



European Economic and Social Committee

CIVIL SOCIETY TO WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE DANISH EU PRESIDENCY

The coming six months will not be easy ones for the European Union. As Denmark takes over the EU Presidency from January to July 2012, it has the challenging task of steering Europe back towards growth and stability.

"In the middle of what may be the worst economic, social, political and institutional crisis Europe has ever known, Denmark's strong leadership is crucial", emphasises Staffan Nilsson, president of the European Economic and Social Committee. The EESC has pledged to work actively alongside the Presidency – with the close involvement of civil society across Europe – to support and promote environmental, economic and social progress.

Fostering dialogue and participation and strengthening the involvement of people at grass-roots level are central to the EESC's mission. The Committee's members play a crucial role in explaining EU policies in their own countries, listening to the public's interests and needs and channelling this feedback into the debate in Brussels. A successful exit from the crisis and a sustainable jobs and growth scenario will be achieved only if the whole of society feels committed and all actors take full responsibility. "At a time when important decisions are being taken, decisions which will have an impact on all our lives, public involvement in and co-ownership of the reforms is more vital than ever", the EESC president says.

Whilst short-term actions are needed to overcome the crisis, it is also crucial to maintain a long-term vision to create the best conditions for the welfare of Europe's future generations.

With this in mind, the EESC is continuing to focus on sustainability and has pledged to see it mainstreamed across all policies. Pursuit of the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth objectives of the EU 2020 strategy is already an EESC priority, under the leadership of its Europe 2020 Steering Committee. This expert committee is to draft an Opinion on the EU's Annual Growth Survey for the meeting of European leaders in March.

Clearly, the economy will be top of the agenda in 2012, with negotiations on the EU's long-term financial framework after 2013, as well as the more immediate debt crisis to

deal with. "The EESC's job is to contribute to this process by providing good guidance," says Committee member Sinne Conan of the Confederation of Danish Industries.

Consumer confidence

2012 marks the 20th anniversary of the launch of the internal market – undoubtedly one of the EU's most significant achievements, which has helped to generate jobs and growth. Modernising the single market to make Europe more dynamic is a Presidency priority. Reflecting its special expertise in consumer protection, the EESC is holding its annual European Consumers' Day event in Copenhagen in March 2012. "Consumer confidence is essential if the single market is to be revitalised," insists EESC member Benedicte Federspiel, of the Danish Consumer Council.

Environmental and climate issues have always been high on Denmark's agenda, and it will be working on a long-term strategy from now until 2050. The EESC is planning a number of events to examine energy policy, including a major conference on building a European Energy Community, in cooperation with the Danish Presidency, in January 2012. It is also developing its message and contribution for the United Nations Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held in June 2012. The EESC's Sustainable Development Observatory has taken the lead in coordinating a wide-ranging public consultation and in February 2012, together with the European Commission, the Committee is organising a conference to foster dialogue, exchange experiences, look for best practices, discuss and agree what has to be done, and make proposals to decision makers on topics such as the green economy, consumption, governance and the eradication of poverty.

Denmark's fourth priority is to create a safe Europe. In the context of migration policy, the EESC is already playing an active part in promoting social cohesion: together with the European Commission it will organise the seventh meeting of the European Integration Forum, set up as a platform for dialogue on this important topic.

Listening to young and old

The social impact of the crisis must not be forgotten over the coming months. "Europe's biggest problem is unemployment – not least for young people," says EESC member Marie-Louise Knuppert of the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions. She is calling for new proposals to help young job-seekers into the labour market. The Committee takes a special interest in the views and experiences of young Europeans – tomorrow's decision-makers – and in April 2012 will hold its third youth plenary session: "Your Europe, Your Say!" in Brussels.

Denmark is also at the helm throughout the first half of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations 2012. The EESC has set up its own coordination group to support activities and members are taking part in initiatives throughout the EU to promote the welfare of Europe's growing population of older people.

Finally, the EESC is working with the Presidency to sustain its links with civil society outside the EU. For example, in May 2012, members will meet civil society representatives from Latin America and the Caribbean, in Chile.

Denmark itself has welcomed the Committee's commitment to action. "Our ambitions for Europe are high," declares European Affairs Minister Nicolai Wammen. "I look forward to the EESC's contribution in supporting the proposals we put forward, with the insight and expertise that the Committee is traditionally known for. This is the only way to overcome the current difficulties and promote a future of economic growth in Europe."