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EESC, PLENARY SESSION: ULGIATI SPEAKS ON EU SOVEREIGNTY IN THE CLOUD

The European Union's digital future will be decisive for its democratic future. Without promoting and protecting digital sovereignty, that is, sovereignty over data, innovation, investment, employment, competitiveness and fundamental rights, there can be no true strategic autonomy, no resilient information society, nor any credible role for the EU in a global order increasingly marked by conflicts and geopolitical tensions. This issue was addressed in the Opinion TEN/878 of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), adopted during the October Plenary Session. The Committee believes that the only way to ensure economic competitiveness, democratic self-determination and security is to reduce dependence on non-EU providers of cloud services, artificial intelligence and platforms, by aiming to achieve a cross-cutting digital sovereignty strategy covering the entire digital supply chain, with clear rules on data protection, transparency, diversification and interoperability. Councillor Ulgiati, speaking on the subject, said: «It is essential for Europe to achieve sovereignty in the cloud, but overcoming digital dependencies and protecting data means having strategic independence across the entire tech stack: from the energy required to power data centres, to the rare earths needed for the production of microchips, from the research and development of new, ever-more-powerful chips, to the cloud. However, this is not enough – warns the EESC representative – because we must put people at the centre and invest in new skills for workers, which are essential for ensuring management capacity across the entire supply chain. Europe is lagging behind its American and Asian competitors, but at last policymakers seem to have realised that they must make substantial investments - concluded Ulgiati - not only to defend digital sovereignty but also, and above all, to implement a human-centred strategy».



EU: COURT OF AUDITORS' REPORT ON YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Over the past decade, one of the most significant challenges many European Union Member States have faced in the field of employment has been that of integrating young people into the labour market on a permanent basis. Employment is primarily the responsibility of the Member States, whose annual expenditure on labour market policy measures for all age groups has averaged around 60 billion euros since 2014, excluding the pandemic-related peaks of around 80 billion euros in 2020 and 2021. The EU supports and, where necessary, complements the actions of Member States in this area. Since 2014, around €25 billion in cohesion policy funding has been specifically allocated to preventing and tackling youth unemployment and inactivity, in particular through the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). A Report recently published by the European Court of Auditors examined the effectiveness of EU-funded youth employment measures in Germany, Spain and Italy, highlighting that since 2014 the youth unemployment rate has fallen from 20 per cent to 12 per cent. In 2025, there were, in fact, 4.7 million unemployed young people in the European Union, accounting for 11.6 per cent of the labour force aged 15–29. Consequently, despite the progress made over the last decade, young people are still twice as likely as the average to be unemployed. In its Report, the European Court of Auditors criticises, in particular, the lack of reliable data on the long-term effects of the measures funded. The current outcome indicators measure the employment situation of beneficiaries only six months after the end of the support. No assessment is carried out at twelve or eighteen months, timeframes which, according to the Report, would in fact be the most significant for assessing whether a young person has genuinely become permanently integrated into the labour market. Another structural shortcoming highlighted concerns the fact that, in the operational programmes analysed, there is no agreed definition of when a young person can be considered to have effectively integrated into the labour market. The absence of this parameter therefore makes it more difficult to set measurable objectives and assess the effectiveness of individual measures. Finally, the Court recommends providing more targeted support to economically inactive young people, a group that European programmes consistently struggle to reach.