



SPEECH by Diversity Europe Group President Séamus Boland
Debate on the priorities of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU (linked to opinion SOC/684 on Adult Learning) with **Anže Logar, Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs**
EESC plenary session, 8 July 2021

Dear Minister, dear colleagues,

I would like to begin my intervention by saying how much I like the slogan of the Slovenian Presidency: **"Together. Resilient. Europe"**. I find that those three words really do encompass both the challenges and the opportunities that we have before us.

Together, building a more resilient and autonomous Europe.

The question of course is how to do this! And I would like to put to you **three proposals**:

Firstly, we will only achieve these objectives through **structured** and **meaningful dialogue** with European civil society. I like to use a term we coined at one of our events: **'Civil society in the driving seat'**. In other words, civil society bringing **innovative ideas, engaging with policy-makers** at all stages and proposing **alternative solutions**. Civil society brings an **expertise, a grass-roots knowledge** and a **sense of community**, that no national or EU representative can compete with. Of course the Slovenian Presidency coincides with the CoFE and so this concepts of 'togetherness' and **democratic participation** take on even greater importance.

Secondly, we will only be able to make Europe more resilient if we **embrace alternative models of growth and development**. We need a **paradigm shift** in our understanding of **societal** and **economic 'progress'** and crucially, we need to **anchor our perceptions in the SDGs**. It is my firm belief that investment in **social cohesion, sustainable development** and **human capital** will be instrumental in creating and in sustaining recovery, employment and growth, post-COVID 19.

Thirdly, the degree of our success in making Europe more resilient will be measured by how we manage to **combat climate** and **environmental change** and by how we **invest and re-structure** our **health systems**. But a 'more green' Europe, must also mean a **more accessible and equitable Europe**. Greener transport must also mean, transport accessible to all. And a green Europe will only be equitable through **active labour market policies to upgrade skills** and **re-train citizens**. Ultimately, for recovery and resilience to be achieved, **all policies must be mutually reinforcing**. And although governments cannot eliminate risks, they should at least ensure that people are able to 'bounce' back after crises.

Finally, allow me to say a few words about **building European resilience through health**. In Ireland we say that **'health is wealth'** and the Covid-19 pandemic has clearly shown that the health of Europeans, **dictates the financial health** of the European Union. So it is high time that we started to **prioritise health and a European Health Union**, in the same way as we prioritised the Banking Union during the economic and financial crisis. A European Health Union will be imperative for the recovery and resilience of the EU. I would also like to add that we should increase the resilience and competitiveness of the European pharmaceutical and healthcare supply chains, so that our production

capacity becomes more robust and the **EU gains a degree of geo-political autonomy in the health sector**. Thank you for your attention.