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EESC: STATEMENT BY COUNCILLOR ULGIATI AT THE APRIL PLENARY SESSION

On the 23rd and 24th of April, the regular Plenary Session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) took place in Brussels. Numerous and all of great interest were the debates that took place during the two days of intense work: competitiveness and the EU's role in the current geopolitical context, the Union of Equality, the EU's strategy for start-ups, and supplementary pensions for a Union of Savings and Investment. On the latter topic, Councillor Ulgiati spoke in the Chamber during the adoption of the relevant Opinion. The far-reaching social and economic progress made in recent decades has enabled people across Europe to live longer and remain in good health. However, the ageing population and the decline in the working-age population are increasing pressure on public budgets and pension systems, which therefore need to be adapted to ensure that people can maintain a good standard of living in retirement. Pensions, in fact, are a cornerstone of social protection, as they guarantee income security and dignity in old age. According to Ulgiati «supplementary pensions must not become a pretext for weakening or even replacing the public system. The risks would be new inequalities. Vulnerability – he added – is not only a matter



of old age or health conditions, but also of a lack of financial resources. This vulnerability affects women more severely and, looking ahead, will primarily affect young people who see retirement age receding into the distance. Furthermore, we must take into account the fact that public pension systems are no longer able to guarantee the benefits of the past. Accurate information on supplementary pension schemes is essential - continued the Committee member - in order to make the right choice regarding provisions for the future. Supplementary pensions can effectively help alleviate financial difficulties, particularly in old age». However, a question arises: how can the choices of young workers be influenced? According to the EESC member - one solution could be automatic enrolment in a pension Fund, but it is essential to manage the information and negotiation phase through the Trade Unions. Today - concluded Ulgiati - in many Countries, supplementary pensions are already a welfare tool that forms part of collective bargaining».

EU, PNRR: COMMISSION APPROVES NINTH TRANCHE FOR ITALY

«**T**he Italian model of the PNRR has marked the transition from a spending-led approach to a culture of reforms and structural investment» said Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, commenting on the European Commission's approval, a few days ago, of the payment of the ninth instalment of Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), amounting to €12.8 billion. Following its assessment of the payment request, the European Commission found that Italy had satisfactorily completed all 16 key milestones and 34 targets set out in the Council's implementing decision. With this penultimate tranche, the total funds disbursed to Italy now amount to approximately €166 billion, equivalent

to 85% of the total resources provided for in the Plan, namely €191.5 billion comprising grants (€68.9 billion) and loans (€122.6 billion). The European Commission has recognised the commitment to employment, with the programme enabling at least three million people to benefit from Active Labour Market Policies and over 600,000 participants to successfully attend training courses, particularly in the development of digital skills. Another achievement considered a success is the reduction in early school leaving, with over 800,000 students receiving support through targeted tutoring and vocational re-training programmes. Improvements in the area of judicial reform have also been viewed positively, with



first-instance administrative courts reducing the number of pending cases by over 80% between July 2023 and December 2025. Among the fifty objectives achieved, the implementation of the electronic health Record for 85% of GPs and the modernisation of hospital technology and digital infrastructure across 280 healthcare facilities are also of particular significance.