

**SPEECH by Séamus Boland, President of the Diversity Europe Group  
Debate on the 'Fit for 55 package: building a resilient and sustainable framework for the EU's  
future', EESC plenary session, 9 December 2021**

Dear Commissioner Simson,

Welcome and thank you for being with us today.

The **European Green Deal** and the **'Fit for 55' package** are both necessary and urgent. **Climate Change** is already upon us and there is **nowhere left to hide**. Regular severe floods, fires, droughts and hurricanes. This is what the world looks like at 1.1 to 1.3° Celsius warmer than when the steam engine was invented.

Today, it is **impossible to ignore the impact of Climate Change** on our daily lives. Our planet's future is very much under threat and there is no choice but to **urgently deliver on our common promises**.

Without doubt, the EU's 'Fit for 55' package will affect the lives of **every European citizen**. What is crucial, is for the climate transition to also be a **just transition**. Leaving nobody behind, but rather informing, involving and assisting **vulnerable consumers** and **vulnerable citizens**.

Ultimately, **access to energy is a right**. And the **energy transition cannot be the cause of energy poverty**. Recent exponential increases in **the price of energy** have further exposed the vulnerabilities of many Europeans, bringing **energy poverty** squarely within political domain.

In this context, the new **EU Social Climate Fund** to tackle energy poverty is a welcome step. Incentives for consumers to renovate smartly and sustainably must also be delivered, in tandem with strategies such as the **EC's Renovation Wave**.

Dear Commissioner, before closing, I would like to say a few words on the **role of European civil society in the Fit for 55 package**.

It is my firm belief that civil society organisations **want to be and must be allowed** to be at the **centre of the entire process**. Every socio-economic sector of civil society must be **empowered to lead, design and implement the transition** towards **reducing net greenhouse gas emissions**.

Only **civil society** has both **creativity** and **determination** to imagine this **sustainable, resilient and fairer world**. It is civil society which has a pivotal role in **driving and maintaining the momentum** on climate mitigation and adaptation among **communities** and **citizens**. It is these same actors who will have the tenacity to **invest in, accelerate and embrace change with bottom-up initiatives** which **respect the opinions and the rights of local people**.

However, we can only be able to embark on this new world by **changing perceptions and attitudes**. By anchoring climate mitigation and adaptation firmly within our **European values and identity**.

**Delivering on Climate Change** must become a **positive European narrative**. A narrative which **embraces** and finds the **balance** between **environmental sustainability, prosperity, innovation, social inclusion** and **democratic participation**.