



European Economic
and Social Committee
Civil Society Organisations' Group

**The EU's responses to (geo-) political challenges in 2023 –
the perspective of the European Parliament**
Debate with Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament
Speech by Civil Society Organisations' Group President Séamus Boland
EESC plenary session, 25 January 2023

Dear President,

I would like to begin by thanking you for taking the time to speak to us today – it is very much appreciated and you are very welcome.

There is no doubt that the invasion of Ukraine, this **aggression of Russia against a sovereign country**, has resulted in a **tectonic shift in the global geo-political landscape**. The European Union is at the centre of this tectonic shift. **How we respond this year, will determine our reputation, external relations, energy market, industrial model and levels of poverty within the EU.**

Regrettably, the **financial sanctions** imposed almost one year ago on Russia, have been **much less effective than we had anticipated**. Russia's economy has adjusted and the country has even become a **global exporter of grain**. In my opinion, the war will not end in the near future, **dispelling the naivety of European nations** who had hoped for a short war. One cannot help remembering a similar naivety at the beginning of the **First World War**.

So my question to you, Madame President, is the following: **How should the EU best prepare and manage the implications of a long war between Russia and Ukraine?'** This is a fundamental question for **three reasons**. Firstly, because there is a **real fear that Member States will waver from their commitments on climate change**. In my own country Ireland, recent targets have been revisited and revised. Similarly, Germany has re-opened coal-fired power plants. **How will the EU stay the course on climate change in a medium to long-term war?**

Secondly, we can all see that **energy inflation is overflowing into the rest of Europe's economy**. This energy inflation together with the **American green subsidies**, officially called the '**Inflation Reduction Act**', could put Europe **at risk of de-industrialisation**. And all of this, at a time when Europe is trying to fulfil key pre-war objectives on **re-industrialisation**.

Thirdly, **Europe is 98% dependent on China for rare earth minerals**. These are needed for wind power, hydrogen storage and batteries. Could we not imagine a scenario where **China invades Taiwan**,

taking advantage of the **current political and economic fallout** from the war in Ukraine? The international community, including the EU, has already been very naïve, when we ignored warnings that Russia would not stop at the **2014 annexation of Crimea**. Perhaps we should be planning contingency measures for a **war with a 2nd front**, something that would completely devastate Europe's economic vitality.

Before bringing my comments to a close, I would like to state that **politics and policies must be firmly rooted in society**. Regrettably, **CSOs are often relegated to service provision**, whereas we need more opportunities for CSOs to use their **skills, networks and knowledge, and to help identify and implement solutions**. CSOs will be particularly necessary given the **increasing levels of poverty**, including **energy poverty**, which are a direct consequence of the war in Ukraine. Thank you for your attention.