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**Oliver Röpke**  
President of the EESC



## Speech by President Oliver Röpke on "Climate change and migration in the Mediterranean" in Alicante, Spain

[check against delivery]

Mr Antón Costas Comesaña, President of the Economic and Social Council of Spain,  
Mr Andrés Perelló Rodríguez, General Director of Casa Mediterráneo  
Distinguished Presidents,  
Dear Secretaries-General,  
Dear Participants,

- I would like to start by **thanking all co-organisers** and partners of today's conference: the **Spanish Presidency** of the Council of the EU, the **Economic and Social Council of Spain**, **Casa Mediterráneo** and the **Union for the Mediterranean** with its "Day for the Mediterranean" campaign.
- I would like then to address the pressing issue on everyone's minds – the recent attacks in Israel by the terrorist organization Hamas.
- We are missing two parts of our family today: Israel and Palestine colleagues.
- We **strongly condemn these attacks and mourn the tragic loss of life**. We stand in solidarity with Israeli civil society, and I had exchanges with Avi Yehezkel, President of the Israeli ESCI, on this matter. I expressed to him my deepest sympathy and solidarity on behalf of the EESC of these tragic events.

- Our primary concern is to prevent the conflict from escalating further and spreading in the region. The **top priority is an immediate halt to the violence and the protection of civilians on both sides**, who are always paying the highest price in these situations.
- We call for de-escalation of the conflict, which would restore Israeli and Palestinian people's aspirations for peace.
- Now, I want to come back to today's topic, and turning to the extraordinary premises in which we are welcomed today. The **Casa Mediterráneo**, a former train station officially opened in 1887. This train station with its proximity to the Port of Alicante constitutes a perfect symbol for the connection between both shores of the Mediterranean. Excellent location, congratulate the organisers for choosing it;
- The conference today and tomorrow is dedicated to two issues of high importance for the whole Mediterranean region: **climate change and migration**. The first day of this event is devoted to climate change, so allow me to start my speech with this topic.
- Reference to manifesto: clear link between climate change and fundamental rights. Everyone should have the right to a decent, safe and healthy environment.
- First of all, I would like to quote the **Nairobi Declaration** adopted by African Leaders on 6 September 2023:
- *"Climate change is the **single greatest challenge** facing humanity and the single biggest threat to all life on Earth. It demands **urgent and concerted action from all nationals** to lower emissions and reduce the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere".*
- Unfortunately, **Mediterranean countries** are **especially affected by climate change** and they are warming almost twice as fast as the global average. In the future, heat waves will last longer and attain even higher temperatures, especially in the Mediterranean region.
- Furthermore, **each degree** in **global warming** will **decrease rainfall** by **4%**. Extreme weather events with very heavy rainfall are expected to happen more often, especially on the Northern shore of the Mediterranean.



- Another important aspect of climate change is the **rise** of the **sea level**. According to a study by the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and environmental Change this could amount to 90 cm by the end of this century. This will in turn increase the frequency and intensity of coastal floods and erosion.<sup>1</sup>

Dear participants,

- These figures illustrate the urgency to act. Scientific evidence shows we've breached safe planetary limits, necessitating urgent shifts in societal and economic structures to balance environmental stewardship with decent living conditions.
- We need to stick to the EU objective of **reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 55%** by 2030. This goal is challenging and requires a clear roadmap for the years to come.
- Let us not forget the social aspect of the green transition: as rightly claimed in this year's **State of the Union Address** held by Ursula von der Leyen, we need a **fair and just transition** with decent jobs for all.
- Just transition should embody social, economic, and territorial fairness, address the needs of those disadvantaged by the transition, aim to fight poverty, reduce inequalities, and secure human well-being within a thriving natural environment.
- I would like to add that a **meaningful social and civil dialogue** is key to ensure that no one is left behind. This social and civil dialogue must have a clear focus on organized civil society. Green transition will only be a success if it is embraced by civil society.
- Thank you to the Spanish Presidency again, excellent exercise. Spanish Presidency involved EESC at very early stage, we made several initiatives together.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- The second topic of this conference is "**Migration** in the Mediterranean region", a topic clearly linked to climate change.
- Of course, political and economic considerations are major triggering factors for migration.

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<sup>1</sup> Union for the Mediterranean MedECC report "The Mediterranean Basin: main drivers of environmental changes" (2022)



- However, water scarcity and a decreasing soil quality also impact **migration**:
- According to the World Bank, up to **9 % of Northern Africans** could be **climate migrants by 2050**, mostly moving within their own countries or to neighbouring states<sup>2</sup>.
- Only a small part of migrants continues the journey to Europe, but **drowning** remains the leading cause of death on migration routes. In the **first half of 2023**, more than **1.700 migrants** drowned in the Mediterranean Sea<sup>3</sup>. We cannot and must not accept this and remain silent.
- In this context, I would like to remind you of this year's commitment of **G7 leaders** to ensure a **safe, orderly and regular migration** around the world. They also claim the full respect of human rights and of **fundamental freedoms** of migrants.
- I could not agree more as I have chosen the promotion of democracy, **fundamental rights** and the **rule of law** as guiding principle for all activities during my mandate as president of the European Economic and Social Committee.
- Let me also underline the **important role** of **civil society organizations** that provide humanitarian help for migrants. The access of these organizations to migrants and asylum seekers should always be guaranteed.
- Essential actors to protect migrants include the **UN Refugee Agency** and the **International Organization for Migration**.
- I would like to congratulate the European Commission on its **10-Point Plan for Lampedusa** and its claim to reinforce cooperation with these two organizations to ensure protection along migration routes.
- The Plan for Lampedusa also proposes the promotion of **regular migration** and the establishment of **legal and safe routes** to Europe.

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<sup>2</sup> World Bank Groundswell Report II (2021)

<sup>3</sup> International Organization for Migration – Missing Migrants Project – Mid-year Regional Overview (June 2023)



- I am glad to confirm that the European Economic and Social Committee fully backs this proposal. Only the **credible perspective** of **legal migration** will stop people from risking their lives when crossing the Mediterranean.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- Climate change and migration are two topics that are extremely relevant, on which the EESC is ready to play its part.
- European **cooperation** with **regional civil society organizations** is more necessary than ever to address the double challenge of climate change and migration!
- I am convinced we will have **very interesting debates!**
- Thank you!

