



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

21 June 2012, 11.15 -13.15h  
EU Pavilion – Athletes' Park – Rio de Janeiro

**Civil society taking global responsibility**  
**Models of civil society participation in sustainable development**  
**from local to global level**

**Staffan Nilsson opening speech**

Welcome the European Commission President, President Bresso and Danish Minister Daniel Friis Bach, representing the EU Presidency, and all the other panel speakers and audience.

I am the president of the EESC and I will chair and lead you through this side event.

**The EESC is representing European civil society within the institutional setting of the EU.** We have members coming from different civil society groups of all European Member States. We are advising, through opinions, in EU policy decision-making.

Engaging people for a sustainable Europe and for a sustainable world lies at the heart of the EESC work programme during my mandate as the president. Civil society involvement is our *raison d'être* as European Economic and Social Committee. Civil society dialogue is our job, is our expertise and we would like to contribute with this to the Rio+20 process.

In this event we want to share experiences of civil society participation by looking at different models from global, regional, national and local level. There is no right or wrong model, as long the dialogue and involvement were have come out into meaningful results and make an impact.



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I will just mention now our work on Rio+20 and then my colleague Brenda King will talk more about how the EESC has been enabling participation of civil society in a broad range of fields.

We have organised a **European civil society dialogue and consultation process on sustainable development** with several hearings and conferences in the last one and a half year. We have agreed with civil society organisations on a list of messages to the EU and world leaders to take on board during the UN Rio+20 summit.

The EESC has an **on-going dialogue with civil society representations in other parts of the world**, in particular from the BRICS countries, including the Brazilian CDES. Sustainable development and Rio+20 was a central issue on the agenda of our meetings. Yesterday we have adopted [a joint report with civil society from Brazil](#), and we went even further: we have agreed on a joint statement with civil society in BRICS countries.

After the Rio+20, the EESC will continue this dialogue with its counterparts from other world regions, in order to promote the concept of sustainability and to help implementing the results from Rio.

But we are still in Rio. Negotiators already agreed an outcome document. The EESC delegation analysed the outcome, and of course [we have different opinions](#), however we could all together formulate a reaction.

First of all, as an EU advisory body, **we contributed to the EU's input and position in the negotiations**; we appreciate the EU negotiators' efforts to push for ambitious targets and to secure a real deal, rather than a mere statement of intent, at the Rio+20 conference. So, Jose, I'm sure your people have done the best they could. However **we ask the EU to stick to its internal commitments on sustainable development and to keep pressing home the argument in its dealings with its partners.**

Our strong belief is that Rio+20 could have reached a better deal, but the road from Rio is as important as the road to Rio.

We know that negotiations have been tough but there is a deal and an agreement – and that is a good thing! Overall **we are pleased that the green economy has been included in the agreement as the main way to**



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**achieve sustainable development, we welcome the introduction of sustainable development goals and of the provisions intended to strengthen international sustainable development governance.**

The agreement that has been negotiated opens up new avenues for further development and will see improved sustainable development in a number of areas.

However we regret that the agreement lacks ambitious and action - oriented decisions. The Rio+20 outcome acknowledges many of the world's needs but does not reflect the urgency of the situation.

While the outcome text recognises the role of businesses and civil society stakeholders, **there are no new established mechanisms to ensure effective civil society participation in the transition process towards sustainable development.**

One of our main messages remains this one (and this is also what we mentioned to Commissioner Potočnik last evening): the EU and all other international parties must effectively involve civil society structures in the Rio+20 follow-up that is designed to secure the transition towards a new green economic order.

It is important that governments set the frame for a change towards sustainable development and a green economy. And in the end it is the civil society actors that can actually make the change happen on the ground! Civil society has to take global responsibility!

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