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EESC, ULGIATI ATTENDS FEBRUARY PLENARY SESSION

The Plenary Session of the EESC (European Economic and Social Committee) has just concluded in Brussels, with Councillor Ulgiati speaking on two topics of extreme relevance and interest. On the first day, Ulgiati spoke on the adoption of the Opinion on “Energy connectivity and electricity networks” (on which he had already expressed his views during the adoption of the same Opinion in the TEN Section “Transport, Energy and Infrastructure” on the 3rd of February) highlighting how a secure electricity network helps to guarantee the supply and competitiveness of the European industrial system and reiterating that «long-term energy plans and strategies are needed, supported not only by the budgets of individual Member States but also by that of the European Union». On the second day of the meeting, the EESC representative took part in the debate entitled “From ambition to action: a European plan for affordable housing for all”, explaining how housing policies are one of the main social issues that Governments are called upon to address. «The shortage of housing and the cost of homes are the main critical issues that citizens have to deal with - said Ulgiati - whether they are renting or buying. This is a common problem in all European Union Countries, which is why the use of funds allocated in the MFF (Multiannual Financial Framework) has become a necessity that can no longer be postponed». The EESC member then highlighted how the issue of housing is compounded by the problem of energy costs and energy poverty. «We need to come up with new models for public housing that not only respect modern, increasingly green homes, but also include new buildings that are decent and aesthetically pleasing, built around a network of services and transport that make them accessible and comfortable.» In conclusion, Ulgiati pointed out that a special chapter should be dedicated to student housing, which is useful for giving everyone the same opportunities for education and social advancement, emphasising the indispensable involvement of the Social Partners in such housing policies.



EU: STRATEGY FOR THE EASTERN BORDER

The European Union is mobilising in favour of its eastern flank because «these are not just national borders, but European borders, and what happens there affects all Europeans», said Raffaele Fitto, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for Cohesion and Reforms, when he presented the new Eastern Flank Strategy a few days ago. There are approximately 5,000 kilometres of border (3,500 with Russia and Belarus, 1,500 with Ukraine) to be strengthened and border regions in nine Member States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria) that need support because they have been worn down by four years of conflict and hybrid warfare, the exploitation of migration as a weapon, economic and trade disruptions, as well as abandonment and demographic decline. The Strategy launched by the European Commission is cross-cutting, because while it is true that «security and defence are a prerequisite», it is equally true that «these regions also need investment, services, connectivity and economic prospects», as Executive Vice-President Fitto reiterated. Brussels has identified five priorities: security and resilience, regional growth and prosperity, exploiting local strengths, connectivity, and supporting people. From a financial point of view, the Strategy does not allocate new resources but promises the launch of an “EastInvest” financing platform – to be launched on the 26th of February – dedicated to the eastern border regions, which will bring together the EIB (European Investment Bank), international financial institutions and numerous national and regional promotional banks. The new financial instrument will facilitate access to loans and advice for the nine member Countries and is estimated to mobilise up to €28 billion between 2026 and 2027 in private and public investment in the member States concerned. Fundamental importance is also attached to the integration of the Baltic States’ electricity into European networks and the development of cross-border hydrogen infrastructure, such as the Nordic-Baltic hydrogen corridor. The project also promotes digital connectivity through transport networks and addresses the problem of depopulation and labour shortages through specific training and employment pathways.

