



*European Economic and Social Committee  
The President*

Amman, 17 October 2012

**Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar  
Institutions**

**Staffan Nilsson's opening speech**

*Seul le texte prononcé fait foi*  
—————  
*Check Against Delivery*

[Your Majesty], Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends and Colleagues,

First of all, let me say what an honour it is for me to be here in Amman at the Euromed Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions for our annual gathering of civil society representatives from the countries in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

I would like to warmly thank our partners, the Economic and Social Council of Jordan, and in particular **Mr Anani**, its President, for hosting this important event on the Euro-Mediterranean calendar.



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As you will be aware the Jordanian ESC is the civil society body in Jordan that brings together the various strands of Jordanian civil society - the employers, trade unions, professional associations and NGOs - into one forum where government policies and national concerns can be discussed in a consensual manner. ESCs are a mechanism for making sure that civil society has a stake in national policy debates and that the government knows what civil society wants. This allows governments to improve their policies.

So the Jordanian ESC is playing a crucial role in what is a crucial country in the region. Jordan is a country facing many challenges. But we know from the past that it has the resourcefulness to positively embrace such challenges. Proof of this is the fact that it has now taken over the Co-Presidency of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). This is not an easy task and I commend Jordan for its willingness to carry the UfM project forward.

For those of you who are new to the summit, the purpose of the EESC's activities in the Euromed region is to engage with all types of civil society partners in order to support them through knowledge exchanges and to help them to become better involved in policy making at national and regional level. That is an aim we share with you.

I am pleased to say that for the first time we have the possibility to invite NGOs or NGO networks from each country in the region to the summit. Their participation reflects the importance of NGOs in promoting Human Rights and democratic values, in supporting women's' rights, in seeking the public's involvement in political processes, amongst many other tasks. They form an important branch of civil society complementing the other branch which is that of the socio-professional organisations such as employers, trade unions, farmers and consumers. So at this summit we are bringing together the two strands of civil society in order to promote both 'civil dialogue' and 'social dialogue'. And ideally that is what each and every ESC in the region should consist of – both strands, all categories of civil society organisations.

We have another newcomer here, and these are the participants from Libya who are taking part for the first time.

To all the newcomers: we are very happy that you are here. Welcome!



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Since I have just spoken about the different types of civil society activity, and also of the ideal composition of ESCs, I should briefly highlight the fact that we are proposing to adopt a Charter of non-binding principles – of benchmarks – for ESCs in the region. You have I believe already seen the first draft. You might ask: why a charter of *non-binding* principles for ESCs? What is the purpose if it is not binding?

Well of course we cannot make it binding. Civil society work is not about coercion. It is about persuasion and consensus, about making governments and stakeholders recognise that an even-handed approach, allowing civil society to be involved in an independent and representative manner in policy-shaping, is actually to *everyone's* benefit. It is better for everyone – for governments and civil society.

Nonetheless we hope that the charter can provide strong guidance by setting out minimum criteria that an ESC should fulfil to be considered functioning and representative. The criteria in the charter provide a clear reference point, available for everyone to see and refer to in all transparency, and hopefully they will be followed.

I am pleased to say that we have a number of high-profile speakers joining us at the summit who will boost our discussions. We have of course [Jordanian representative in opening]. We are very honoured that you are here.

Then we also have **Ms Ines Ayala Sender**, Member of the European Parliament and Vice-President of the Economic Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean, **Mr Andreu Claret**, Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation, and **Mr Chakib Benmoussa**, President of the ESC of Morocco, which has been making great strides since its establishment last year. I'm also pleased that **Mr Ahmad Majdalani**, Palestinian Minister for Labour and Agriculture, and **Mr Moussa Oumarou**, Director of Industrial and Employment Relations Department (DIALOGUE), International Labour Office (ILO) are attending. They will be speaking a bit later in the day. And tomorrow we will have the pleasure of listening to **Mr Sotiris Varouxakis**, Deputy Secretary-General for Energy of the Union for the Mediterranean, who will be speaking at the session on industrial policy and energy. This is just to name a few....

I shall not list you all, you know who you are and you all have the programme. Just to say thank you to you all for being here – we look forward to your contributions.



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Those of you who have been to our previous summits, in Istanbul and Rome, will know that this is my third summit as President of the EESC. The first one in Rome took place a couple of months before the major changes gripped the Euromed region in the wake of the Arab Spring. Last year, in Istanbul, I believe we were catching our breath and taking stock of all the dramatic events. Today in Amman we pick up where we left off last year, consolidating what we have achieved, perhaps reorienting some of our goals and I hope we can find concrete solutions to the many challenges facing the region.

I wouldn't be telling you the whole truth if I didn't admit that I am also quite concerned about events in the region. What concerns me, for example, is:

- the failure of some governments to respect basic Human Rights and liberties;
- the deteriorating social and economic situation for women in particular;
- the policy of not respecting trade union rights which has been preventing the installation of social dialogue in some countries;
- the obstacles to full freedom of expression for the media;
- the failure, as a result of such obstructionism, to generate jobs and growth.

I fear that there has been some general back-tracking in some countries.....I don't want to be a pessimist. But I do believe it is important that we are realistic about the challenges we are facing and the context in which our discussions today are taking place. I think these challenges make it all the more important that we achieve concrete results in our discussions and that we send out a strong message as civil society representatives.

It is therefore, I believe, important that we start by discussing some core themes in the region: **Improving governance by enhancing civil society's influence and involvement in policy-making**. This is a topic close to all our hearts. We all want to see governments and political authorities set up platforms and mechanisms through which civil society can voice their views on key policy issues, and then see governments take that advice on board. ESCs are one useful means of doing so.



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We will also be discussing **The social dimension: improving social dialogue, training and networking**. If economic and social progress is to be achieved in the region we need to have basic structures in place that allow employers and trade unions to sit together, negotiate and plan ahead, and we need to see ILO conventions respected.

As regards **Freedom of the media in the Euromed region**, I believe this requires no further explanation. Media freedom is the concrete manifestation of freedom of expression. It is crucial for media organisations of course, but also for civil society which as I said earlier acts through the power of persuasion and public pressure. As some of you will be aware, we held a seminar on media freedom in Cyprus, the EU country which is currently holding the EU Presidency, only last week. And I'm pleased to say that **Ms Darmanin**, the EESC's Vice-president for Communication, is here to report on the results of the seminar, as are two speakers who took part, and we can take the discussion forward from there.

This of course is just the start of our summit.

We then have further key themes, such as **industrial policy and the role of the Union for the Mediterranean**. As you will know if you attended last year's summit when we discussed renewable energies, the region has major potential to develop a powerful industrial policy in the **energy sector**, and this will once more be the focus of our discussions on industrial policy.

I mentioned it earlier. The situation for women in the region is very worrying. So it is very good that we will be discussing **The economic and social situation of women in the Euro-Mediterranean region** which I believe must remain a priority for us. Women represent half the population in the region. They are already making a major economic and social contribution to society, but don't always get the credit for it. They are also a major economic growth factor for the future.

What is very worrying in the region also is the cleavage between the increased use of limited resources by a growing population on the one hand, and the threat of environmental degradation on the other. That is why I'm pleased that we will be examining **The sustainable development challenge in the Euromed Region**. This is a topic that is close to my heart, and one which I believe needs to be mainstreamed into all policy discussions.



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Last, but certainly not least, we have the topic: **Fighting corruption in the southern Mediterranean region**. Once again, I don't think this needs any detailed explanation. This is key topic for all countries in the Mediterranean region, north and south, and I'm pleased that we have amongst us as one of the speakers, **Mr Khalid Laraichi** from the Moroccan central corruption prevention agency who will update us on the fight against corruption in Morocco and the wider region.

I should just underline briefly that even if this is my last summit as President of the EESC, our Committee will continue its work in the Euromed region into the future. I believe that this forum of ours, where civil society partners from the whole region can come together to discuss subjects of crucial importance for the region, continues to be something we badly need in these challenging times. I am sure our summit today will prove this once more.

Thank you for your attention.



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