Edited by Luigi Ulgiati, UGL Deputy Secretary, member of the EESC N. 180 30th of June 2026

EESC: ULGIATI AND EUROPEAN ENERGY-INTENSIVE INDUSTRIES

Ensuring a stable and affordable energy supply for European energy-intensive industries, drawing on the example of the chemical sector, was the subject of the Opinion TEN/876, which was adopted during the meeting of the Transport, Energy and Infrastructure Section of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), held recently in Brussels (24th of June). Councillor Ulgiati spoke on the subject, stating that the Opinion in question «highlights the impact of high energy costs on European industry, and in particular on energy-intensive sectors. The example of the chemical sector – according to Ulgiati – is no coincidence, because the chemical industry is not only one of the most energy-intensive in terms of energy consumption, but fossil fuels themselves represent the natural resource that must be processed to obtain the raw materials required throughout the industrial supply chain. Energy costs - he continued - are crucial to ensuring the global competitiveness of European products; otherwise, they will be priced out of the market, including within the single market itself. Furthermore - added the EESC representative - when it is argued that industrial decarbonisation should go hand in hand with infrastructure development, we must be aware that the environmental costs cannot be borne solely by European citizens and industries». Twenty years ago, the European Union was one of the world's leading industrial producers. Today, Europe's competitive position has weakened considerably, and industry's share of the EU's GDP has fallen from 17.4 per cent to 14.3 per cent in just a few years. We are also seeing the closure of numerous businesses, job losses and «our Continent is gradually becoming one of consumers alone, who are growing ever poorer». In this context, to preserve European competitiveness, the solution «is to develop tailor-made energy mixes - concluded Ulgiati - suited to the specific circumstances and capabilities of each Member State, alongside achieving independence from non-European Countries, expanding battery storage and utilising next-generation nuclear power, backed by substantial public investment to complement private investment».

EU, PROTECTION OF WORKERS FROM CARCINOGENS

A political agreement was reached last week by the European Parliament and the Council on the sixth revision of the Directive on carcinogens, mutagens and substances toxic to reproduction (CMRD), concerning stricter EU protection measures against carcinogens in the workplace, which will guarantee greater protection for workers, whilst ensuring that businesses have sufficient time and support to adapt to the new requirements and implement the recent legislation. The revision – which updates EU health and safety legislation with the aim of strengthening protection against exposure to hazardous substances in the workplace – was proposed around a year ago, in July 2025, by the European Commission and is based on the EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2021–2027, supporting the objectives set out in the Roadmap for Quality Employment and in the European Pillar of Social Rights regarding health and safety at work; it also contributes to the European Plan to Combat Cancer and the European Health Union with a view to ensuring safer and healthier workplaces across the European Union. Specifically, the new Directive sets protective exposure limits for high-risk substances such as cobalt and inorganic cobalt compounds, used in the manufacture of batteries, magnets and hard metals; for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), used in steel, iron and aluminium, as well as in welding fumes; for 1,4-dioxane, used in chemical and textile production and present in some household cleaning products; and finally for isoprene, found in the chemical and rubber industries. Once formally adopted, the strengthened Directive is expected to prevent around 1,700 cases of lung cancer and 19,000 occupational diseases over the next 40 years, whilst generating healthcare savings of up to €1.16 billion across the EU.