline that Covid-19 has pushed **key environmental challenges out of the agenda**. Meanwhile, **water scarcity** increases year by year and **temperatures** are **rising 20% faster** around the **Mediterranean** compared to the **global average**.
- However, let us not forget that Covid-19 might also have **positive effects** once the health emergency is under control.
- The virus has notably shown the **importance of resilient supply chains** to economic actors throughout the MENA<sup>1</sup> region.
- For this reason, the European Commission strongly advocates **on-shoring** and **re-shoring** - production in and near Europe to **shorten supply chains** and to **increase flexibility**.

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<sup>1</sup> Middel East and North Africa

- This new approach represents **significant opportunities** for the **manufacturing sector** throughout the Mediterranean region and could contribute to a **strong economic recovery** in the years to come.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- The challenges and opportunities related to Covid-19 make our cooperation all the more important.
- Allow me to add the **strengthening of participatory democracy** throughout the Mediterranean region as **another crucial aspect** of our **common work**.
- Only an **active civil society** can ensure a **stable democracy**. For this reason, we have established a **solid collaboration** between us, and I would like to pay **tribute** in that regard **to my predecessor**, Luca Jahier.
- There are many **examples** of such **cooperation**, let me start with today's co-organizer, the **Moroccan Economic, Social and Environmental Council**.

- Together, we have set up the **EU-Morocco Joint Advisory Group** that provides **input** from organised civil society to the **ongoing negotiations** of a **Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement** between the EU and Morocco.
- Another very practical example of collaboration concerns the **Economic and Social Council of Lebanon**. Last year we organized a **seminar** for its **newly appointed members** to outline the functioning and the activities of the European Economic and Social Committee.
- Let me take this occasion to **thank** the **Belgian, French and Spanish councils** that **also organized training sessions** for our Lebanese friends. I am convinced this was extremely helpful.
- The **drafting** of **opinions** and **information reports** constitutes a **further example** for the **excellent collaboration** with Mediterranean economic and social councils and other institutions.
- The European Economic, Social and Environmental Committee attaches **great importance** to the **views** of **civil society organizations** from **both shores** of the Mediterranean.

- For this reason, **today's debates** will be **reflected** in the **final version** of the **Euromed information report** on sustainable development.
- This brings me to the **main topic** of **today's summit**, **sustainable development** in the **Mediterranean region**.
- I am very glad about this topic as sustainable development is **one of the priorities of my mandate** as president of the EESC.
- The vast majority of the **organisations** virtually present today have worked on this issue, let me just **cite a few opinions and other publications**.
  - The **Algerian National Economic and Social Council** is currently drafting a **report** on **energy transition**. In this context, I would also like to mention the signature of a **cooperation agreement** between the Algerian council and the **United Nations Development Programme** to support **sustainable human development**.

- The **Moroccan Economic, Social and Environmental Council** has been working on a **new model of development** in Morocco with a focus on sustainable development.
- The **Economic and Social Council of Jordan** has published an opinion and a policy paper on **climate change** in Jordan.
- Many **European councils** are also active in the field of sustainable development. The **Spanish Economic and Social Council** touches on several aspects of sustainable development in its **annual report** on the **socioeconomic situation** in Spain.
- Sustainable development is also a key aspect of the **National Development Programme 2021-2025** elaborated by the **Greek Economic and Social Council**.

- The **French Economic, Social and Environmental Council** is actually working on several opinions related to sustainable development. These opinions include "**Sustainable fishing** in the context of climate change", "**Sustainable food** and local production" as well as the new **French draft legislation on climate**.

Distinguished guests,

- **Sustainable development** is a key issue for civil society in the Euro-Mediterranean region.
- Let me now brief you on the **state of play of discussions**<sup>2</sup> within the European Economic and Social Committee:
  - The EESC considers that the transition to a resource-efficient economy implies substantial **benefits**, not only for the climate but also in areas like **health, education** and **gender**.
  - In this context, **policy coherence** is of key importance to reconcile economic, social and environmental aspects of the sustainable development goals.

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<sup>2</sup> REX/526 – Sustainable development in the Mediterranean region

- **Investing in human capital** is essential for sustainable development and for stability and security throughout the region.
- The EESC also insists on the **importance of equal rights and opportunities for women**. Only equal access to the world of work can ensure inclusive and sustainable development. We must not forget the youth either.
- This afternoon we will also have a **follow-up debate** on **"Digitalisation and SMEs in the Mediterranean region"**<sup>3</sup>, the main topic of last year's Euromed Summit.
- You have all received the final report that takes account of the debates in Barcelona.
- Main points of this report include the **lack of digital readiness** of SMEs and micro-firms. This is of great concern as digital entrepreneurship could provide for more and better employment opportunities in the Mediterranean region.

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<sup>3</sup> REX/519 – Digitalisation and SMEs in the Mediterranean region

- The report also calls for incentives for the **reskilling of workers**, such as paid educational leave and trainings during working hours to improve digital skills.
- Another important aspect in this context relates to **smart farming** as a major opportunity to better manage the increasingly scarce water resources in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- I am very glad that we have come together today, at least in a virtual form, to exchange our views and to learn from each other.
- The cooperation with national economic and social councils and similar institutions of the Mediterranean is very close to my heart and I am very open to even **further collaboration**.
- Together, we should make sure that the **wishes and concerns of civil society** are heard in all current and future **trade negotiations** in the Mediterranean region.
- I would also propose to **inform each other of planned opinions and reports** that we consider of key importance and to explore possibilities for synergies and collaboration.

- Our common work on sustainable development is an excellent example for such cooperation.
- Allow me to finish my speech with **Jean Monnet**, one of the founding fathers of the European Union. He insisted to *"make men work together – show them that beyond their differences and geographical boundaries, there lies a common interest."*
- I believe that what is true within Europe is also true between Europe and its Southern neighbours.

**Thank you very much** for your attention and wishing all of us a successful summit laying further ground for our future co-operation.

**For more information, please contact:**

Andreas Berger Fournier, EESC Section for External Relations

Email: [Andreas.Berger@eesc.europa.eu](mailto:Andreas.Berger@eesc.europa.eu)

Tel: + 32 2 546 9062

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[VIDEO: The EESC from the inside](#)

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*The European Economic and Social Committee represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. It is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the EU decision-making process. The Committee has 329 members from across Europe, who are appointed by the Council of the European Union.*

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