



European Economic
and Social Committee

SPEECH by the President

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Speech by Luca Jahier, EESC President
rEUnaissance: the time is now

[Check against delivery]

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

This is the last plenary I have the honour to address as President of the EESC.

Two and a half years ago, in April 2018, I invited you to dream with me of a re-energised Europe and to work together for a second European Renaissance!

I called for a strong civic engagement for our sustainable European future.

Two and a half years ago seems like yesterday - and at the same time so long ago.

Times of change stood ahead. I saw the European Union faced with profound transformations: an economic transformation, an energy and ecological transformation, a deep social transformation, a democratic and participatory transformation. And lastly, a geopolitical transition in international relations, which has even accelerated in the last weeks.

I am thinking here of the unbelievable level of repression in Belarus against a growing movement of people demanding freedom and democracy. Or the unacceptable decision of Turkey's President Erdogan concerning Hagia Sofia and the growing threats to Greek and Cypriot sovereignty. And last, the United Kingdom, which we have always recognised as a beacon of fundamental principles of Law, that decided to break the international legitimacy of a ratified agreement.

I continue to believe that the EESC, our House of European Civil Society, representing what we called during our 60th anniversary commemoration 'the House of Europe at Work' has a key role to play in shaping these transformations. 'Europe at work' is the lever, the catalyst and powerhouse for this rEUnaissance.

Ahead of us stood the European elections, with founded fears of the impact of rising nationalism and xenophobia on voting patterns.

Yet we knew that we needed to remain masters of our fortune, plan ahead and create together a new Europe with the voice of Civil Society at its heart.

Our contribution to the Road to Sibiu and beyond was an important element, feeding a renewed commitment to an EU that delivers on the issues that "really matter to people".

All these challenges are still present today.

Yet little did we expect that we would be hit by a global pandemic which, in the course of a few months only, profoundly changed the way we live together and substantially impacted our economy, our social and our personal lives, making uncertainty a new normality.

We must question the way our societies function, the importance we give to protecting our elders and more fragile. We must reflect on how to better value and compensate those people who keep our societies alive, economically, socially, and culturally - nurses, caretakers, salespeople, cleaners, teachers, artists, to name but a few. We have realized that we must re-instil our societies with a greater sense of compassion and solidarity.

In one sentence, we should ask ourselves, more than two centuries after the French revolution: ***Is it finally the time for fraternity?***

Chers collègues,

Déjà en 2016, Frans Timmermans, dans un petit livre – '*Fraternité, retisser nos liens*' – nous a tous invités à remettre cette catégorie au centre de la politique de ce millénaire. Faut-il rappeler que déjà en 1875, pour Victor Hugo, la liberté était un droit, l'égalité un fait, la fraternité une obligation.

Pour en venir à Edgar Morin, le grand philosophe français, connu pour avoir fixé le concept de « communauté de destin » pour l'humanité de ce millénaire, qui, dans son plus récent ouvrage "La fraternité pourquoi", nous invite à un effort inlassable de tissage continu de la liberté et de l'égalité avec la fraternité.

Ce besoin d'humanité, qui se fait puissant dans notre société, est encore devenu une urgence majeure durant cette pandémie, qui nous a tous poussés à revoir nos priorités, mais a aussi généré une convergence politique et sociale sans précédent, qui trouve son fondement dans le sentiment profond de nos concitoyens, de la nécessité de se transformer pour évoluer, et qui demande maintenant à être accompagnée et traduite en actes.

Se faisant l'interprète de cette demande, le Pape François, dans son adresse au séminaire de Cernobbio de la European House Ambrosetti, a invité sans ambiguïté le monde de l'économie à changer de paradigme, en mettant la science et la technique au service d'un nouveau modèle de développement, plus durable, plus sain, plus humain, plus social, plus intégral, plus écologique, plus orienté vers la promotion du bien commun. En rappelant la clé de voute de la Déclaration de Robert Schuman, où on parlait d'une "solidarité de la production", le Saint-Père a évoqué l'impératif aujourd'hui d'étendre cette solidarité à ce qu'il y a de plus précieux, la personne humaine.

Faisant ainsi, il anticipe sur ce qui constituera le cœur de sa nouvelle *Encyclique* "Fratelli tutti", "Tous frères, qu'il va bientôt signer à Assisi, le 3 octobre prochain, et qui sera dédiée à la fraternité et à l'amitié sociale

On peut alors se demander.... Est-ce que la fraternité va forger la Renaissance européenne, qui est déjà en cours de réalisation ?

Dear colleagues,

Our human fragility has once more been revealed.

The current pandemic is a wake-up call.

It is in light of this imperative that I would like to highlight a few achievements and challenges of my mandate. Of course, there are many more, that you can find an overview of, in the publication I have prepared.

It was not an easy mandate. However, as the late John Belushi said in "Animal House": "When the going gets tough, the tough get going".

I am proud that Sustainable development was one of my priorities and it will certainly be part of the legacy of this Presidency. I will never forget the strength of Greta Thunberg's voice in our Plenary "Civil Society for rEUnaissance" on 21 February 2019, warning us of the need to radically change our lifestyles to protect the future of our earth, of her generation and future ones.

Of course, such radical change cannot come without a price. If we cannot balance tomorrow's economy with the necessary shifts, we risk increasing social disparities, breaking open old divides in our society, rekindling xenophobia, and seeing citizens seeking protection from a fast-changing, uncomfortable reality in the words of demagogues and nationalists.

We must thus continue to work on creating cohesive, peaceful societies, promoting a new intergenerational pact and on inventing joint narratives, which shape our thoughts and actions.

I would thus like to mention my initiative on *Peace and Borders in Europe*, which took me from Belfast to Sopron, from Berlin to Nicosia. Moreover, I would not want to forget my visit to Krakow, at the very beginning of my mandate, during which we highlighted the reconciliation of memories as one of the crucial challenges for the Europe of today. In addition, let me stress the still not solved challenge of a fair and sustainable management of migration and asylum.

We must continue to work on these challenges of our borders, both physical, political and mental ones, together with our neighbouring countries and international partners, in order to create a just future for all.

Moreover, Europe must invest in its historical links with Africa. A sustainable Africa – EU alliance could be a significant step towards progress in this century, as my missions to Ethiopia and Senegal demonstrated.

Furthermore, you are aware of my passion for culture.

Culture, as a key force for cohesion and reconciliation, both giving meaning and prompting us to question our lives and our societies, is more important than ever. Since the performance of “Orfeo & Majnun”, highlighting the beauty of culture and its diversity, during our 60th Anniversary celebration, I have been advocating culture as the powerful engine for change in these crucial times.

As the late Philippe Daverio, a fine connoisseur of the revolutionary force of the Renaissance of Leonardo da Vinci, said: "I always believe that culture will save the world". Of this, I am fully convinced.

I would also like to highlight our successful actions in shaping the future of Europe, such as our successful drive to contribute to and be part of the planned Conference on the Future of Europe. Starting from the joint action I initiated with former President of the European Committee of the Regions Karl-Heinz Lambertz, for a permanent and structured mechanism of citizens' consultations through CSOs and local authorities.

Lastly, our clear stance on the MFF and the recovery package #NextGenerationEU, where we were the first to call for a European Health Union, now announced by President von der Leyen as a priority in her SOTEU speech.

I am proud of the work we were able to achieve and thank all those who have worked for this.

Yet allow me a point of warning.

Hand in hand with the great potential of the EESC ... comes a clear responsibility, as I stated in my inauguration speech.

Let me quote Matthew, verse 12:25 "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand."

As outgoing President, I call for the EESC to stand united, members and staff, and open to possibilities this new reality present us with.

Often, there seems to be a fear of change - yet by insisting on keeping things "as they have always been", we are endangering the mission of the very Committee we all, I am convinced, so strongly believe in.

Dear colleagues, it has been an intense journey, and we have achieved a lot.

Yet sometimes, it is not about pondering whether the journey or the destination is more important. It is about the company we are in.

Cari colleghi,

Voglio prima di tutto ringraziare tutti coloro – e sono tanti - che nei diversi livelli di responsabilità degli organi politici, tra i membri e nell'amministrazione si sono sempre prodigati ed hanno costruttivamente contribuito alla realizzazione degli obiettivi stabiliti ed hanno anche dato prova di dedizione rimarchevole nei momenti di crisi senza precedenti che abbiamo attraversato. La somma della loro perseveranza, spesso non immediatamente visibile, ci ha consentito di continuare ad operare ad un regime significativo e con un riconosciuto impatto.

Voglio poi ringraziare anche coloro che in alcune responsabilità politiche e in alcune funzioni dirigenziali hanno dimostrato una ostinazione quasi diabolica, nel mettersi costantemente di traverso, talora per il gusto di farlo, o per partito preso anche a costo di mettere a serio rischio il futuro stesso della istituzione e il suo corretto funzionamento. Essi hanno dimostrato la veridicità di una massima

famosa di un noto politico italiano, Giulio Andreotti, "Il potere logora chi non ce l'ha", come anche il famoso detto che "Non c'è mai limite al peggio".

Cari colleghi, le crisi fanno scoprire la vera anima delle persone. Mostrano di che pasta sei fatto. Enfatizzano i punti di debolezza come quelli di forza.

O per dirla con un grande scrittore siciliano che amo, Leonardo Sciascia nel suo "Il giorno della civetta", che nel famoso dialogo tra il Capitano Bellodi e il capomafia don Mariano fissa magistralmente le categorie di persone: uomini, mezzi uomini, ominicchi e quacquaracquà. E questa è letteratura letta nella scuola media italiana.

Voglio infine ringraziare con affetto e riconoscenza il mio gabinetto, che agli inizi qualcuno denominò "Dream Team". Grazie a Stefano Martinelli, Katherine Heid, Daniela Vincenti, Cinzia Sechi e per la prima parte Daniela Rondinelli, come anche Alessandra Spalletta, Ula Sofidis, Bianca Cozar, Ulrika Arvidsson, Gabriela Hausmann e Claudia Husdup. E, last but not least, la mia instancabile e straordinaria capogabinetto, Magda Herbowska.

La vostra professionalità, passione, dedizione, pazienza, resilienza, curiosità e anche spirito di fraternità - e in questo c'è molto della specificità del femminile - hanno reso possibile quanto è stato fatto.

Con molti di voi neppure ci conoscevamo prima dell'inizio di questo mandato, ma insieme abbiamo fatto una scommessa. Perché la rEUnaissance cammina sulle gambe, nella pancia, nel cuore e nella testa delle persone. E non si fa se non si rischia. Solo se si osa qualche cosa di nuovo si può essere generativi.

Cari colleghi, avrebbe voluto essere qui con noi una donna straordinaria, Marta Cartabia, la prima donna Presidente della Corte costituzionale italiana, che ha concluso il suo mandato giusto la settimana scorsa.

Nel suo magistrale discorso per la Festa della Repubblica italiana, lo scorso 2 giugno, ha ricordato che tra i molteplici significati della "res - publica" ve n'è uno spesso dimenticato. Il popolo infatti non è solo destinatario delle decisioni che riguardano la vita della Repubblica, ma ne è partecipe ed artefice.

E ricordando Tocqueville, ha affermato che "il popolo vi emerge in termini plurali: associazioni, minoranze linguistiche, confessioni religiose, famiglie, scuole e università, sindacati, partiti politici, cooperative, imprese".

Tutti soggetti traenti del corpo sociale, riconosciuti dalla Costituzione, che contribuiscono alla costruzione del bene comune.

Mi sembra che questo assunto, proprio di tutte le tradizioni costituzionali europee, richiami in modo esigente l'alto compito che è affidato al CESE.

Now, I really am coming to the end.

I would like to express my warm thanks to our Secretary General, Gianluca Brunetti and the committed staff of the EESC administration. I am sure you will continue to serve for the better this house.

I wish also the future President much success and strength in leading this magnificent House, which I was proud to serve.

We are at a crossroads, and we must act fast, bringing together everybody's passion, strengths, diversity and creativity - and leaving no one behind.

It is a daunting task, yet, to quote Seneca :

"Even if fear will have more arguments, choose hope."

Whatever it takes, I tried to do so, in the remit of my mandate.

GRAZIE.