



European Economic and Social Committee

Summit of Heads of State and Government

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Speech by

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Heads of State and Government,
Ministers,

May I start by thanking you for inviting the representatives of civil society to participate in this summit to mark the 10th anniversary of the Barcelona Process.

I would like to join you in expressing my solidarity with the government and people of Jordan. On 20 and 21 November, Amman hosted our Euromed Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions. Despite the dramatic events of 9 November, we were determined to hold our summit in Amman and our decision was supported by all the Partnership countries and their civil society representatives.

I am here in my capacity as President of the European Economic and Social Committee; our committee serves as an institutional bridge between Europe and organised civil society, but also, and especially in the context of this meeting, as the coordinator of the Euro-Mediterranean network of economic and social councils and similar institutions. For ten years we have been holding regular meetings on the basis of the mandate given to us by the 1995 Barcelona Declaration, in which the European Economic and Social Committee was invited to take the initiative in establishing links with its Mediterranean counterparts and equivalent bodies. My presence here today is therefore particularly significant.

In the last ten years we have managed to build at all levels - political authorities, administrations, parliaments and civil societies - a genuine network and working relationships which offer hope for the future. Euro-Mediterranean organised civil society, under the auspices of the European Economic and Social Committee, has therefore made a valuable contribution to the Barcelona Process.

We have drawn up joint recommendations on several subjects of importance to the Partnership, on issues such as energy, water and desertification, as well as migration flows. In addition, we have contributed to the development of the consultative function and to the establishment of bodies in several Mediterranean partner countries where representatives of civil society can engage in dialogue; we derive great satisfaction from this.

The focus of my short speech will be a review of the Partnership and the impetus it requires.

We believe that the implementation of the Barcelona Process has had rather mixed results. In fact, it has failed to live up to the high expectations it created in 1995, both politically and in the economic and social spheres.

We think, however, that the Partnership should be given an impetus for the same reasons that it was established in 1995. This policy should help to strengthen regional integration and in particular South-South integration.

For the representatives of civil society - employers, employees, farmers, professions, consumer NGOs and others – the revival of the Partnership must be based around two priorities: strengthening the Partnership's social dimension and developing the consultative function.

First and foremost, there can be no economic development without social development. We think that the Partnership has not given sufficient consideration to this issue and that over the next few years it should embrace and develop this issue to a greater extent. This could be achieved by establishing a structured dialogue on the subject and by providing greater technical and financial support to organisations and institutions working in this area. This could also be achieved if economic and social partners played a bigger role in determining and implementing national policies and action plans adopted jointly by the European Union and the partner countries.

As the second priority, developing the consultative function is in my opinion essential. The consultative bodies play an important role in representing and reconciling the various interests that exist in society. We therefore call for the consultative bodies to be strengthened in countries that already have them and set up in countries that do not. It goes without saying that these bodies must be able to act independently and have at their disposal the resources they need to function. What is more, they must remain open to all representatives of civil society and help to give practical expression to the important concept of participatory democracy.

We are convinced that developing the consultative function, and, in particular, setting up economic and social councils, can contribute to better governance and help society develop in a more harmonious way. To this end, I call upon you to adopt the following points at your Summit as priorities:

- the strengthening of the capabilities of socio-occupational organisations and of the other components of civil society,
- the adoption of a regulatory framework allowing the consultative bodies to function independently,
- the development of the consultative function at national level and within the Partnership.

The network of economic and social councils and similar institutions is ready to take any initiatives you consider useful in order to give the Partnership the necessary impetus.

Thank you for your attention.
