

**Statement by President Oliver Röpke on the occasion of 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of EESC first plenary  
19 May 2023**

*As the European Economic and Social Committee marks the 65th anniversary of its first plenary meeting, it is a moment to reflect on where the Committee came from and where it is headed.*

*We are the house of organised civil society. We are proud to represent everyday Europeans: businesses, workers, farmers, consumers, youth, environmental, human rights NGOs as well as many others. Those voices were of key importance when shaping EU policies over that past 65 years. And today, they are more important than ever. Whether it is a digital or green transition, the voice of the Europeans, especially the youth, should be at the heart of every EU policy and decision. With the European elections coming up in 2024, we need to be ahead of the curve, putting new priorities on the EU's agenda, such as the Blue Deal.*

*With Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine and Europe getting back on track after the pandemic – we are facing some of the greatest challenges of our times. But I believe that challenging times are not stumbling blocks. They are opportunities that allow us to grow, show our resilience and unity. This is exactly the time to do so. This is the time to stand up for what makes today's Europe: our democracy.*

*A vibrant civil society is the key element of any healthy democracy. This is where I see the Committee heading. As the democracy watchdog – monitoring the state of civil society in Europe. As the window to the future – scanning the horizon, identifying the big trends and signalling them to our EU partners. As the true civil society gateway – speaking up for Europeans.*

*The European Economic and Social Committee is one of the founding EU institutions and I am confident that it can rise to the challenges ahead and help building a stronger Europe that works for all citizens.*