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## EESC: ULGIATI IN BRUSSELS FOR THE JANUARY PLENARY SESSION

Councillor Luigi Ulgiati attended the Plenary Session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) held in Brussels on the 21st and 22nd of January. The agenda included, in particular, the presentation of the priorities of the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the debate on Artificial Intelligence, a topic followed with great interest by Councillor Ulgiati who, after recently speaking on the subject during the adoption of the Opinion INT/1105 "Strategy for Applied AI" in the Single Market, Production and Consumption Section (INT), spoke again on the subject of Artificial Intelligence, this time at the Plenary Session that has just ended, to affirm the importance of this technology, which should be used with an anthropocentric approach that places humans at the centre of all considerations and assessments. AI is changing processes, organisation and skills. We therefore need to manage this transition with responsibility and vision, focusing on workers, pro-

tection, safety and quality of work. For Ulgiati «Europe must have a strategy on Artificial Intelligence, and today more than ever it should have one for all strategic sectors. AI can be an opportunity to improve efficiency in industry, healthcare, defence and networks, but we must also consider the risks, such as data protection, inequalities, which is why an anthropocentric strategy is necessary». Councillor Ulgiati then highlighted three crucial aspects: work, energy and the creation of an Observatory. «AI can increase productivity, re-

place routine jobs and enhance safety - said Ulgiati - but the risk of job losses should not be underestimated; skills for new professions must therefore be improved. Furthermore, AI can optimise the efficiency and integration of production systems in the electricity grid, but above all, it can reduce costs for businesses and citizens. Finally - concluded Ulgiati - the creation of an Observatory composed of Social Partners, such as the one already established in Italy, can monitor the development and application of Artificial Intelligence».



## EU: MERCOSUR, RATIFICATION ON HOLD

After 26 years of negotiations, on the 17th of January 2026, in Asunción, the Capital of Paraguay, the European Union and Mercosur officially signed a bilateral trade agreement that promises to create the largest free trade area in the world: 700 million citizens/consumers, combining the EU market with those of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. Set aside for years, the free trade agreement with Mercosur was relaunched by the European Union after Donald Trump's return to the White House in response to his tariff war and represents, in this sense, the European effort, underway in recent months, to try to expand and consolidate trade relations and more

to other areas of the world outside the Old Continent: South America, but also India and Central Asia. Negotiations between the two blocs on the new text were completed over a year ago, and ratification by the European Parliament was therefore awaited for it to enter into force. On the 21st of January 2026, by just ten votes, the European Parliament approved the request to refer the text to the EU Court of Justice to verify its compatibility with the Union Treaties. With 334 votes in favour, 324 against and 11 abstentions, MEPs adopted a resolution requesting a legal opinion on the agreement from the Luxembourg Court, a move that significantly delays the final approval of the agreement. The po-

stponement suspends the ratification process by the European Parliament, whose final vote was scheduled for the coming months. The ruling by the EU Supreme Court could take more than a year to be issued, with the result that the ratification of the trade agreement will be frozen for a long time, unless the European Executive forcibly proceeds to bring it into force on a temporary and provisional basis, which is technically possible but very risky for relations between the European Institutions. The trade agreement between the EU and Latin American Countries has therefore split and divided Europe, marking, with the recent vote in the Strasbourg chamber, not only a division between parties and parliamentary groups, but also a rift between the agricultural world, which is jubilant, and industry, which is critical.