

# **'Think Green! The Opportunities of Sustainable Development and of the Green Economy'**

**SPEECH**

by

**Mr Luca JAHIER**

**President of Group III 'Various Interests'  
of the  
European Economic and Social Committee**

**INAUGURAL SESSION**

**2 May 2012**

---

Seul le texte prononcé fait foi

---

Check Against Delivery

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear friends and colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that I would like to welcome you to our conference today, entitled 'Think Green! The Opportunities of Sustainable Development and of the Green Economy'. We are now only a few weeks away from the UN Rio + 20 conference and anticipation and expectations are growing. From local to international stakeholders, all eyes will turn to Rio for solutions, decisions and ideas. But one thing is certain: a UN conference which takes place only once every twenty years should not be for governments alone. It should also be an event for the 'Earth's citizens' and young people in particular must be actively involved, for they hold in their hands both the present and the future!

Some of you may have participated in the conference at the European Economic and Social Committee on 7 and 8 February entitled 'Rio + 20: Be Responsible! Go Sustainable!'. In my opinion this was an excellent event, bringing together a wide spectrum of actors from Europe and beyond and demonstrating both the knowledge and commitment of civil society. Today's conference will follow a similar logic, opening up a 'normal' Group III meeting to wider civil society organisations. Together, in the morning we will discuss the principles and lessons learnt and the way forward towards a global sustainable development strategy and a green economy. However, the two afternoon sessions will move from theory to practice and we will examine case studies of existing green economy initiatives, often local. For already today, civil society and citizens are taking excellent initiatives. They are working closely with business and local authorities on innovative tools for resource efficiency, transport systems, water efficiency and so forth. Our objective is to showcase these examples, to demonstrate what citizens have already achieved and to help others do likewise. Our objective is also to help raise awareness among citizens of the benefits of green growth and notably, to help to dispel myths and fears.

For in 2012, although environmental and consumer concerns are becoming more mainstream, there is still the perception that our current consumption levels and availability of resources will continue indefinitely. I honestly do not think that the current generation has 'digested' the fact that we cannot continue our lifestyles and production patterns. Unfortunately, Europe has exported its industrialised economic model to the world. Now it is only through coordinated action and political commitment at all levels, that we will be able to aspire towards sustainable growth and to reverse environmental degradation.

And there is certainly a great deal of degradation to speak of, with the ecological footprint in 2012 much worse than in was at the first Rio conference on sustainable development in 1992, and with a much more complex political and economic environment in 2012. And the figures speak volumes: by 2050 there will be 9 billion people in the world, who will produce 9 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. Already today, we are using 1.3 to 1.4 times the resources of the Earth. And on an annual basis, we waste 1/3 of the biomass we create. Clearly we have to change our behaviour.

I heard a fascinating piece of information on the radio one Sunday morning, that "There is enough sun shone every second to fuel the world's energy needs for a year." When I did some research on the topic I also read that "The amount of solar radiation striking the Earth over a three-day period is equivalent to the energy stored in all fossil energy sources."

Even to myself, a non-scientist, this is very exciting! It is in fact a wonderful challenge to the human race, an *opportunity to be seized* to put our intelligence and our creativity to test. To develop technology that will overhaul the energy system and modernise it without jeopardising our energy needs. It is about finding alternative solutions, many of which can be provided by nature, solar energy being just one. But first of all, we have to accept that we need to de-couple economic growth from resource use and all stakeholders have to work towards the same objective. That means public authorities at all levels introducing favourable regulatory environments and financial incentives. In Europe we have the Europe 2020 Resource Efficiency Flagship – very good, now we need legislation to implement it and we need a pact between all concerned stakeholders to move rapidly in this direction.

But we must also encourage business and industry to incorporate the green economy into their corporate identity and public authorities should introduce more green public procurement. Ultimately, it is only through measures such as increases in public-private partnerships investing into innovative green technology and the phasing out of environmentally harmful subsidies, that we will be able to meet our objectives. And central to our objective of sustainable societies, is of course the creation of *new growth* and *new jobs*, which will undoubtedly be generated by the green economy and sustainable development. Indeed, it is estimated that in the next ten years the green economy will generate over 20 million new jobs.

Ladies and gentlemen: so far I have discussed about what industry should do, what governments and international bodies can do. But the other key partners are of course *consumers* and *citizens*. And we are all consumers and citizens. So how can *we* also contribute to a global sustainable development strategy and a green economy? Arguably, if consumers were given more choice and information, and if there was a better marketing of green products we could also make better decisions on what products to buy. So a first step would be to introduce sustainable and environmental labelling. But we also have to be realistic, particularly in this period of economic crisis: if green products are too expensive, only a few consumers will buy them so we also need to develop financially acceptable alternatives for consumers.

As regards citizens, I hope that during our afternoon session today we will be inspired by examples of green businesses which are designed and implemented by citizens. What is new in the green economy is that citizens are no longer only passive players. In many cases they are now active participants, for example, energy production decentralised to the citizen's level. This in my view is the beginning of a new economic order and it is something that we will see more and more of.

Before ending my introductory remarks, I would like to remind us all that sustainable development is composed of three inter-dependent elements: the social, environmental and economic. The green

economy is a part of sustainable development. Together, these two principles of sustainable and green growth have the potential to lead to social equity, social inclusion and job creation. And this is both an opportunity and a challenge for our societies. So let's join forces and adopt a collective sense of responsibility, let's re-discover the sense of urgency and be more ambitious in our goals and in our means to achieving them. Lets '*Think Green*' and '*Act Green*', today!

Thank you for your attention.

---