



*European Economic and Social Committee
The President*

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The Sovereign Debt Crisis: Towards Fiscal Union in Europe?

Staffan Nilsson's opening speech

Seul le texte prononcé fait foi

Check Against Delivery

This conference comes very timely. We all can feel that European governments and citizens are waiting for the results of the elections in Greece. Only then European Member States will be able to meet again and to decide what solutions we can create together to boost European Growth.

It is not only about growth, it is a matter of confidence and of hope. I often repeat here and there that: yes- the crisis is a painful reality, but repeating and repeating the word can also become a kind of a mantra.

We need a hope. I firmly believe that together, in the next Council meeting end of June, we can give a sign of hope.

There is also **the need for political courage**. Strong decisions need to be taken. We need courageous solutions. This is the reason for this conference today: what courageous solutions can we advise to our political leaders?

The reality is indeed hurtful:

- Europe is facing difficult times. The economy is stagnating, consumer and business confidence has declined sharply and the **public debt in many countries has increased to an extent that appears unsustainable**.



European Economic and Social Committee

The President

- The sovereign debt crisis has put the European economy under pressure to an extent that the very foundations of the European Union are being tested.

Our Committee is extremely concerned about the current risk of the Euro zone and the European Union as a whole.

This is why, end of last year, I decided to launch an intense consultative activity, leading to an EESC opinion with **concrete proposals for the introduction of mutually backed bonds**. It was the first proposal of its kind stemming from a European Institution and not from Academia.

On several occasions I have stressed that the solution to the problems is [MORE, NOT LESS EUROPE](#), and I am completely convinced that this is the only way forward.

I said it before and I want to repeat it: **to achieve a positive outcome we need a strong political leadership**. The most important is to find new avenues for concrete political solidarity between the European people.

This does not mean that we have to abandon the efforts for fiscal discipline! On the contrary, fiscal discipline remains essential, but while FISCAL DISCIPLINE is a NECESSARY condition, it is NOT SUFFICIENT to succeed!

Policy makers must add some creativity to this issue. I borrow an expression from the President of the European Central Bank, Mr Mario Draghi: "*new 'politically creative' solutions need to be found. Solutions which will enable us to make further progress on the chosen path of INTEGRATION - with coherence and determination*".

We all know that we still lack the consensus necessary to achieve these solutions. I think we need to say loudly:

- **We need to assume the perspective of the Europe-wide common good.**
- **We need to look beyond the particular interests of particular categories or given Member States.**

European integration is not a zero-sum game where one player wins what the other loses. It is a game in which either we are all net winners or we all are net



European Economic and Social Committee

The President

losers. In order to win, we must be good team-players, what means that we must put the common interest before the individual one.

I sincerely hope that the European leaders, particularly the most influential, will decide to follow without further delay. Postponing it would only allow the situation to further deteriorate. I hope that this Conference will contribute to a development in this direction.

In this perspective, I would like to thank all the personalities that join us today with presentations, as well as our Members and the public who is invited to join the discussions.

I wish all of you a fruitful conference. Personally, I am looking forward to taking good note of the upcoming interventions and discussion. I guarantee that **the Committee will always make its voice heard for more European integration in order to overcome the crisis.**

For further details:

Coralia Catana | EESC President's Spokesperson

+32 (0)25469963 | +32 (0)498984613

E-mail: coralia.catana@eesc.europa.eu | president.eesc@eesc.europa.eu

Internet: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.staffan-nilsson-speeches>