



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

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THE EESC AND THE COOPERATIVE MODEL

The United Nations has proclaimed 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives with the theme “Cooperatives build a better world” to highlight the growing recognition by international Institutions of the role played by cooperatives in many sectors. Among social and solidarity economy entities, cooperatives are the most structured in business terms and the most widespread worldwide in terms of legal forms and identity principles. The European Union and many international Institutions have recognised the decisive role played by social economy enterprises, and the EESC (European Economic and Social Committee) in its own-initiative Opinion CCMI/242, adopted during the December Plenary Session, has sought to emphasise how the cooperative model has been able to build competitive and profitable enterprises, whose success is also based on their inclusive capacity, worker participation and constructive interaction with local communities. The cooperative business model is fully in line with the values of the EU Treaty and the objectives of the European Compass for competitiveness. Cooperatives, which pursue both economic and social goals, are in fact an indispensable element of the “social market economy” and generate value and wealth on a par with conventional businesses. The difference with the latter, however, lies in the distribution of wealth and the value that is returned to society. Social cooperatives for work integration play a fundamental role in bringing the most excluded workers into the labour market through effective and adequate training. In addition, many cooperatives are engaged in the dual green and digital transition, even in advanced sectors such as research into hydrogen-based energy production. «European Institutions and Member States - said Councillor Ulgiati - should give greater recognition to the role of industrial cooperatives as key drivers of the European economy and introduce targeted financial incentives to encourage these forms of enterprise, which have many strengths, foremost among which is the general tendency of the cooperative model to pay greater attention to job creation and retention».



EU: EUROPEAN NETWORKS AND ENERGY MOTORWAYS PACKAGE

The European Commission recently proposed the “European Networks Package”, aimed at modernising and expanding the EU’s electricity network to enable efficient energy flows across all Member States, integrate cheaper clean sources and accelerate electrification. The Package will help to ensure secure, clean and affordable energy for all European citizens, strengthen the Union’s energy independence and support the competitiveness of the Old Continent. As part of this package, the EU Executive also presented the “Energy Highways”, essential strategic interconnections that will support the completion of the Energy Union by addressing critical bottlenecks in the EU’s energy system. Already announced by President Ursula von der Leyen in her 2025 State of the Union Address, the “Energy Highways” concern key strategic projects that respond to the most urgent infrastructure needs, requiring further support and commitment for their implementation, with a view to the creation of the Internal Energy Market. According to the Commission, many European energy infrastructures are not advancing fast enough to keep pace with the growth of renewables, while several Member States are far from the 15% interconnection target by 2030. The eight Energy Highways (selected not only on the basis of their strategic importance for the completion of the Energy Union but also on the level of EU political support needed for their effective implementation) therefore act as a fast track for the European Union to accelerate the most urgent cross-border energy projects through strengthened governance, faster authorisation procedures and increased financial instruments. The Commission also points out that upgrading key infrastructure can generate significant savings. In fact, an investment of €5 billion can reduce system costs by €8 billion, with a net benefit of €3 billion. A truly interconnected and integrated energy system is therefore welcome, as it is the basis for a stronger and more independent Europe.