



*European Economic and Social Committee  
The President*

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**Workshop on Transformative Partnerships on Poverty & Environment  
Europeans at Rio+ 20**

Staffan Nilsson's welcome speech

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I would like to welcome all the participants of today`s Workshop, in particular:

- **Mr Timo Makela**, Director international environmental affairs, Commission, DG ENV;
- **Mr Chris Van den Bilcke**, Head of UNEP Liaison Office to the EU;
- **Mr Raymond Van Ermen**, Executive Director of European Partners for the Environment.

First, I would like to remind you that today is the **World Environment Day** and the theme of the World Environment Day 'Green Economy' has been chosen in accordance with the main subject of the UN Rio+20 conference this month.

This choice demonstrates once more very clearly: **protecting the environment and creating economic prosperity should not be regarded as conflicting objectives**. We have to transform our economies in a way that serves to both: the food security and the poverty eradication for a growing world population and maintaining the planet's limited natural resources for future generations.



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Therefore, also the topic of our workshop is well chosen: transformative partnerships on poverty & environment. I expect from this workshop some useful findings on how can transformative partnerships be efficiently used for this purpose. The Rio+20 conference this month will hold a platform on Partnerships for the Future. We want and we should communicate the outcome of this workshop to this platform.

The instrument of global partnerships has been introduced at the UN Johannesburg Summit 2002 as a means to enhance the implementation of the Rio principles on sustainable development. Since 2002 many partnerships in this field have been established. The outcome of these partnerships varies from case to case. It is time to systematically evaluate existing partnerships and draw the conclusions for projects following the Rio+20 conference.

**Partnerships are a very important model for involving civil society actors in sustainable development.** They bring together governmental authorities and non-governmental actors, in particular NGOs and stakeholders from businesses in order to pursue common objectives. This makes transformative partnerships so important to us, the EESC.

We have always pointed out the **importance of civil society involvement in the transition to a green economy.** In the end, that is only the civil society who can make the change towards sustainable societies happen! Hence, partnerships should be further developed also as a means for civil society participation.

In 2 weeks time many of you will be in Rio de Janeiro at the UN Rio+20 conference. The EESC, including me as EESC president, will also be present at this conference as part of the EU delegation. European institutions, in particular the Commission have invested huge and admirable efforts to make this conference a success. The EESC has contributed to the European position by organising a European civil society dialogue on sustainable development and the contributions Europe could make to the Rio+20 conference.

In February 2012, ***the major EESC conference Go sustainable, be responsible! European civil society on the road to Rio+20***, has led to European civil society messages to negotiators and called on our political leaders to step up their efforts to arrive to an ambitious outcome at the UN conference.

The key messages we bring to Rio are:



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- World leaders must commit to a **concrete action plan** leading to sustainable development and poverty eradication within the limitations of the planet.
- Promoting a green economy must be part of an **overarching sustainable development strategy**, striking a balance between social, ecological and economic aspects while achieving distributional and intergenerational equity.
- **Eradicating poverty and secure access to enough food, clean water and sustainable energy for all** must be a top priority on the Rio+20 agenda.
- Rio+20 should put emphasis on the **social dimension of sustainable development**. A just transition to sustainable societies must guarantee gender equality, youth employment, decent work and high-quality jobs for the workforce and social security.
- Rio+20 must lead to a **green economy roadmap** with specific goals, targets and actions and monitoring mechanisms. A process should be launched to establish by 2015 a set of global Sustainable Development Goals.
- We need a **reinforced global forum for Sustainable Development**. UNEP should be up-graded to a new UN agency for the environment.
- Political leaders have to agree on **additional measures to improve effective civil society involvement**, including legal and institutional frameworks such as the Aarhus Convention and Economic and Social Councils.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you in Rio again. We will organise several events in Rio, also together with our Brazilian counterpart, the Council for Economic and Social development, concerning specific civil society messages and interests. This afternoon we will certainly have time to talk more about it when we discuss how Europeans can be efficient in their side events.

I assume some of us go to Rio with mixed feelings. We all know and it has often been said that 20 years after the first Rio world summit Rio+20 is a unique opportunity to make the urgently needed progress in sustainable development.



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However, we know as well that the first informal negotiation rounds have not been very promising. A positive dynamic seems to be missing. So meanwhile expectations for the conference are low. There has been an additional informal negotiation round in the recent days and maybe some speakers of the workshop today were present in these meetings and can comment on results with hopefully some good news.



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