**EESC steps up relations with African civil society, reinforcing the EU's strategic partnership with the African Union**

**On 17 July, the President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Oliver Röpke, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) represented by its Presiding Officer, Khalid Boudali. The memorandum aims to formalise the partnership between the two institutions and enhance economic and social stakeholder involvement in the Africa-EU partnership.**

The signing of the MoU took place in the margins of the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the African Union ECOSOCC and the 2024 ECOSOCC Citizens Forum in Ghana. On this occasion, President Oliver Röpke also met with the EU Ambassador to Ghana, H.E. Irchad Razaaly as well as with African leaders and civil society actors.

The memorandum outlines the areas of cooperation relevant for both parties to work together with a view to achieving the objectives of the Africa-EU partnership, building sustainable and inclusive development and contributing meaningfully towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

EESC President **Oliver** **Röpke** said: '*Through this MoU, we underline our commitment to enhancing civil society participation in the Africa-EU partnership, fostering the establishment of a permanent, inclusive and representative mechanism for such engagement. It is a testament to our shared commitment to promoting the values of democracy, inclusive dialogue and sustainable development. With 1.3 billion people, the African Union and its ECOSOCC is by all means one of our largest partners and we are glad to invest further in our joint future.'*

The Presiding Officer of the ECOSOCC, **Khalid Boudali**, highlighted that: *'This MoU is more than just a document. It's a testament to the collaborative spirit nurtured between the ECOSOCC and EESC since our meeting in Brussels in June 2023 and through subsequent continuous coordination and planning meetings. Each step has reinforced our shared vision for a stronger, more inclusive partnership between Africa and Europe. The journey to this day has been marked by significant milestones, shaping our collective approach for a dynamic and impactful partnership.'*

**Background**

Relations between the EESC and the African Union ECOSOCC have strengthened since 2015 and as a result, an EESC delegation regularly participates in the General Assembly of the AU ECOSOCC. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the cooperation continued with a number of events and meetings including the EU-Africa Economic and Social Stakeholders' Network consultations which are periodically organised to gather input from stakeholders on the EU-Africa partnership.

Very recently, the EESC has started working, in consultation with the AU ECOSOCC, on an own-initiative opinion *Democracy in Africa – current situation and future perspectives. What role for the EESC?* to be discussed and adopted in an EESC plenary session towards the end of the year.