



SPEECH BY ITALY'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL'S (CNEL) REPRESENTATIVE MASSIMO GIUNTOLI AT THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCILS OF EU COUNTRIES

Thank you, Mr. Wos, let me express on behalf of CNEL's President Brunetta our great satisfaction for being here to illustrate the conclusions of the Annual meeting of European Economy and Social Committee and National Economy and Social Councils. **Italy's CNEL, that I represent, has gone through difficult times, but it is strong willingness of President Brunetta and of the new Council to play a renewed role in international agenda, to advancing further the issues of social and labour protection and improvement of the working conditions, that are crucial for economic and social progress.**

Indeed, Europe lives difficult times. Productivity is lagging behind US and China's; we face significant challenges related to green, demographic, technological, and strategic autonomy transitions. Work and social protection are not for granted anymore. Next Commission' priority will be revamping European competitiveness; in this perspective, robust governance and increased coordination among Member States are essential; but governmental activity must be supported by a strong action aimed at ensuring a high level of social protection.

Reinforcing the resilience of the EU requires not only economic strengthening but also the simultaneous promotion of the social, economic and environmental sustainability of EU policies. In this respect, the role of National Economy and Social Councils and European Economy and Social Committee in policy design and implementation is crucial.



In this necessary framework, I would like to thank all National Economy and Social Councils and the European Economy and Social Committee for these widely shared Conclusions of the Annual Summit. They value general principles that must affect the actions of governments and economic and social councils, such as social cohesion, involvement of social partners, economic recovery; but they also regard two issues that lie at heart of welfare in civil societies.

The first is affordable and sustainable housing policies.

Housing has become a pressing economic, social, and political challenge in the EU: between 2010 and 2023 house prices rose by 48%, rents went up by 22% and inflation by 36%, contributing to cost increases. Even more important, in 17 EU countries the housing-related costs increased, and so the share of the disposable personal income that pays total housing costs.

Therefore, the problem of housing is reflected in many layers and aspects of society.

First, there is a **compellent financial problem**: the European Union shall render possible the financing of adequate investments in the housing sector. But it is not only a matter of money: we must **reform housing market**, creating a sustainable and balanced development of the real estate sector, that shall become capable of satisfying the needs of the most vulnerable layers of the society.



As National Social and Economic Councils, we express our interest in promoting a **universal access to decent housing**, whether private or public. To address this challenge, the Conclusions envisage two main solutions:

- a) Starting necessarily from the financial viewpoint, we must find a way to **stimulate long-term public funding** for affordable and sustainable housing, through a reform of the Stability and Growth Pact and of the rules of State aids. But the Conclusions underline also the importance of **stimulating private investments in housing**, especially in energy-efficient renovations of buildings, through leveraging appropriate policy tools (VAT, guarantees, loans, and investment budgets), and simplifying administrative burdens.
- b) **At European and Member States' level**, public authorities at all levels should play a more active role, ensuring that **the Leave no one behind principle should be present in all housing and related policies.**

Second crucial issue is the topic of working conditions, from long time a priority of the European Union. The evolution of the labour market, affected by sizeable risks like precarious employment forms, automation or economic uncertainty, raises concerns about job security and social protection. In this context, a joint action of Governments, workers, employees and social parties is utmost needed to adapt business and workers to the new working conditions, to safeguard at the same time economic competitiveness, security at workplaces and fair wages.



1. The key to adapt a **labour market in perennial transformation is to ensure access to high-quality lifelong education and training, with a specific focus on digital skills.** Action of the European institutions and Member States shall put in place **extensive training and formation systems, aligned with the demands from the labour market, so to anticipate and to govern possible** changes of the labour market in the longer run. In this respect a joint action by Governments, the social partners and businesses, at the European and national level, is needed.
2. Governments, together with social parts, shall also cooperate in strengthening **social protection of social rights, promoting quality jobs, ensuring high levels of social protection for workers and the self-employed,** while also considering the necessary conditions for **enhancing competitiveness.** We shall build inclusive systems covering all workers regardless of the type of employment, offering fair wages, minimum income support and return-to-work assistance, while ensuring long-term financial sustainability. Putting in place **non-discrimination policies will be a major step forward,** notably through **collective bargaining agreements,** that shall have the necessary flexibility to adapt to new working conditions, possibly aiming to the **reduction of working time.**
3. **Conclusions stress that a safe and productive worker is a worker who is cared about. This highlights the importance of ensuring high health and occupational safety standards at work, also through the support of European Social Fund Plus and ILO occupational health and safety conventions. The improvement of psychological well-being can avoid work-related illnesses.** In that context, the Conclusions underline the widespread need to **improve work-life balance, and the related right to disconnect.**



-
4. **The** Conclusions regard also the risks related to **Artificial Intelligence**, that are very high at the moment: replacement of jobs, excessive automation, loss of human expertise. Social dialogue and worker involvement shall promote a ‘trustworthy’, ethics-respecting and participative AI in the world of work. In this perspective, stronger involvement of workers and their representatives is one of the best levers for minimising the risks and harmful impacts of AI systems.
 5. **Last, the Conclusion highlight that one of the main tools to pursue an effective action in strengthening labour market and working conditions is to foster the social dialogue, ensuring fair and decent wages through the effective involvement of the social partners. NESCs shall cooperate themselves to recommend better and effective labour markets policies to the EU governments, in the broader framework of the European Pillar of Social Rights. A proper cooperation between Governments and social parties shall tackle unemployment and social exclusion, especially among women, young people, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups.**

The future of the city will increasingly be characterized by significant social innovations, by the ability to implement inclusive processes, with particular attention to proximity services in peripheral areas, mobility, and the infrastructure of the green system, with the goal of making our urban structures polycentric, thus putting an end to the current models of monocentric cities that are based on a logic of "separation."



Urban regeneration is a historical necessity because it is now urgent to create new models that integrate the principles of sustainability, social inclusion, the quality of buildings and urban spaces, and thus improve the quality of life for people.

The idea that urban planning is the discipline that brings order to the functional organization of community life has, as we have always argued, been put into crisis by the pandemic, which has generated new forms of work, giving rise to various phenomena that still need to be fully investigated.

The CNEL believes that greater economic and social development can only stem from strengthening interventions aimed at areas significantly distant from urban centers – "the inner areas" – which are rich in culture, tradition, and growth opportunities, as well as key to promoting greater environmental sustainability.

These areas have suffered over time from processes of marginalization and present deep economic, social, territorial, and geomorphological inequalities, as well as significant imbalances, primarily caused by the distance from essential services and citizenship rights.

The demographic crisis in the inner areas, in fact, also has repercussions on the dynamics of land transformations and natural resources, which have deep roots in human usage and presence.

Allow me now, dear colleagues, to say a few words on behalf of



CNEL's President Brunetta about the commitment of Italian Council. We share the perception that we have a big work ahead of us. We need willingness, clarity of objectives and of the means to pursue them. In this struggle we need also symbols that flag our objectives of protection and safety at work: we need to remember the tragedy of Marcinelle. In this Belgian mining locality, the 8th of August 1956, 262 miners died, 256 belonging to States now members of the European Union: mostly Italians - 136 – and Belgians (95), but also from Poland, France, Holland, Hungary, Germany and Greece. A truly “European” tragedy. Italian Government celebrates the anniversary of Marcinelle every year, keeping alive the awareness of the fundamental value of the free movement of workers, their rights and safety, which are priorities for an effective and competitive social Europe.

CNEL has long taken the initiative to create a European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Work and for the Protection and Dignity of Workers, in memory of the Marcinelle tragedy. EP Vice-Presidents Picierno and Sberna, and MEP Salini jointly proposed a Resolution on the establishment of such a European Day, on 8 August. The motion aims to strengthen labour protection and social protection, while celebrating the victims of Marcinelle.

The European Union relies on advanced labor legislation in all Member States, and on the safeguard and guarantee role of the European Economy and Social Committee and the Economic and Social Councils of Member States. Revamping the European competitiveness – a much-needed objective – shall not be to the detriment of social and labour protection. A mobilisation of the European Economy and Social Committee and the National Economy and Social Councils on the Marcinelle initiative, making the tragedy a symbol and labour protection a goal to aim to, would

**IMPROVING LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS ACROSS
THE EU: THE ROLE OF ORGANISED CIVIL SOCIETY
CONCLUSIONS**



be a clear and volume-speaking signal about the willingness to ensure the European Union a vibrant economy and social and work security at the same time. Together, supporting this initiative, CNEL, National Economy and Social Councils and European economic and social Committee, can take this direction decisively.