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EESC, ULCIATI IN BRUSSELS FOR SINGLE MARKET SECTION MEETING

Un the 8th of January, the Single Market, Production and Consumption Section (INT) of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) held a meeting in Brussels, which was attended by Councillor Ulgiati, who spoke on the adoption of the Opinion INT/1104 on the "Programme for the Single Market and Customs for the period 2028-2034". «This is a complex and highly technical task - said Mr Ulgiati - which shows, 33 years after the establishment of the European Single Market, the critical issues that remain: the need for genuine harmonisation of customs rules, the urgency of checks to verify the conformity of goods, the importance of technical specifications and, above all, the need for tax and customs obligations. The Opinion in question - continued Ulgiati - takes into account the role of consumer associations, which is very important. It also

calls for cooperation not only between Member States but also between the different authorities operating in the customs sector, recommending maximum interconnection of IT systems and greater computerisation in order to improve controls. In fact, the latter are carried out on a very marginal basis compared to the flow of goods in circulation. Finally - Councillor Ulgiati concluded - the consolidation programme is highlighted with four fundamental policies to strengthen the European customs system: the single market, customs union, taxation and the fight against fraud». This is therefore a comprehensive Opinion in which the EESC considers that the existence of a single market implies the absence of obstacles to its normal functioning, except those necessary and duly provided for in exceptional cases by the Treaties, with the conse-



quence that goods, services, people and capital must be able to circulate safely and smoothly throughout the EU economic area, in accordance with conditions of fair competition between all economic operators.

EU: CYPRUS AT THE HELM OF THE EUROPEAN SEMESTER

From Copenhagen to Nicosia. On the 1st of January 2026, Cyprus, the only EU Member State still partially under occupation, officially took over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, succeeding Denmark at the helm of the European semester. The Cypriot Presidency concludes the 18-month trio presidency of the Council of the European Union (Poland-Denmark-Cyprus), based on their common programme of defending European values. Fourteen years after its first term in 2012, Cyprus inherits a heavy burden because 2025 has been a very difficult and complex year for the European Union: from the tariff war with the United States to the disconnect with public opinion on the conflict in Gaza and the increasingly dangerous dependence on China, the EU has found itself weak and at the mercy of an

increasingly aggressive world. The Cypriot Presidency intends to stay on the track set by the European Commission in recent months and already followed by the Polish and Danish Presidencies during 2025: the focus will be primarily on security and competitiveness. At the heart of the programme is a clear vision: to work towards an "autonomous and open Union". A European Union that is strong internally, capable of protecting its citizens, borders and strategic interests, but at the same time able to build partnerships and alliances from a position of strength, based on principles, values and respect for international law. The Cypriot Presidency's action will be based on five key points to strengthen the Union "from within", all revolving around the concept of autonomy. Autonomy through security and defence, competitiveness, trade openness,



the protection of democratic values and an ambitious Community budget. Nicosia also promises swift implementation of the White Paper on Defence and a commitment to implement all key initiatives in this area: the SAFE instrument, the EDIP programme and the defence industry strategy. Particular attention will also be paid to migration management, with the implementation of the Pact on Asylum and Migration, the strengthening of returns and cooperation with third Countries. In essence, a Cypriot EU Presidency that comes at a time of profound geopolitical challenges, but which sees European unity as a force capable of transforming difficulties into opportunities.