



European Economic and Social Committee

PRESS

CES/09/117
25 September 2009

President Sepi's Declaration on the EESC mission to Tibet: "Our fact-finding mission in Tibet: first conclusions and main points for the Committee's incoming Report"

Following our Delegation's visit to Tibet, which took place between 11 and 15 September at the invitation of the Economic and Social Council of China, I would like to stress a few main points which have characterised this mission and which will be crucial for the future steps and achievements that will follow this visit.

It was my concern to hold a press conference on the day upon our return to Brussels, in order to provide journalists with the most genuine and fresh information, as regards our first impressions of Tibet, and in view of the elaboration of our report which we will finalise in the coming weeks, following the necessary discussions with the members of our Committee as well as further structural analysis of the several social and economic aspects involved. Our report will also incorporate the results of our discussions with representatives of the Tibetans in exile.

It was also my concern to keep our public opinion informed during the whole mission, through a daily "Tibetan journal" which I published on my blog (<http://eesc.europa.eu/organisation/president/Sepi/blog/index.asp>) regularly from China. For these reasons, I think it is important to reaffirm some of the key points that have emerged so far, in coherence with a "step by step" communication strategy that we considered the best possible approach, in view of the importance and sensitivity of such mission. The EESC Delegation which took part in the visit was composed by other two members of the Committee, Peter Clever (D, Group I) and Sukdev Sharma (UK, Group III), and was accompanied also by two members of the EC Delegation in Beijing.

Our mission was the first visit to Tibet, after the unrest of 2008 in Lhasa, by one of the EU institutions. The purpose of the visit, in the framework of the role and competencies of the European Economic and Social Committee, was to increase our knowledge of the social and economic conditions of TAR (Tibetan Autonomous Regions), in order to develop possible fields of cooperation between our civil societies, and to deepen the activities of the EU-China Round Table.



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Among the main conclusions we can claim so far, I would like to mention the following points which represent, in my opinion, the most important elements on which we shall reflect in order to suggest development cooperation projects and ideas:

Tibet has been characterised by a high level of investments by the central government, mainly on infrastructures and subsidies

Tibet suffers from a heavy dependence on the central government funding for its development and we could not see the presence of a long term development model aiming at increasing Tibetan economic autonomy

There is a high level of discrepancy between urban and rural areas. This can be source of tensions, with the Han Chinese tending to be more present in the more developed urban areas and Tibetans predominating in the poorer rural areas of the region.

The Delegation's concerns about the degree of participation of Tibetans in the region's economic development were strongly highlighted on several occasions during our mission.

China, as a key global player, has to take on stronger responsibilities in terms of opening up its culture and values. At the same time, the Tibetan culture, which I believe is a strong one, needs to be dynamic in adapting to continuous development which is an undeniable characteristic of our globalised world.

It is crucial, for a genuine and comprehensive development of Tibet, to seriously invest in the human capital and in a higher degree of participation of the Tibetans in society.

This first and very synthetic analysis is the result of our meetings with several representatives of the TAR local government, members of international and local NGOs and civil society organisations, as well as our direct perception and understanding that was only possible due to the fact that we visited Lhasa with our own eyes.

I would like to conclude addressing our institutional interlocutors and the press in particular, by calling upon their sense of responsibility towards public opinion. To those who could not attend our press conference on 18 September and to those who were not able to fairly listen to and discuss with us the reality of a region that needs to be visited and analysed directly, on the basis of a fact-finding approach far from any pre-existing prejudice.

I firmly believe that the Committee can help improve the situation of people and societies, in terms of human and socio-economic development which cannot be separated from any concern related to the protection of fundamental rights. And this is the reason why we decided to make this visit and start up this difficult work in Tibet.

Mario SEPI

EESC President