Edited by Luigi Ulgiati, UGL Deputy Secretary, member of the EESC N. 148 31st of October 2025

EESC: DIPLOMACY AND DISABILITY

The Plenary Session to renew the mandate, which ended last week, saw not only the inauguration of the new European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), but also the adoption of Opinions on key issues such as diplomacy and disability. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted in 2006 and in force since 2008, represents a milestone in diplomacy in the fight against discrimination against people with disabilities, establishing fundamental principles such as non-discrimination, full and effective participation in society, accessibility and equal opportunities. The CRPD is an important international legal instrument that complements the United Nations' general human rights system, within which disability moves from being a social issue to a binding matter of international law and in which the importance of international cooperation and its promotion is recognised in support of national efforts to enable the effective exercise of the rights of people with disabilities. Furthermore, the CRPD is fundamental in that it establishes a binding framework for inclusive development cooperation. At the individual level, many States use diplomacy to negotiate the implementation of the CRPD, adopt their own national laws and cooperate with other Countries to improve inclusion. The EESC welcomes the numerous measures taken by the European Union since the signing of the CRPD in 2011 to ensure that people with disabilities have equal rights and opportunities. In addition, the EU has provided funding at European level to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in various sectors: social, employment, education, health and culture. According to Councillor Ulgiati «concrete social policies are needed to improve the lives of people with disabilities, reduce economic barriers and stimulate their social and political participation. Disability - he continued - must be considered a priority on the European agenda, and the next EU financial framework must ensure that funding programmes are tailored to needs and promote accessibility and inclusion.» The hope, therefore, is that the renewed European Economic and Social Committee will also be inclusive internally, allowing all duly appointed members to participate fully in the working Groups according to their natural affiliation and not allowing the discriminatory exclusion of certain Councillors on spurious ideological grounds.

EU, NEW FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH UKRAINE IN FORCE

Kiev closer to joining the European Union Single Market with the entry into force a few days ago, on the 28th of October, of the new EU-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement regulating trade relations between Kiev, Brussels and the 27 Capitals for over a decade, aimed at consolidating and stabilising trade relations between the two parties, with particular attention to the protection of sensitive agricultural sectors in the EU and the gradual alignment of Ukrainian production standards with those in Europe. The Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), was negotiated between 2007 and 2011, signed in 2014 and entered into force in 2016, eliminating most tariffs, especially on industrial products. After the start of the Russian invasion in February 2022, the European Union introduced unilateral liberalisation measures, renewed annually for three years, known as Autonomous Trade Measures (ATM), valid until June 2025. The new revision, recently authorised and ratified, ensures the continuity and systematisation of trade relations in a context of progressive integration. The new text provides a long-term perspective in which the EU and Ukraine "will benefit from a strengthened, stable, fair and permanent trade framework" according to a statement from the European Commission. The revised Agreement is structured around three pillars: increasing trade flows, aligning production standards and a robust safeguard clause that authorises the activation of timely measures in the event of significant negative impacts on the economies involved. For the EU, this assessment can also be carried out at regional level, thus ensuring a calibrated and timely response to any critical issues. The new Agreement therefore reflects the European Union's commitment to supporting Kiev's economic integration into the European Single Market and represents a step forward for Ukraine towards full EU membership.