



**European Economic and Social Committee**  
**The President**

Brussels, 19.09.2012

**Workshop on**  
**Sustainable urban Development – which role for civil society?**

**Staffan Nilsson's opening remarks**

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

Dear Chairman, Dear Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address you all at this workshop, organised by the European Economic and Social Committee on the role of civil society in a sustainable urban development. As you know, this workshop is our contribution to the EU-China Majors' Forum that is being held in our premises these two days.

Beyond that, this workshop is also part of our current work as stakeholders in the EU-China Partnership for Sustainable Urbanisation. Indeed, the fifth pillar of that Partnership is civil society at large. We started contributing to it already this year together with our Chinese civil society counterparts, the Chinese European and Social Committee. You can read our joint proposals to the subject on the documents that you have at your disposal, and which reflect the work of our EU-China Civil Society Round Table.



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## **The EESC's work in relation to China**

Some of you may not be aware of what our EU-China Round Table is, so before I start sharing my views with you about sustainable urban development, I'd like say a few words about the cooperation of the EESC with China:

We maintain regular contacts and dialogue with our partner, the Chinese economic and social council, since 2007, when a mandate was given to us by the EU-China Head of State Summit. The purpose of this dialogue, which is done through what we call The EU-China Round Table, is for us to discuss all issues that are on the political and economic agenda. The Round Table meets twice an year.

These meetings have proven to be a very useful tool for putting across the demands and recommendations of civil society organisations to the EU and Chinese political authorities. They have contributed more and more to the people-to-people dimension of EU and China relations and opened a space for frank, non-political dialogue on issues of common interest to both Chinese and European organisations.

## **The theme of our workshop today**

Our workshop today is about cooperation between public authorities and civil society in the area of sustainable urban development. I'm very glad that we are tackling this issue, because it is essential that civil society organisations are involved in the design, formulation and implementation of public policies related to urbanisation. As one of our Round Tables concluded recently, civil society organisations are instruments that facilitate mediation between diverse interest groups (and by those I mean the public, residents, immigrants, taxpayers, workers, employers, pensioners, local authorities, etc). This is exactly our task today.

I do not need to get too much into explaining the extent of the problem, which all of you know well. About three quarters of the European population lives in cities, while the level of urbanisation in China is growing very fast: it has reached 50% of its population now, and is quickly increasing its pace. From a global perspective, change in cities plays, and will continue to play, a decisive role in



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any economic, social and territorial development. Without input from cities, the social and environmental "sustainability" of any national or, as it is indeed the European case, supra-national growth model cannot be maintained.

Sustainability, as you all know, means guaranteeing a balanced development of the economic, social and environmental aspects of a policy. As regards urbanisation, the economic side of it should involve, for example, the investment and maintenance of urban infrastructures and services. At the same time, some fundamental social aspects have to be taken care of, like social, education and health benefits for resident and immigrant populations. From the environmental point of view, the list is long: clean water supply is a serious issue: citizens of most if not all Chinese cities cannot drink water from the tap, for instance; the internal immigration from farm to town means rural desertification, and a serious risk of food supply problems as a consequence; not to speak about the challenge of achieving low-carbon emitting cities...

I will stop the list here, but as you see one first piece of evidence is that the EU and China have a good amount of shared problems when it comes to facing the development of our cities. Urban policies implemented so far have proven quite unbalanced. This is where this exchange of experiences today will prove its value. As you know, Chinese massive urbanisation came after the same phenomenon happened in Europe. The EU is happy to provide its experience to our Chinese friends, so that they do not repeat our mistakes.



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## **Sustainability at local level: the need for dialogue between local governments and civil society on sustainable urbanisation**

Sustainable urbanisation is a typical example of a global problem where local solutions are first required. That's why the EU-China Partnership on Sustainable Urban Development has focused first of all on the role of city majors.

So let's start with a sheer, elementary truth: our cities are not sustainable. Many policy areas need to be addressed in order to change this, and of course we cannot tackle them all here today. So we decided to focus this workshop on the issue of **urban governance**, which is one of the key elements of the UE-China Partnership on sustainable urbanisation.

Urban governance, which is the responsibility mainly of local authorities, is a key element here. It should focus on achieving good communication and cooperation between local authorities and local civil society organisations when it comes to defining the development policy of a town.

Local authorities and governments know very well that, if they want successful policies that reflect and address the reality on the ground and have the support of the people, they need to consult with the main economic and social stakeholders. When it comes to the issue of how to develop our cities in a sustainable manner, inclusive policies are really crucial.

### **Some possible solutions and positive side-effects**

Different models and solutions can of course coexist, because the economic, social and environmental constraints differ between the cities within the same country and even more so between countries; but what we favour is an urban development that improves efficiency, preserves the environment and encourages social integration. It would be extremely important that sustainable development indicators are integrated in local public procurements, and those qualitative indicators, especially when forecasting urban development, are defined with the support of civil society.

From a political point of view, I also believe that civil society's regular and informed involvement in urban planning and review of implementation (the best conceived policy needs adjustments along the way, we all know that) is essential



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for promoting and upholding the accountability of local authorities and of other stakeholders involved. This is one key benefit of what is known as participatory democracy: increased political transparency and accountability.

There are other more specific proposals that we have put forward, and that we would like to share with you. But for this I will give the floor to Mrs Evelyne Pichenot, sitting here by my side, who will explain what our thoughts and recommendations have been so far. I will only mention one of her very wise recommendations: the shift in the governance of public goods from “top down” to “bottom up” approach. I’m happy to agree to this institutional innovation. Our two working sessions today will indeed present examples of both approaches. Let’s listen to them.

Thank you for your attention.



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