



European Economic and Social Committee

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**The new foreign policy of
the EU and the role of civil
society**

Brussels, 27 October 2011

OPINION

of the

European Economic and Social Committee

on

The new foreign and security policy of the EU and the role of civil society

(Own-initiative opinion)

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Rapporteur: **Mr Cedrone**
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On 14 September 2010, the European Economic and Social Committee decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion, under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, on

The new foreign and security policy of the EU and the role of civil society.

The Section for External Relations, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 25 May 2011.

At its 475th plenary session, held on 26 and 27 October 2011 (meeting of 27 October), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 111 votes to 23 with 23 abstentions.

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1. Conclusions and proposals

1.1 Strategy

1.1.1 In the light of the major changes taking place, the EU, taking advantage of the opportunity provided by the establishment of the EEAS and the creation of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, needs to redefine and update its foreign policy strategy, as regards both policies and areas of action to prioritise. Pursuing common interests and a major coordination initiative are essential to facilitate achievement of this objective.

1.1.2 Europe accounts for a third of world GDP. However, the EU is not just an economic community. The full extent of Europe's role becomes apparent in the light of the fact that it is now no longer possible for the EU Member States, acting purely as nation states, to protect their interests, establish their values internationally or address challenges which have taken on a cross-border dimension, such as migration or terrorism. Thus, a greater joint endeavour on the part of Member States in the area of foreign policy would also help to curb the trend towards an intergovernmental approach and prevent isolated measures being taken by individual countries, as has happened recently. If it were to be consolidated, this trend could speed up not just the economic decline but also the political decline of the EU, potentially jeopardising the democratic values on which it is based.

1.2 Policies

1.2.1 The EU must preserve, first and foremost, its foreign policy values, defining joint actions and policies to preserve peace, prevent conflict, develop stabilising measures, strengthen international security with due regard for the principles of the United Nations Charter, consolidate and support democracy, the rule of law, fundamental human rights and the

principles of international law, including the core labour standards, and help communities facing natural or man-induced disasters. If Europe is acting outside its borders, however, it is not purely out of human goodness or love of its neighbour, but because it is in the interest of its own prosperity at home. It therefore needs to address the issue of refugees and create prospects for people in their own countries.

1.2.2 The EU must take the lead in this field within the UN, which is primarily responsible for keeping international peace. Close cooperation is therefore necessary between the EU and the UN in civil and military crisis management and, in particular, humanitarian aid operations.

1.2.3 Moreover, the EESC believes that integrated, joint foreign policy measures need to be stepped up in the areas of energy supply and security, food security, climate change, regulating migration flows and fighting organised crime, illegal trafficking, piracy and corruption. This process of integration and coordination will also have to cover trade policy. Overall, this will be a major, complex commitment which will entail the EU's foreign policy budget being increased accordingly.

1.3 *Geographical areas of intervention*

1.3.1 The EU has to monitor and concern itself with what happens outside its borders, redefining its strategy of alliances. However, it still does not have all the means and instruments to do so as is necessary and has been called for, in order to become a genuine international **political player**. Its main problem, however, is not lack of instruments but inability to ensure consistent management of the different instruments and secure Member States' political will to this end.

1.3.2 Therefore, without neglecting, at least in economic terms, its relations with the major world regions, such as North America – with which it has a strategic relationship – South America and the Caribbean – with which the European Union has established a bi-regional Strategic Partnership – China, India and Russia, the EU must focus even more attention inside its geographical borders and on its neighbours, as it has been doing thus far. To this end, it is crucial to generate synergies between bilateral and regional relations.

1.3.3 In this perspective, it is necessary to complete enlargement to include the Balkans, which is an extremely sensitive area inside the EU's borders, pursue negotiations with Turkey, and develop an effective neighbourhood policy focusing attention on the situation in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

1.3.4 In this regard, the Mediterranean policy needs to be relaunched on new bases, with new institutions, new cooperation bodies and appropriate resources and operational instruments. The calls for democratisation and civil progress emanating from these countries must be heard and supported. The EU has a fundamental responsibility to ensure a rapid, non-traumatic transition to democracy rather than to new, albeit disguised, dictatorships, so as not to betray communities' and young people's hopes of freedom, human dignity and social justice.

- 1.3.5 To this end, more resources need to be earmarked in the Community budget for cooperation with these countries, with particular regard to institution-building, economic and social development, job creation and creation of investment opportunities in the various countries.
- 1.3.6 In this context, the EESC has a crucial role to play in implementing people-to-people measures and initiatives and developing an organic link with the genuine, representative civil society organisations in the Mediterranean and the Middle East who were behind the current transition processes, in order to support dialogue between these organisations and the various governments, and to strengthen democratic participation in upholding civil rights and the rule of law.
- 1.3.7 Africa as a whole must be the EU's other priority for action: the EU's security and stability depends greatly on the development and democratic growth of the African continent, which is so near. If the EU wants to find a solution to the destabilising waves of mass emigration caused by desertification, food crises and impoverishment of African peoples, corrupt, dishonest regimes and lack of justice and freedom, it must act effectively and immediately, signing an agreement with the African continent.
- 1.4 *International bodies*
- 1.4.1 Coordinated, effective measures should be promoted in international forums, which also need to undergo far-reaching change to make them cope more effectively with new responsibilities and new needs; the EU must manage to speak with one voice in this setting with a view to having a single representative.
- 1.4.2 In particular, the labour rights laid down in the ILO's core conventions should be placed on an equal footing with economic and free-trade rights; the EU should have one voice in the ILO as well.
- 1.4.3 The EESC believes that the EU should play an increasingly active role in that context, with particular regard to the G20 process and links with the UN's most representative institutions, especially ECOSOC, where it should represent joint positions. In this framework, reform of ECOSOC could enable progress to be made and also make civil society's voice better heard in the organisation.
- 1.4.4 Effective, long-term policies should be developed to safeguard the euro area and set up appropriate instruments to combat international speculation, abolish tax havens, reduce competition based on exchange rates and boost economic growth and decent work. Amending Article 136 of the Treaty is a major first step. Above all, it facilitates a community Europe: the central role of the Commission and involvement of the European Parliament have been guaranteed, furthering the democratic process. The same should be done for foreign policy (amending Article 24).

1.4.5 Involvement of the social partners and civil society organisations is one of the prerequisites for safeguarding and promoting the values underpinning peaceful international coexistence. The EU must promote broad-based consultation with the EESC, civil society and the social partners in order to facilitate involvement in international organisations' future governance structures.

1.5 *Security policy*

1.5.1 As regards security and defence policy, the European Defence Agency needs to be strengthened and permanent structured cooperation needs to be implemented without delay, not least to generate useful synergies and savings on national budgets, with the resources saved channelled into production investments, job creation and reducing public debt.

1.5.2 It should be possible for the security and defence instruments available to the EU to be used and recognised as genuine regional security instruments.

1.5.3 As regards security, the EU should give priority to its neighbourhood, mounting operations to stabilise crisis areas and peace-keeping initiatives.

1.5.4 In this context, the EESC hopes that, as happened after the 1998 St Malo agreements, joint experiences will be included by the Defence Agency and incorporated into the common security policy.

1.6 *The EESC*

The EESC must have a role to play in the definition and implementation of EU foreign policy and be able to contribute to it. It therefore feels it would be appropriate for EU foreign policy measures to be submitted to it for its opinion, not least in order to ensure transparency and monitoring of the initiatives concerned. Use should therefore be made of all existing EESC opinions which give guidance on aspects of the EU's foreign and security policy, and of those which concern cooperation instruments that could have an impact on foreign policy¹. Action by the EESC could prove extremely effective here, as a link between action by the Member States, the EU and the demands voiced by civil society.

1.6.1 This is necessary in order to allow involvement of organised civil society and the public in decision-making on international policy issues, which have more direct impact on the economy and European citizens' lives.

1.6.2 At international level, the EESC can pursue EU policy seeking to promote the role of civil society in negotiations and implementation of the resulting agreements. On the basis of its

¹ See for example opinions SLO/ECO/249 on the External dimension of the renewed Lisbon strategy; REX/266 on Regional integration for development in ACP countries; REX/313 on Sustainability impact assessments (SIA) and EU trade policy; REX/296 on the Development Cooperation Instrument of the European Union; and REX/263 on the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights.

accumulated experience and initiatives already taken, it believes that it should both work with the partners to advance the EU's international negotiations and be included in the mechanisms for applying and implementing these agreements, whether association, trade or other agreements.

1.6.3 In particular, in the context of consultation processes and international participation responsibilities conferred on it, the EESC will continue to act as a link with EU civil society organisations in the countries and regions targeted as priorities by EU policy.

1.6.4 It is therefore necessary that the EESC also be consulted at the different stages by the common external service, so that it can discharge its responsibilities properly in the interests of the EU citizens. To this end, a cooperation agreement could be signed between the EESC and the common external service, based on the existing agreement between the Commission and the EESC, a memorandum of understanding that sets rules and procedures for structured cooperation.

1.7 *The EU's instruments and role*

1.7.1 The potential of the Treaty must be harnessed so that the EU, starting with the EEAS, can carry increasing weight internationally, speaking with "one voice", ensuring consistency in Community policies and between EU and Member States' policies, preventing spectacular divisions which end up harming its image.

1.7.2 Instruments such as **reinforced cooperation** should be promoted in the area of foreign policy, so that a group of countries will form which will take the lead and act as a driving force to achieve increasingly integrated foreign policy, thus creating an institutional framework which is more robust and coherent in pursuing joint goals. A first step could be to sign a "Foreign Policy Plus Pact", similar to the Euro Plus Pact (Council of 24-25 March 2011).

1.7.3 The EESC therefore believes that the EU decision-making process must be improved and made more effective, in particular to raise the EU's profile internationally. To this end, the EESC hopes that the EU can find the right procedures and proposals to enable it to act with one voice in foreign policy.

1.8 *Immediate-term priorities*

1.8.1 All the European Commission bodies involved in launching the *common external service* must make every endeavour to work together, so that more is achieved than just adding a "new directorate-general" to those already in place.

1.8.2 The need must be stressed for an international agreement preventing fresh financial speculation, which is still a threat, on the basis of the proposals tabled by the EU at the G20.

1.8.3 Specific, immediate-term EU measures must focus on the Mediterranean.

- 1.8.4 The conclusions of the European Councils of 16 September 2010 and 24-25 March 2011 regarding EU strategic partnerships need to be put into practice.
- 1.8.5 Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty must be effectively and scrupulously implemented, with all the institutions called on to comply with the requirement to consult the EESC, and to dialogue closely with each other on issues which could have a direct or indirect impact on civil society, in close liaison with the EP and national parliaments.

2. **Introduction**

- 2.1 The new Treaty provides the opportunity for a radical improvement in EU foreign policy, if national governments allow it; thus, the EU's role as an international **political player** can be strengthened. Although the new Treaty does not yet meet the EU's objective needs, it has raised many expectations in the Member States and internationally. What is needed now is to give practical effect to the changes introduced and meet international society's expectations sufficiently if the EU is not to lose credibility. This objective cannot be achieved without the full, active involvement of civil society. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is given full legitimacy by Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty, as a representative of organised civil society, to contribute to European Union Common Foreign and Security Policy, and so it must be directly involved by the EU and the EEAS.

3. **The new international framework**

- 3.1 In the past the EU has played a relatively minor role in foreign policy; now it has more opportunities which it must fully exploit to halt its decline. Indeed, individually, the Member States are playing an increasingly insignificant role in the new, constantly- and rapidly-changing international framework. Greater mutual support within the EU is therefore needed, with powers shifted from individual countries to the shared framework of the EU as a whole, preventing competition between Member States, which is almost always harmful.
- 3.2 Today, more than ever, the European Union is facing numerous global challenges which call for more united agreement and greater common will to address increasingly complex threats which are shifting the geopolitical balance towards a multipolar world. In the Middle East, with particular regard to the Israeli-Palestinian question, which is still open, in Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan and elsewhere in the world there are still unresolved conflicts or areas of tension. The whole of North Africa is aflame with revolts against authoritarian regimes, whose outcomes are difficult to predict. States' security is endangered by global threats of various kinds such as religious intolerance or new nuclear programmes such as the Iranian programme.
- 3.3 Other very important factors are and/or could become contributors to instability and revolt, such as food security, population growth, social inequalities, which are on the increase, trade imbalances and, lastly, the struggle for rare earths and metals. These factors should be

addressed early on and are related to globalisation, which has nevertheless also given countries new opportunities for fighting poverty, unemployment, etc.

- 3.4 The EU is in a situation, in a "state of need" which forces it to act. However, it must act more swiftly and without delay, better than it did in cases such as the euro support fund, in the Middle East, etc. A common foreign policy is a great antidote to all this and an excellent instrument for better protecting the interests of the EU and its businesses and citizens. The Mediterranean crisis could be the opportunity for the EU to launch a common foreign policy.

4. **Reasons and goals for a foreign policy and the state of the Union**

- 4.1 Globalisation and the financial crisis have highlighted and increased the need for new finance rules and greater *European and global governance*, which the EU must champion. Hence the need for the Member States to act in close cooperation and speak as one in international bodies where they are represented individually and sometimes over-represented in terms of their international clout. European Union delegations must be able to represent the EU's position in all international institutions (Article 34 of the Treaty), starting with the UN Security Council (see European Council decision of 24-25 March 2011).

- 4.2 The EESC believes that, in order to act as one, the EU should have a common strategic approach to the challenges and opportunities of globalisation, establishing political priorities and priority areas of interest, and gradually expand the scope of measures in accordance with resources and capacity for action. To this end, a *strategy* of global *alliances* in a multipolar system is imperative for the EU. This should start with the transatlantic alliance, which needs to be consolidated with a unified political approach, given the two-way relationship which has long existed. That would stop relations between the two sides of the Atlantic weakening as they are at present. The EU will be required to play its role with conviction and credibility, to foster in practical terms a multipolar system and a new, healthy north-south balance, developing its action in respect of Latin America, Asia and, in particular, the African continent.

- 4.3 The EU needs to be more careful in making choices. Indeed, its neglect in recent years of calls from civil society on the southern side of the Mediterranean, where first the Barcelona process and then the Union for the Mediterranean have been substantial failures, is jeopardising the security of a border which is vital for the stability of the European Union. The EU must address this complex issue responsibly, seeing it as an opportunity, responding to the calls for civil, economic and social progress from civil society in those countries and encouraging the establishment of democracy and the rule of law.

- 4.4 This reflection applies to the rest of the African continent too, where the EU cannot stand by and watch China, the only country which is expanding, and overlook its own historical and geographical responsibilities; it should sign a global agreement with the continent as a whole.

- 4.5 A more active, effective EU "foreign policy" has taken shape with the gradual enlargement of its geographical borders to the east and south. It has worked well thus far but the process has yet to be completed, with the negotiations underway with the Balkans and Turkey; these negotiations cannot be drawn out indefinitely but must be undertaken openly, without preconceptions or fears, by both sides.
- 4.6 Mutual interests need to be served, with forms of partnership with countries or regional areas, to achieve balanced development which places "people" at the heart of the common interest and joint action, without underestimating *the strategic interests of the EU and its citizens*. The EU must consistently support and promote the content of the European Social Model and base its agreements on fundamental and labour rights.
- 4.7 The EESC believes that there are various policies which resonate in the EU's external relations field, where civil society has an unavoidable role to play, given their substantial impact within the EU as well: for example, in the area of *rights, rules on speculative finance, monetary policy* (the euro as reserve currency and an international economic policy instrument), *energy policy* (often used for blackmail), *environment policy, trade policy, food security, security and combating terrorism, immigration and corruption, etc.*
- 4.8 It is therefore important for the European Commission to provide objective, specific, effective information, with a contribution from the EESC, on the EU's action in the area of foreign policy and its significance and added value compared with action at national level. This is often lacking, or the process is distorted by the Member States. It is also extremely important to this end to involve the European Parliament and national parliaments.
- 4.9 The danger here is that Europeans will feel confused and question the usefulness and role of the EU. In fact, often the politicians of the various Member States have no interest in promoting work carried out in Brussels: they are more concerned with their own short-term survival than undertaking a long-term, wide-ranging project.
- 4.10 However, the European Union is still a model of balanced, sustainable growth which should be extended to neighbouring countries, based on the values of the rule of law, democracy and peaceful coexistence. Its "soft power", its transformational diplomacy, has led to the stabilisation of Europe, extending the democratic process and prosperity to many States through enlargement and neighbourhood policies.
- 4.11 That is not enough, however. The European Council of 16 September 2010 stated that "the European Union must be an effective global actor, ready to share in the responsibility for global security and to take the lead in the definition of joint responses to common challenges".
- 4.12 The EU remains the largest donor to countries in need, and so it should make better use of cooperation policy. It is the foremost trading power in the world and its stances on environmental policy are at the cutting edge, as shown by the recent Cancun summit. It

therefore has both the right and the responsibility to play a key role and take the lead in defining new multilateral rules.

- 4.13 The United Nations stands at the pinnacle of the international system. We must breathe new life into multilateralism to address both the political and the economic challenges. We need to take far-reaching action in all international spheres and help carry out a thorough overhaul of institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO. In addition, the G20 should be given a more structured, targeted role, to improve regulation of economic and financial transactions, as has long been called for, without creating further hierarchies.

5. **Security policy**

- 5.1 The EU has developed a common security and defence policy, establishing crisis management instruments and catering for the diversity of Member States' positions. It must play a major stabilising role in its neighbourhood. The EU must therefore require all the Member States to support and comply with the principles underlying peaceful international coexistence, in the knowledge that fundamental rights are not negotiable.
- 5.2 The EU has long been directly (or through its Member States) involved in various military and civil missions. In effect this is a global undertaking which is at times purely symbolic. The instruments available to the EU must be strengthened and used as genuine regional security instruments, and recognised as such. The EU must use all its instruments, including the EEAS and the HR/VP, to take tangible action.
- 5.3 In the area of security, the EU should give priority to operating in what is known as the neighbourhood: Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Balkans, Mediterranean and Africa, by means of a combination of initiatives aiming to stabilise crisis areas with peace-keeping, institution-building and economic development measures. It is in precisely these areas that civil society has a key role to play in encouraging peaceful development. The EESC is already very active and is carrying out valuable work to this end.
- 5.4 Even security and defence policy, which traditionally comes under Member States' sovereignty, is becoming increasingly important for civil society and the European public, given the potential strategic, budgetary and social implications of decisions relating to these sectors.
- 5.5 In this perspective, the EU and NATO must develop and deepen their strategic partnership to achieve better cooperation in crisis management. In addition to being a decisive element of the CFSP, the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy is also seen as an integral part of the new strategic approach of the Atlantic Alliance, agreed in Lisbon on 20 September 2010 with participation by the highest NATO and EU bodies.

6. **The EESC's role**

- 6.1 The aim of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)'s work in the field of external relations is to voice the points of view of organised civil society on EU trade, enlargement, development and foreign affairs policies.
- 6.2 The EESC monitors relations between the European Union and many countries in the world, in particular the countries and regions with which the European Union has a structured relationship, and builds relationships with civil society in these countries and regions. Close relationships with the economic and social partners and other civil society organisations in third countries have been established in order to draw up proposals, mainly on economic and social issues, and help strengthen civil society. In this framework, joint declarations addressed to political authorities are adopted.
- 6.3 Relations with our counterparts are conducted through the permanent committees. There are thus joint consultative committees with the candidate countries (Turkey, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and countries for which an association agreement exists (European Economic Area countries). Contact groups exist for the Western Balkans, Russia, Japan and neighbouring European countries to the east. Moreover, the follow-up committees work with their counterparts in the field of relations with Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, relations with Latin America and in the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean. Civil society round tables meet on a regular basis with the Brazilian and Chinese ESCs.
- 6.4 Among these specific policies, for example, the EESC has developed major activities in three areas:
- development policy, where the EESC works regularly with the Commission, providing organised civil society's contribution to the various DG Development proposals, whether in the form of opinions or in the form of joint recommendations drawn up together with civil society organisations from ACP countries;
 - EU enlargement, through its work with candidate countries, with which it sets up civil-society joint consultative committees. The role of these committees is to channel know-how, experience and information between the EU and the socio-occupational organisations in these countries regarding the scope of common policies and the actual implementation of the Community *acquis*;
 - trade policy, where the EESC provides monitoring of the social, economic and environmental impact of international agreements signed by the EU, acting as intermediary for the joint structures set up with civil society in the countries or regions concerned and putting across the views of organised civil society. This can be achieved by means of greater involvement in negotiating the EU's international agreements, which must explicitly provide for the existence and role of organised civil society.

- 6.5 In addition, the EESC has been given the task of involvement in monitoring the implementation of trade agreements signed between the EU and Cariforum, the EU and Central America and the EU and Korea. The increasing number of trade negotiations is set to expand this role considerably. The EESC also monitors implementation of the European Instruments for Democracy and Human Rights and the International Cooperation Instrument by means of specific meetings with the Commission and by working together with the European Parliament, which has a "right of scrutiny" as regards these instruments.
- 6.6 The EESC therefore has a particularly important contribution to make to achieving greater consistency between Community policies, which are having an increasing impact on international policy and are in turn influenced by it. An example is the close interconnection between internal market and international economic and financial, monetary, energy, environment, trade, social, farming, industrial and other policies. The EESC could be particularly effective, serving as an interface between the action of the Member States and the Community institutions and the needs expressed by civil society.
- 6.7 The EESC believes that these objectives should also be pursued through proper representation of civil society and effective action in international bodies, starting with the UN Economic and Social Council, the ILO and the economic and financial institutions, which have been in need of a thorough overhaul for too long now, to reflect the fast-moving change we see every day and to make decision-making processes – which often lack effective monitoring systems – more transparent.
- 6.8 The Treaty gives the EU as a whole the chance to work together with civil society, a model which should be introduced and promoted at international level. Under Article 11 of the Treaty, the EESC has a key role to play in foreign policy as regards implementing participatory democracy, on which the EU is founded, embodying "civic diplomacy" and safeguarding it for the public, including as regards **transparency of initiatives**. For these reasons, and on the basis of its work thus far at international level, the EESC believes that, as is already the case for other policies, it should be one of the key partners of the Commission, through the European External Action Service (EEAS), of the Parliament and of the Council in drawing up and monitoring foreign policy. To this end, the EESC will propose to the EEAS that a memorandum of understanding be drawn up between the two institutions to help achieve a better structure for civil society involvement in EU foreign policy, whether through opinions or other regular consultation mechanisms.
- 6.9 The EESC has already long been working very hard internationally; it has set up a network of links with similar bodies in various parts of the world, promoting the principles underpinning the EU and the calls of civil society bodies in the area of the economy, cohesion, partnership, combating discrimination and social inequalities.
- 6.10 The EESC calls for greater consistency between the actions of the various Commission DGs and EU bodies. Furthermore, it feels that the WTO should put labour rights on the same level as economic and free-trade rights, when there are countries which have failed to ratify or

apply the ILO core standards or which completely ignore them. These decisions have repercussions on European society, workers and businesses. Therefore, the EESC believes that the EU should uphold a fairer, more ambitious concept of globalisation, to prevent the jobless recovery becoming the *status quo*.

- 6.11 The EESC believes that organised civil society must be more actively involved in international policy issues, by means of a direct link and regular consultation by the EEAS. It wants to prevent EU citizens being inadequately informed about events which directly concern them.
- 6.12 To this end, the EESC can serve as a vehicle for debate at European level on issues which can no longer be resolved at national level: migration; energy; neighbourhood matters; the environment; demographic change; corruption; social and food issues; trade and development, etc. Moreover, the EESC can keep these debates in the public eye, even when other urgent matters are in danger of pushing them off the European agenda.
- 6.13 The EESC can also provide the European institutions with the expertise and the ability to analyse specific EU policies from new perspectives, representative of the interests of the sectors involved: promotion of the social economy in third countries; farmers' interests in international foodstuffs trading; the role of civil society in development policy; international water management; international trading of farm products in the WTO framework; small businesses; social cohesion; regional integration; etc.

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The President
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