



*European Economic and Social Committee
The President*

Brussels, 09 October, 2012

Inter-institutional working-session on Rio+20 follow-up at EU-level

Staffan Nilsson's opening speech

Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
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Check Against Delivery

Welcome Commissioner Janez Potočnik, ENVI Chair Matthias Groote, CoR Vice-President Mercedes Bresso, Council DG Jaroslaw Pietras, and other participants.

As you know, the EESC has been very actively involved in the run-up to Rio, enhancing civil society dialogue in preparation of the Conference and at the Conference.

We were **committed to contributing to the EU's position** and to **mobilising EU civil society** in order to push EU and world leaders towards an ambitious outcome.

We know now that the outcome text has not been as ambitious as we Europeans would have wished it to be. Now we have to work to make the agreement a success by advancing further on the processes that were



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launched and by implementing at least here in Europe the proposals that we have put forward in New York and in Rio de Janeiro.

That is why I am glad that you have responded so positively to my invitation to this inter-institutional working lunch. It is good to bring Rio home also in the sense that we keep the common EU feeling that we have to advance on sustainable development matters also now that we are back in Brussels.

To guide our discussions we have submitted you three general questions, I propose that we organise a "tour de table" on these.

1) What do we see as the most important outcome of Rio+20 for the EU?

- The mentioning of **inclusive green economy** as an important vehicle for sustainable development, the **positive appreciation of the role civil society** can play for sustainable development, the **recognition of workers' rights** and the **need for a just transition** are elements the EESC has been advocating for in the run-up to Rio+20 because we consider them being essential elements for sustainable development. The other very important outcome is the process leading to **SDGs** since they should also guide our transformation to sustainable development. I would also like to underline the essential importance of the adoption of the **10 Year Framework programme for sustainable consumption and production** and the task given to UN Statistical Commission to develop complementary indicators for measuring societal well-being **beyond GDP**.
- Nevertheless, we can't help seeing the **huge discrepancy between the Rio text and the aspirations, ambitions and commitments** which were visible in the myriad Rio+20 events and statements from **civil society**.
- So when we talk about "taking Rio home" that refers not only to implementing the Rio decisions and follow-up on the processes launched but also to **keep the momentum, continue civil society actions and civil society push for political decisions**.



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2) What do we see as priority issues in the EU?

- As I said, the first priority for us is to continue advocating for sustainable development and to follow up on the issues we have brought to Rio and to help develop them in the EU reality.
- The **feedback** received so far from our partners in the European civil society concerning the EESC's Rio contribution is a **positive** one and we have already heard several **requests to continue the approach chosen for the Rio preparation also for the Rio follow-up.**
- So we see it as being a priority for the European institutions to further involve civil society in the Rio+20 follow-up and welcome the Commission's initiative to launch a public consultation on that topic. We suggest to complement this online consultation by a joint hearing with DG Environment on the results of this public consultation.
- What came out of the public Rio-debriefing the SDO organised on 5 July (with over 100 participants) was the **request expressed by stakeholders to get involved in EU follow-up actions to Rio+20.** Two major suggestions were made: First, it was suggested that we accompany/shadow the SDG process in New York through broad public debate in Brussels. Second, to have a broad civil society debate on how to implement Rio decisions on green economy in EU policies, in particular in the frame of Europe2020 strategy and EU Sustainable development strategy, more widely to have a broad civil society debate on which kind of economic model we want.
- On the SDGs. This process is closely linked to the ongoing debate on the post 2015 development framework. Our section for external relations has started work on an opinion concerning the MDGs post 2015, an opinion which will certainly also deal with SDGs. Preparations for a **joint hearing** with DG DEVCO on the results of the public consultation launched by the Commission are under way. As far as I know, our Sustainable Development Observatory will also debate this opinion, trying to enlarge the debate to even more stakeholders.



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- From what we hear from representatives of European civil society networks and organisations, efforts for developing a joint strategy for the SDG/MDG processes are under way, we at the EESC can provide the dialogue space for intra-civil society debate and for the dialogue between civil society and European institutions. We stand ready to elaborate an exploratory opinion on the issue of the SDG process to which we would associate our civil society partners. This opinion could be useful for all institutions present here today in the process of defining a common European position on SDGs.
- On the green economy: Work will most likely start on an own-initiative opinion on "Green economy: advancing sustainable development for Europe", aiming at making concrete proposals concerning enabling conditions for the transition to green economy. The EESC will initiate an inter-institutional debate on coherence and/or complementarity between Europe2020 and the EU Sustainable Development Strategy and the need for a review of these strategies in the light of Rio+20.
- Finally, as you know the EESC has been advocating for a 7th Environmental Action Plan and we appreciate that it will most likely serve as main vehicle to implement the more environmental aspects of the Rio outcome. You can be assured that we will comment on that proposal.

3) How do we intend to involve civil society in "bringing Rio home"?

- You know our constituency. Our membership is composed of employers' organisations, trade unions, farmers, SMEs, environmental organisations, scientists, NGOs, etc. They come from the 27 Member States and are active players in the economic reality of their countries. But we also reach out to the civil society organisations and networks and the think tanks at EU level that are not directly represented in the Committee but with which we have longstanding structured relationship.
- From the EESC side we stand ready to facilitate further the dialogue between civil society and EU decision makers. We will continue reaching out to different communities in Europe and facilitating the dialogue between them so that we can overcome the silo-thinking and can contribute to finding comprehensive answers.



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- As we did before the Rio+20 Conference we will include the Rio follow-up also in the discussions with our counterparts in Brazil, China, Russia. The three-year work-programme of our EU-ACP civil society cooperation is focused on inclusive and sustainable growth. The next meeting of Economic and Social Committees and similar institutions of the Euromed region in Amman will also deal with the sustainable development challenge in the Euromed region, in particular with question of energy and resource efficiency.
- We will again organise open hearings and seminars, not only but also through our Sustainable Development Observatory, where, as you know, we manage to bring together the different communities across sectors and interests, also with the valuable input of think tanks. Here we are ready to work in complement to your activities, we can focus in particular on questions where you would be looking for more civil society input.
- After our lunch I plan on having a meeting with a number of representatives from civil society organisations and networks at European level to see how best to facilitate civil society input in EU Rio-follow-up.

Next springtime I propose to organise a major civil society conference on green economy.

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>