



**Speech on the 'Presentation of the priorities of the French Presidency'  
by Diversity Europe Group President Séamus BOLAND**

EESC plenary debate with Clément BEAUNE, French Secretary of State for European Affairs,  
19 January 2022

Dear Mr Beaune,

Thank you for being with us today, to discuss the priorities of the French Presidency. I would like to begin by saying that **I very much welcome the ambition, optimism and confidence in the EU**, which are expressed in your programme. These are very fitting for one of the founding countries of the European project. I also believe that **citizens are genuinely looking towards the EU for political guidance** on the great challenges of our time, be they social, economic, digital or environmental.

I particularly welcome the objectives of introducing **minimum wages** throughout the EU, **the creation of carbon border taxes** and plans to **revise the Maastricht criteria**, in order to **enhance European investment and growth**. Minimum wages can certainly be an effective instrument to help **raise individuals and whole families out of poverty**. And although social policy remains the prerogative of Member States, I do believe that the EU should encourage **upward convergence of social policy**. I would also like to mention that on **2 March** our Group will organise a high level conference in Paris on the topic of *'Climate Change and Energy Transition'*, during which precisely this issue of carbon border taxes will be explored.

Dear Minister, allow me to make **two specific comments** regarding the priorities of the French Presidency. Firstly, when I look at the priorities of the French Presidency, I notice a definite shift away from the language of **"Western" values** and towards the language of **"European" values**. Similarly, in the French priorities we detect an *'acceptance of the notion of a community of fate'* among EU countries. What I mean, is that for the last two years, there has been a degree of acceptance by politicians **and** citizens, that the **fate of the continent is bound together**. The challenges facing individual countries require **supranational responses**, be it on Climate Change or relations with China. And when **money is shared**, like with the National Recovery and Resilience Facility, **problems are also shared**. Consequently, there is **more margin for manoeuvre** on **EU approaches** on sensitive policies like **social policy**. Hence, the French ambition for minimum wages throughout the EU.

My second comment relates to the **ambition of the French Presidency**, to make the EU and I quote: *"Master of its destiny... and Free of its choices"*. Here, I would **caution against raising the expectations of citizens too much**. Surging natural-gas prices are soaking up the savings that citizens made over the last two years. However, **European strategic autonomy will be difficult** when we are dependent on Russia to keep our houses warm, particularly now with the stand-off over Ukraine!

Thank you for your attention.