Edited by Luigi Ulgiati, UGL Deputy Secretary, member of the EESC N. 155 19th of December 2025

THE EESC AND COMPETITION POLICY

EU competition policy, managed by the European Commission, aims to ensure a functioning single market by protecting consumers and businesses from unfair practices, prohibiting cartels, abuses of dominant positions, harmful mergers and state aid, and opening up traditionally monopolistic sectors such as telecommunications and energy to stimulate innovation, choice and low prices. The EESC (European Economic and Social Committee), in its Opinion INT/1096, adopted at the recent December Plenary Session, welcomes the approach taken by the European Commission to effectively integrate competition policy with the European Union's digital, green and resilience objectives, while safeguarding a competitive and efficient single market. It also welcomes the new approach used in competition policy, which supports businesses in their expansion into global markets while ensuring a level playing field. This new method should be reflected in the assessment of mergers, taking full account of innovation and resilience, but ensuring that market concentration does not lead to higher prices or lower quality. In addition, it should be ensured that all parties involved in the process, in particular the Social Partners, are adequately consulted and have the appropriate opportunities to express their views in relevant cases, including on social and labour issues, so that all the issues underlying these processes are dealt with in a sustainable manner. In this regard, Councillor Ulgiati hopes that in the future «the application of competition rules will increasingly take into account not only the effects on consumers, competing companies and the functioning of markets, but also the issue of employment and labour, with regard to issues such as "anti-poach" agreements between digital companies (non-competition agreements between companies not to hire each other's employees, thus limiting competition in the labour market and wages) and unilateral conduct that reduces or even eliminates the collective protection of digital platform workers».

EU COMMISSION: U-TURN ON INTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINES

After months of intense pressure from influential Governments, such as Italy and Germany, as well as the European automotive sector, the European Commission announced a sudden, albeit expected, U-turn on the total ban on the sale of combustion engines from 2035 during the European Parliament's Plenary Session in Strasbourg a few days ago, presenting the new EU Automotive Package. This ban, which had become a symbol of the severity of the Green Deal, has now been softened by a package of measures that represents a significant, albeit not radical, departure from the environmental policies of recent years. In order to move forward, the Commission is therefore reversing its position on the issue of automotive sustainability. This announcement was expected and is part of the Action Plan for Cars drawn up by the EU Executive to support the automotive sector and its related industries. The flexibility introduced by the omnibus package for cars provides for a reshaping of the targets: no longer a 100% cut in emissions by 2035, but a 90% reduction compared to 2021 levels. A 10% margin remains, which can also be filled with traditional engines. On the other hand, the Commission's proposed revision specifies that the Package «will allow internal combustion engine vehicles to continue to play a role after 2035, alongside fully electric and hydrogen vehicles». The rewriting of the emissions standards therefore leaves room in the post-2035 market for the sale of vehicles equipped with combustion engines, plug-in hybrids and range extenders, overcoming the idea of a transition limited exclusively to electric cars, which will still receive €1.8 billion in support through the "Battery Booster" programme for the development of a battery supply chain produced entirely in the EU. The European Commission's initiative therefore outlines a new path, which takes the form of a compromise in an attempt to balance climate objectives with industrial reality and social and economic concerns, but which will still need to obtain final approval from the Governments of the 27 Member States and the European Parliament.