



Edited by Luigi Ulgiati, UGL Deputy Secretary, member of the EESC

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EESC: COUNCILLOR ULGIATI AT THE DECEMBER PLENARY

On the 4th and on the 5th of December, the 592nd Plenary Session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) took place in Brussels, with the participation of Councillor Ulgiati. On the agenda were very interesting debates on the priorities of the next Presidency of the European Council with the presentation of the new President António Costa, on democracy in Africa, on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, and also on housing. The Opinions adopted were also highly topical, including the one on the shortage of manpower and skills in the fields of transport, energy, infrastructure and digital technologies (TEN/836). Europe, with an ageing population and falling birth rates, is facing demographic changes that are leading to a significant reduction in labour supply, with a negative trend that will continue in the coming years. Technological developments require new and specialised skills, particularly in the areas of green technologies and digitalisation, but many companies are finding it difficult to provide in-house training and professional development courses. Thus, there are skills mismatches and labour shortages in a number of sectors, highlighting the importance of cooperation with social partners in order to improve working conditions and make jobs more attractive. In this respect, Member States

play a key role in ensuring adequate basic education and labour market policies, as well as in financing and incentivising participation in training. "In order to effectively address labour and skills shortages, while also ensuring a fair transition - said Ulgiati - we need more ambitious and comprehensive action, not only at EU level but also at Member State level, to foster social dialogue, strengthen the participation of social partners and enhance collective bargaining, also with a view to eliminating precarious work and unpaid internships while promoting quality jobs".



EU-MERCOSUR, COMMERCIAL AGREEMENT SIGNED

After 25 years of long and complex negotiations, the free trade agreement between the 27 European Union States and the four Mercosur Countries (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay) was signed on the 6th of December, at the strong impetus of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who described the milestone as "the largest trade and investment partnership the world has ever seen". The historic signing, which opens up the possibility of crea-

ting a market of 700 million people, however, has triggered a very tough debate, destined to last for a long time, and has also aroused strong perplexity regarding the conduct, behind closed doors, without transparency and social participation, of the negotiations themselves. The agreement reached envisages the gradual elimination of 92% of tariffs for imports from Mercosur and 91% for European exports, allowing the European Union to more easily export cars, machinery, textiles, chocolate,

wine, spirits, and to import mainly agricultural and fish products, beef and poultry at a good price to the Andean continent. The agreement, considered very advantageous for the automobile and machinery industry, is, on the other hand, particularly opposed by the European agricultural sector, which denounces the lack of reciprocal clauses capable of protecting producers and goods from the Old Continent. The signed pact risks, therefore, remaining on paper amidst vetoes and diverging interests.