



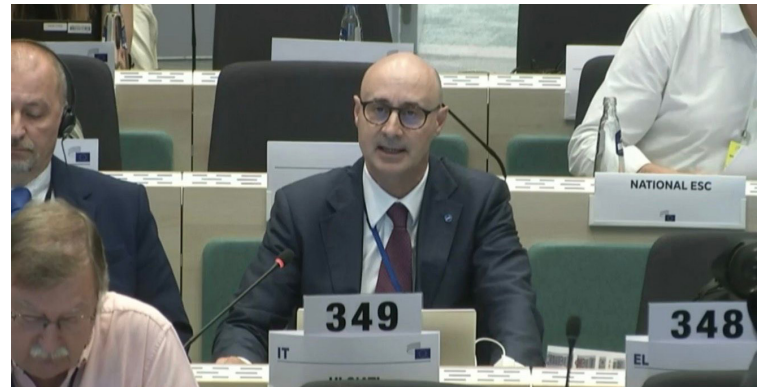
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EESC: STATEMENT BY COUNCILLOR ULGIATI AT THE PLENARY SESSION

Last week (17–18 June), the 606th Plenary Session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) was held in Brussels, at the European Commission, which featured a programme of interesting debates and the adoption of important Opinions, including one on the simplification of transport legislation (TEN/881), on which Councillor Ulgiati took the floor. The European Commission asked the EESC to draw up an exploratory Opinion to assess the possibilities for making administrative procedures in the transport sector simpler and more efficient, whilst maintaining high standards in terms of social standards, safety, environmental and climate objectives, consumer rights, transparency and accessibility. Since the beginning of the integration process, transport has been an area of competence at European level, and the EU's role in this regard is to ensure that the European transport sector facilitates the smooth functioning of the internal market and contributes to territorial, economic and social cohesion, as well as to improving the sector's competitiveness, through safe and affordable access for citizens. The Opinion emphasises the importance of social dialogue, as the Social Partners are best placed to

identify unnecessary and disproportionate regulations and to propose concrete simplifications within the framework of a structured sectoral dialogue, whilst safeguarding both business activity and social standards. «The transport sector - said Ulgiati - is crucial to Europe's output, both in economic terms and in terms of fostering integration, generating 5 per cent of GDP and providing employment for over 10 million workers. We are now living in the digital age - he continued - and during the recently concluded G7 summit, a round-table discussion was dedicated to Artificial Intelligence. It is clear that these new technologies also have an impact on the transport sector, helping to create efficiency, energy savings and environmental protection. We therefore need to simplify and harmonise the regulations governing the sector across all European Countries, but we also need a sense of shared responsibility that takes into account workers' rights, the specific challenges faced by female workers, and subcontracting arrangements that can lead to contractual dumping. Finally – concluded Ulgiati – we must bear in mind the social issue of passengers' rights: the right to efficient, high-quality services, and the right to swift and simplified refunds».



EU APPROVES RETURN REGULATION

Just a few days before the Migration and Asylum Pact came into force (12 June), the European Parliament approved the new European Return Regulation during its Plenary Session in Strasbourg on the 17th of June, with 418 votes in favour, 218 against and 30 abstentions. This EU legislative act, the vote on which split the traditional centrist majority (with the alliance between the EPP and the right-wing Parties proving decisive), aims to harmonise national practices which, within the framework of the "Return Directive" (Directive 2008/115/EC), had gradually diverged. Both the Commission and the European Parliament have highlighted that, at European level, only 20 per cent of returns are actually carried out. The Regulation therefore provides a new legal framework for the return of third-Country nationals whose stay in the European Union is irregular. The EU legislative text thus aims to speed up return procedures whilst re-

specting fundamental rights and international law, including the principle of non-refoulement and the prohibition of collective expulsions, whilst at the same time preventing abuses and unauthorised movements within the EU. Under the new rules, anyone subject to a return order is obliged to leave the territory and to cooperate with the authorities. Failure to do so may result in detention for up to 24 months, with the possibility of an extension. The Regulation also opens up the possibility of transferring migrants to centres located outside the European Union, in third Countries willing to host them on the basis of bilateral agreements, modelled on the Italian centres in Albania. This is «a historic milestone that allows us to turn the page on a twenty-year-old system», said the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. Before coming into force, the new rules must be formally adopted by the EU Council and then published in the Official Journal.