



*European Economic and Social Committee
The President*

Brussels, 13 July 2012, Brussels, Scotland House

EPC Policy Dialogue

"The road from Rio: non-state actors as drivers of sustainable development?"

Staffan Nilsson's speech

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

The EESC has been very actively involved in the run-up to Rio, enhancing civil society dialogue in preparation of the Conference and at the Conference.

We were committed to contributing to the EU's position and to mobilising EU civil society in order to push EU and world leaders towards an ambitious outcome.

Now, coming back from Rio we wanted to bring Rio home, share the assessment of the EESC Rio delegation with all



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EESC members and **start dialogue with wider European civil society and the European Commission on the Rio follow-up.**

As so many others, we do have **mixed feelings about the Rio outcome.** It is good that we have an agreement and **the outcome text contains various elements on which we can build on.**

We had, together with representatives from European civil society organisations and networks, formulated our key messages for the Rio negotiators and I would like to give you an overview on what the Rio outcome looks like in comparison to our messages:

1.) *A clear political signal:* not there

2.) *Clear commitment for sustainable development:* yes there is a commitment but the sense of urgency is missing, no reference to the planetary boundaries



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3.) *Green economy roadmap*: no roadmap but recognition of green economy as an important tool for sustainable development

4.) *Access to enough food, clean water and sustainable energy*: yes, here we find a lot on what to build. Commitment to MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) underlined. But crucial role of women and need for their empowerment is not strong enough. We criticize that reproductive rights of women have been deleted from the text.

5.) *Social dimension*: yes, here the text looks quite good, for the first time the UN is mentioning of just transition. We see recognition of social partners, workers as active agents for change, decent work, gender equality, social protection floor.

6.) *Need to effectively involve civil society*: some good developments. There is broad recognition of the role of civil society despite the lack of new binding institutional mechanisms. We would have liked it to be more concrete,



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e.g. mentioning of the importance of involving multi-stakeholder fora such as Economic and Social Councils in the development of green economy policies.

7.) *Commitment of developed countries to reduce their resource use*: resource efficiency is mentioned

8.) *10 Year work programme on sustainable consumption and production*: has been adopted

9.) *Limitations of GDP as a means of measuring societal well-being*: is recognized, complementary indicators are to be developed

10.) *Sustainable Development Goals*: are in the text, although not as defined goals yet but as starting point for a process that should develop SDGs as part of an overarching development agenda post 2015

11.) *The role of business*: is recognized, see also the positive mentioning of sustainability reporting



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12.) *Concerning our governance proposals:*

Three comments:

- a) a high-level political forum will be created, preparatory work starts this autumn, important mainstreaming of sustainable development for all parts of government;
- b) upgrading of UNEP through universal membership, more functions, more stable financing;
- c) Ombudsman for future generations: that's not in the text but there is an opening of a certain perspective (UN Secretary General was asked to look into this and assess the need for such an institutional mechanism).

But we can't help seeing the **huge discrepancy between the Rio text and the aspirations, ambitions and commitments** which were visible in the myriad Rio+20 events and statements from **civil society**.

So when we talk about *"taking Rio home"* it is not only how to implement the Rio decisions and follow-up on the processes launched but also to seize the momentum, and continue civil society actions and push for political decisions.



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The **feedback** received so far from our partners in the European civil society and from our partners in the European Commission concerning the EESC's Rio contribution is a **positive** one and we have already heard several **requests to continue the approach chosen for the Rio preparation also for the Rio follow-up, also this week at our Plenary debate with Commissioner Potocnik and high representatives from civil society and academia.**

Because as I already said, **the road from Rio is at least as important as the road from Rio:** we can't afford to release our efforts now, the situation of our planet, the situation of millions of people suffering from hunger, malnutrition and distributional injustice don't allow this.

And the argument that we can't afford investment in sustainable development in a time when many EU member states are struggling with the economic and financial crises is not a valid argument, because in my view the two are interlinked and **we should address the**



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crises with coherent and strong policies for an inclusive, green economy.

On that point we had a very interesting contribution from Laurence Tubiana, French institute for sustainable development and international affairs, this week in our plenary debate. She rightly pointed to the factors that make investment in green economy not a luxury question but just **the tool we need to solve the current situation in EU**. Investment in green economy has got the right volume to trigger economic growth and is investment in the technologies of the future. Coherent public policies in that direction are needed to create the necessary trust.

We have a first list of thematic Rio-issues to be followed:

- the Sustainable Development Goals,
- civil society involvement,
- social dimension of sustainable development.

I would like to stress the **importance of the process for defining the Sustainable Development Goals**. The EU has to be strong and vocal here and civil society has to be



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heard. My colleague Hans-Joachim Wilms, Chair of the EESC Sustainable Development Observatory, has rightly urged Commissioner Potocnik yesterday not to go the New York negotiations on SDGs without having consulted with European civil society before. **The EESC is ready to engage strongly and to facilitate civil society involvement and meaningful contribution to this process, like we did in the run-up to Rio.**

I would like to end on this point: **in Europe we have to walk the Rio talk**, which means that also we in the EESC will make sure that when we work on our opinions on Commission initiatives we will consider the sustainable development aspects- economic, social and environmental. We have already been doing it, and still there is a lot of room for improvement. In particular, **we will not forget our Rio messages when we work on the Europe 2020 strategy.**



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