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EESC, COUNCILLOR ULGIATI IN BRUSSELS FOR PLENARY SESSION

The 601st Plenary Session of the European Economic and Social Committee, the first since the EESC's five-year renewal, has just concluded in the Belgian capital. The two days of intense work, held on the 3rd and the 4th of December in the sumptuous chamber of the European Parliament, featured numerous debates, including one on the EESC's contribution to the International Year of Cooperatives, which aim to build a better world, and one on the 30th anniversary of the first COP and the 10th anniversary of the Paris Agreement, which prompted an assessment of global climate action and opportunities for civil society. Also of great interest was the discussion on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) with the presence of Piotr Serafin, European Commissioner for Budget. In this regard, it was highlighted that the European Commission has proposed an MFF worth almost €2 trillion (equivalent to an average of 1.26% of the EU's gross national income for the period 2028-2034) to pursue ambitious specific objectives: increasing flexibility; simplifying, rationalising and harmonising European financial programmes; improving integration at local level; stimulate competitiveness; and create a package of EU own resources. In addition, the general structure of the MFF has been simplified to include four main headings: 1) economic, social and territorial cohesion; 2) competitiveness, prosperity and security; 3) administration; 4) global Europe. It was in relation to this last section that the Opinion REX/611 on strengthening the EU's external action within the MFF was adopted. For Councillor Ulgiati, the "Global Europe" instrument is essential for addressing future challenges «as it enables the European Union to assert its role as a global player, promoting sustainable development, multilateralism, dialogue and peace in an increasingly uncertain and complex international context».

EU, BIOECONOMY: NEW STRATEGY ADOPTED

Last week, the European Commission adopted a new Strategic Framework for a competitive and sustainable bioeconomy, with the aim of accelerating the transition to a more circular economy that is less dependent on imports of fossil fuels and critical raw materials. By using renewable biological resources from land and sea, Brussels aims to strengthen European industrial resilience, stimulate innovation and offer alternatives to fossil-based products. The new Strategic Framework updates and expands on the previous Bioeconomy Strategy of 2012 and subsequent reviews in 2018 and 2022, shifting the focus towards industrial deployment, market expansion and strengthening the EU's economic and environmental resilience. According to the EU Executive, bioeconomy is already an important pillar of the European economy: in 2023, it was worth up to €2.7 trillion and employed over 17 million people, with a significant impact on growth and employment in sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, aquaculture, biomass processing, bio-manufacturing and biotechnology. With the new Strategy, therefore, the European Commission intends to accelerate the bioeconomy with the aim of building a fossil fuel-free economy by 2040, through the consolidation of the production and use of natural products: plant-based foods, bio-based medicines, energy from crops and forests, renewable building materials and new bioplastics. The Commission is also looking at ways to simplify the procedures for approving new biobased products and increase funding in the next multiannual budget in order to remove barriers to the internal market and prevent innovation from shifting to the United States or China, where the spread of bio-based technologies is much faster. However, the Strategy does not convince everyone. Several observers warn that relying heavily on nature to increase the EU's economic competitiveness risks putting pressure on already limited resources, especially forests and agricultural land.