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THE EESC AND THE SKILLS UNION

Europe needs an ambitious, inclusive and forward-looking Skills Union that supports employers, encourages the creation of quality jobs and strengthens the social and economic fabric of the European Union. This was the subject of the Opinion adopted by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) at its Plenary session in mid-July on the European Commission's "Skills Union" initiative, which calls for a bold and well-funded strategy to equip the European workforce with the skills needed for the green and digital transitions, global competitiveness and social cohesion. The EESC highlights the strategic importance of high-quality education and skilled human resources for a competitive, inclusive Europe that is ready to look to the future. However, in order to address current challenges, such as persistent skills shortages with related imbalances between supply and demand and labour shortages in strategic sectors, as well as to attract teachers and trainers, innovative reforms are needed, as well as investment in high-quality education and training. The crea-

tion of a Skills Union is therefore highly ambitious and its success depends on effective and cooperative governance, adequate funding and inclusive representation of the social partners, national authorities and other stakeholders, including civil society organisations, teachers and students. The EESC therefore calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure greater public investment and better use of EU funds to strengthen education systems at all levels, because investing in skills is not an option but a fundamental social imperative for the economic growth and well-being of Europeans. For Councillor Ulgiati, «the Skills Union must align itself with the European Education Area and be based on the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, in order to ensure that everyone has the right and access to inclusive, high-quality education and formal qualifications, regardless of whether they live in urban or rural areas, because only by investing in people and promoting a culture of lifelong learning can the EU build a more competitive, cohesive and resilient Union».

EU-USA: A SOLELY POLITICAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS

The agreement on tariffs reached between the EU and the USA is solely political and not legally binding. This clarification was provided by the EU Commission in the final Declarations of the agreement, which, in its two versions, raises many doubts and important differences. Thus, just a few days after Donald Trump and Ursula von der Leyen shook hands on the agreement on tariffs, the first significant differences are already emerging, involving various items in the trade balance between the two Continents and specific sectors of goods and products. The White House and the European Commission offer different explanations of the agreement announced on

the 27th of July in Turnberry, Scotland, designed to provide certainty to operators, markets and the economy, but which is instead generating many concerns and uncertainties, starting with arms. Trump had specified that, as a result of the agreement, Europe would invest hundreds of billions of euros in US-made weapons, in addition to those in energy through imports of LNG and oil, but this version has been rejected by EU Commission sources. There are also different interpretations on agri-food, semiconductors, pharmaceuticals and steel, the latter being a sector for which the EU claims a 50% reduction in current taxes, while the US maintains that sectoral tariffs on ste-



el, aluminium and copper will remain unchanged, with the EU continuing to pay 50%. Contrasting views, therefore, which seem to cast dark shadows over the solidity and reliability of the partnership. Meanwhile,

15% tariffs on EU goods will come into effect on the 1st of August. The rest will have to be clarified later, even if for the Americans the negotiations are closed, while for the Europeans they are still ongoing.