



EESC PLENARY SESSION, ULGIATI: «POSSIBLE REDUCTIONS IN HIGH UTILITY BILLS»

The Plenary Session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), held in Brussels on the 21st and 22nd of October, has just concluded. The agenda included the adoption of a number of interesting and topical Opinions, such as the one on “Ensuring the sustainable competitiveness of electricity bills in the EU” (TEN/892). The Single Electricity Market is one of the cornerstones of the European Union’s competitiveness and prosperity. The EU is committed to pursuing decarbonisation whilst simultaneously increasing the affordability of energy and energy security, in order to support the competitiveness of European industries. However, in recent years and during two crises, the European Union has faced a rise in energy costs that is jeopardising the Old Continent’s competitiveness. The EESC has drawn up several Opinions on the subject of electricity prices, an issue to which is now added the desire to accelerate the electrification of the European economy, which is essential for keeping various dependencies under control and combating climate change. According to Councillor Ulgiati, who took part in the Study Group that drafted the Opinion in question, «the energy issue is crucial to the management of European infrastructure and industry, and the cost of electricity bills, at this particular stage, is becoming increasingly critical for both industry and European citizens». Furthermore, whilst emphasising that the issue of Artificial Intelligence also features prominently in this Opinion, Ulgiati highlighted that the preparatory work had involved discussions «on the benefits of installing digital meters, whilst considering the need for adequate data protection in this regard», concluding his remarks by stating that, «although reducing the cost of electricity bills is a highly complex matter, adjustments are possible through measures that address system charges, tax burdens and production costs».



EU: ANTI-CHINA TRADE SHIELD FOR EUROPEAN INDUSTRY

The issue of trade featured prominently in discussions amongst the 27 Member States during the European Council held a few days ago (15–16 October) in the Belgian Capital. Developments in recent years have shown that trade can increasingly be used as a “weapon” and that the EU’s existing tools, including tariffs and anti-dumping measures, are insufficient. On the basis of the joint proposal by French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, the European Union will therefore develop “a new instrument for decisive action, restricting access to the Single Market, where this is in the Union’s interest, swiftly and immediately”. The stated aim of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is to protect European interests, thereby reflecting Brussels’ concerns about structural trade imbalances. China – an important partner with whom the EU wishes to maintain fair, balanced and mutually beneficial relations – although not formally mentioned, is the main target of the Franco-German initiative due to its trade dynamics with Europe. In 2025, the European trade deficit with China stood at one billion euros a day, and in 2026 the situation is set to worsen further. A safeguard mechanism is therefore needed which, where necessary, would allow for the immediate exclusion from the European Single Market of Third Countries seeking to prevent the restoration of fair conditions of competition, in order to ensure that Europe has “equal tools” compared with other economic blocs and can provide “flexible responses”. The European shield will grant the European Commission swifter and less bureaucratic powers to respond to market distortions and implement effective countermeasures, acting as a defensive measure and deterrent to safeguard the European Union’s economic sovereignty and strategic interests. Developments and operational details will be discussed at forthcoming meetings, the next of which will take place on the 4th of February 2027 at the Flemish Castle of Alden Biesen in Belgium; this meeting will offer the 27 European leaders a further opportunity to address the challenges relating to European security and the Union’s ability to compete in global markets.

