

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

**SPEECH**

**by**

**Mr Roger Briesch**

**President of the European Economic and Social Committee**

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

Prime Minister,  
Ministers,  
Fellow Chairmen and Presidents,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all I would like to say how pleased I am to be here today for the opening of the Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions.

I am delighted to meet up again with all those who have been involved in the Partnership since the beginning and with whom we have been influencing European policy in order to define a co-development policy between the two shores of the Mediterranean and, consequently, set up the network of ESCs and similar institutions which is meeting today for the eighth time.

I am also very pleased to be in Malta, which is a model for dialogue between peoples of different origins. Furthermore, I am delighted that, in a few months time, Malta will become a full member of the European Union. I must thank the Maltese authorities and in particular **the Honourable Dr Eddie Fenech Adami**, Prime Minister, for hosting this Summit. Thanks are also due to the Maltese Council for Economic and Social Development for the first-class organisation of this meeting, including my friends, its current chairman, **Mr Victor Scicluna** and its former chairman, **Edward Scicluna**, without whom we would not all be here in Valetta today.

Today's Summit is historic as it is the last one before three significant changes are made to the EU and the Partnership:

- EU enlargement,
- the Intergovernmental Conference and
- the implementation of a new neighbourhood policy.

This is the last time that we will meet in the current configuration of 15 EU members and 12 Mediterranean partner countries. As you know, 10 countries will join the European Union on 1 May 2004 and our next Summit will therefore take place in a new configuration, with 25 EU members and 10 Mediterranean partners. I would also like to welcome the co-chairmen of the central and eastern European Joint Consultative Committees, whom we have invited to attend the Euromed Summit for the first time.

The draft Constitution of the European Union submitted to the Intergovernmental Conference provides for major changes in terms of foreign policy. By appointing an EU Foreign Minister, it aims to remedy the asymmetry between Europe's economic and political power. I am convinced that greater political influence could help Europe to solve conflicts peacefully, particularly in the Middle East.

The European Union has adopted a new neighbourhood policy on the basis of the Commission communication. I believe that this new policy was a vital response to the legitimate concerns raised by the enlargement process. Enlargement is, and must be, an opportunity for the Mediterranean area and the EESC will keep a close eye on the process.

Allow me at this stage to say a few words about the ongoing dramatic and intolerable situation in the Middle East. Acts of terrorism, violence, destruction, suffering and human rights violations have continued apace over the last few months.

The road map, a genuine international peace plan that we wholeheartedly support, has not really been applied and has not halted violence. However, in the last few weeks, light has appeared at the end of the dark tunnel of the Middle East conflict. As a fervent supporter of peace, but not a pacifist, I cannot ignore the drafting of an unofficial peace plan by leading Israeli and Palestinian figures: the Geneva initiative, which is receiving more and more support. Although it has only been met with limited approval by the political authorities, it shows that solutions are being sought by people of good faith on both sides. In addition, the Tel Aviv rally on 1 November – bringing together citizens and civil society – and the voices expressing agreement in all sectors of society are positive signs that must be followed up by initiatives within Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

No-one can remain indifferent to this situation, which should encourage us as representatives of organised civil society to give resonance to the voices of the men and women in that region who are calling for peace, democracy and development.

In this spirit, while highlighting the atrocious and outrageous nature of all terrorist acts, I agree with **Commission President Prodi's** statement that: "The fight against terrorism must not be used as a pretext for curtailing social freedoms or for abandoning efforts to improve human rights.

Lastly, I would like to round off this point by pointing out that intolerance, dehumanisation, economic and social deprivation and the lack of prospects are also causes of confrontation. In this context, we – the representatives of organised civil society – have a vital role to play by maintaining a permanent dialogue between ourselves, despite our differences, and by asking our authorities to take the necessary steps to secure genuine economic and social development.

At the dawn of the historic enlargement phase, and in the difficult context I have just described, I would like to make a few comments about the state of our Partnership after eight years of existence. I do not intend to undertake an exhaustive assessment but I would like to share some thoughts with you in order to determine some areas that we can explore together.

### **The architecture of the Partnership**

The architecture of the Partnership is now basically complete with the conclusion of association agreements with all countries concerned, except Syria with whom negotiations are still in progress. However, the slowness of the ratification procedures is deplorable, and I hereby appeal to EU Member States to finally ratify the agreements signed with Egypt, Algeria and Libya. I would also like to see the establishment of a genuine Euro-Mediterranean parliamentary assembly with whom we could cooperate on the basis of contacts established by our follow-up committee and by its chair, **Ms Cassina**, whom I would like to thank warmly for all her work over the last year.

### **Economic development**

The gradual creation of a free trade area for economic and social development is still one of the Partnership's major objectives. Although there are some positive elements in the macroeconomic situation of countries in the region, the growth rate in recent years has clearly been insufficient to cope with the rapid expansion of the workforce or to improve living standards.

I, and the EESC with me, was therefore very interested by the excellent report drawn up by **Mr Pasty** and the French ESC on *New knowledge, new jobs – the impact of new technologies*. I particularly agree with the main findings of the report, which also constitute the Partnership's main challenges: the need to increase direct investment flows and to emphasise the need to make full, effective use of human resources. I also recommend that we support the initiative of the EU Presidency and the European Commission to set up a branch of the European Investment Bank with specific responsibility for the Mediterranean.

I think that two important aspects should also be highlighted:

Firstly, the need to promote south-south integration and trade. I welcome the initiatives taken in this area and particularly the Agadir agreement which provides for the establishment of a free trade area between Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia and Egypt by 2006.

Secondly the importance of consulting civil society when the impact studies on the free trade agreements called for by **Commissioner Lamy** are being carried out. The EESC will take steps to ensure that the study's authors consult the Partnership's civil society.

### **The lack of public interest**

The findings made by my friend, **Mr Dimitriadis**, in his opinion on *Greater involvement of civil society in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership at national and regional level* are of concern, as

despite the progress made, he highlights the lack of information, the lack of access to funds and the inadequate involvement of civil society.

I have to admit that what concerns me most about the Partnership is this very finding: the lack of interest in this agreement by the public at large; this fosters frustration and scepticism to a level equalled only by the hopes generated by this agreement in 1995. I am convinced that no international agreement, particularly one that aims to change economic, social and environmental conditions, can truly succeed without public support.

However, those of you who know me will be aware that I am not prone to pessimism. I would rather call for mobilisation to give a new impetus to our action.

I have great hopes for the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for dialogue between cultures, as long as this Foundation is open to the participation of civil society. ESCs should show their willingness to contribute to this Foundation through their membership and activities.

I also think that we should concentrate on our specific features and added value. Take for example the topics discussed at the Summit: new technologies, the participation of civil society, the dissemination of the culture of participation and the establishment of consultative structures. I believe that a special effort should be made to strengthen existing dialogue structures and contribute to the creation of new ones. I therefore call for the continuation of actions undertaken by the follow-up committee and of the activities of the TRESMED project.

However, existing or future dialogue structures will only secure full legitimacy if they remain open to developments within civil society at large. The European ESC and some national ESCs have begun in-depth discussions on representativeness and are considering measures to ensure that those components of civil society not represented in our ranks participate in our work. I hope that all ESCs bordering the Mediterranean will undertake to hold similar discussions at their own pace, while taking account of their specific national features. I am pleased to note the presence here today of several representatives of organised civil society networks from socio-occupational organisations of employers, workers, farmers and NGOs.

In conclusion, allow me to quote what I, as a representative of organised civil society, consider to be the best definition of the objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The definition was given at the third Euro-Mediterranean ministerial conference: *"to transform the Mediterranean Basin into a region of dialogue, exchange and cooperation by reinforcing democracy, respect for human rights, fundamental social rights, the rule of law, good governance, as well as sustainable and balanced economic and social development, by taking measures to combat poverty and promoting better understanding between different cultures"*.

I think that we can all agree on these objectives. Let us therefore continue our action and our dialogue in order to ensure genuine economic, social and participative democracy within the Partnership.

Thank you for your attention.

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