Dear Minister,

During the Informal meeting of the Ministers responsible for cohesion policy in Nicosia on 6th November 2012, I had the opportunity to express the EESC’s concerns about the ongoing negotiations on the Cohesion Policy proposals for the programming period 2014-2020. I would like to re-affirm the concerns I expressed then.

The EESC has always expressed a highly positive view on the Union's Cohesion Policy, and more recently its ability to contribute directly to achieving the goals of the EU's 2020 growth strategy. We have further argued strongly for enhancing the role of civil society in the preparation and implementation of cohesion policy through strong and genuine partnership.

Partnership with regional and local authorities as well as with organised civil society is a fundamental principle underlying the EU’s Cohesion Policy and our work for the Commission, which was widely disseminated among Parliament, Council and the Member States, has clearly shown that the impact of EU cohesion projects is strengthened significantly where there is a strong and genuine partnership involvement.

Therefore, the EESC is extremely concerned by the orientation of discussions within the Council leading to a dilution of the partnership principle, a decrease of socio-economic and civil society stakeholders’ participation and the deletion of the Code of Conduct in Article 5 of the Common Provisions Regulation.

We urgently request that the original Commission’s proposals on the full and equal participation of the relevant partners be reinstated in the partnership contracts and progress reports, the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes as well as in the monitoring committees and steering committees as specified in the Code of conduct.

We sincerely hope that you will be able to share our point of view and can contribute towards a reversal of the current orientation of the Council’s discussions. Thanking you for your kind attention in this matter, we remain.

Yours sincerely,

<signed>

Staffan Nilsson