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## EESC adopts two Opinions related to the Liberal Professions spear-headed by our Honorary President Rudi Kolbe



The EESC has adopted at its plenary session of the end of this month of September two Opinions related to the Liberal Professions. Both of them have been steered by our Honorary President, Mr Rudolf Kolbe, who was the Rapporteur of the Opinion on **Interdependences between AI applications and liberal professions services: addressing urgent societal needs**, and President of the Study Group on the Opinion on **Water resilience and the twin transition: Industrial approaches addressing the relationship between water, digitalisation and decarbonisation** respectively.

The following are the key points of these important documents:.

### Interdependences between AI Applications and Liberal Professions Services: Addressing Urgent Societal Needs

The EESC:

1. underlines that AI should remain a **complementary tool** rather than a substitute, with ultimate decision-making in sensitive areas such as health, law, or taxation staying under **human control** to safeguard professional autonomy and accountability;
2. stresses that the technology can ease **administrative burdens** and routine tasks, enabling professionals to focus on higher-value, human-centric services, which improves efficiency and the quality of services delivered to citizens and enterprises;
3. insists that **ethical and professional standards** must apply to the use of AI, ensuring transparency in AI-driven decisions, avoiding bias and discrimination, and respecting privacy, data protection, and intellectual property rights;
4. highlight the need of continuous **training and professional standards** are needed to ensure liberal professions can benefit from AI. Ethics committees and inclusive governance structures should be closely linked to practice, while **social dialogue** and **worker participation** are key to determining which tasks are for machines and which remain human;
5. considers that **public trust** requires a cycle of responsible AI development that ensures fairness, accountability, and reliability, with regulation that clarifies responsibilities while encouraging innovation and safeguarding the public interest.

## Water Resilience and The Twin Transition: Industrial Approaches Addressing the Relationship Between Water, Digitalisation and Decarbonisation

The [EU Youth Test at the EESC](#) is being applied to this opinion. The Baltic Sea Region Youth Forum was chosen by a group of interested youth organisations to represent all of them during the opinion-making process.

The EESC:

1. reiterates its call to **revise the EU industrial strategy to explicitly include water-related issues** and for water to be treated as a fundamental element of the industrial strategy;
2. calls on the EU institutions to **ensure greater coherence in water policy**, and to **consider the water-energy nexus in water management** in order to reflect industrial water needs;
3. notes that decarbonisation can shift environmental pressures to local water supply systems, and recommends **developing targeted policies to address water scarcity in industrialised areas and water stress zones**, promoting **alternative water treatment and reuse** to ensure compliance with the Water Framework Directive (WFD);
4. calls on the EU to make **water a strategic priority in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**;
5. recommends **increasing political and financial support for water-efficient decarbonisation technologies** e.g. via Important Projects of Common European Interest and Horizon Europe, as well as **financial incentives** or subsidies for industries adopting water-efficient technologies;
6. calls on industry to prioritise **less energy-intensive artificial intelligence (AI)** learning models and algorithms, to use renewable energy that consumes less energy and water (solar, wind) to power data centres, to **set up centres in regions without risk of water shortages** and to take into account the needs of other sectors of activity;
7. recommends **improving water data interoperability and reliability** by establishing **common standards for data collection, storage and sharing**, and by encouraging technology and digital companies to make water data more transparent, including sources, volumes, recycling measures and audits;
8. calls for **investment in infrastructure** to improve the **water supply chain, interconnect Europe's river networks**, and strengthen **cyber security** measures;
9. encourages **social dialogue on access to and management of water** along the water chain as well as the **introduction of courses on water management**, flood control, drought management and sustainable water use, especially in higher education and vocational education.

## UNPLIB Marks Global Day of the Liberal Professions



This Monday, September 22nd, the eve of World Liberal Professions Day, our Belgian inter-professional member, UNPLIB, held a conference at the Brussels headquarters of Delen Private Bank.

In the presence of the Belgian Minister on the Middle Class, the Self-Employed and SMEs, Ms **Eléonore Simonet**, the professions of the health pillar shared their short- and medium-term challenges and perspectives around the theme: **‘Healthcare, Horizon 2030.’**

The importance of prevention was regularly cited.

The event brought together 70 participants and, by all accounts, it succeeded to transmit the views and concerns of our Belgian colleagues to their national authorities, with which UNPLIB maintains a relationship of trust and sincere collaboration built through years of fruitful input contribution to pieces of legislation concerning our socio-economic category.



*Bernard Jacquemin, President of UNPLIB addressing the participants*



*Mr Jacquemin, Mr Ruwet and Mr Van Gampen, along with the Belgian Minister of SMEs, Ms Eléonore Simonet (centre left)*



*Jean Ruwet, Vice-President of UNPLIB giving a speech*

## SD4EU Transnational Seminar in Rome and Malta



On September 26, 2025, the first transnational seminar of the European project SD4EU – Social Dialogue for a Union of Equality – was held in Rome. This project is implemented by a consortium of several European professional organisations (comprising of CEPLIS, UNPLIB, MFPA, and Confprofessioni), co-ordinated by Confprofessioni, and co-funded by the European Union.

The event, entitled *Social Protection and Gender Equality: Tools and Recommendations for a New European Social Dialogue*, brought together institutional representatives, social partners, academic experts, and professional organisations.

Of particular note was the experience of the Italian context as exemplified by the Italian law on Gender Equality Certification and Incentives which aims to eliminate the gender pay gap, and the possible application of similar legislation in differing European national contexts. This was built upon by the experience of UILTuCS regarding the addition gender clauses in national collective agreements and the impact of automatic salary reinstatement.

The Transnational Seminar affirmed that social partners play a crucial role in building an inclusive and sustainable social protection system by filling in the gaps in public policy through collective bargaining, aligning national and European regulations to the market conditions which they observe daily, and promoting gender equality and universal access to social rights. Continued success is predicated on continued social dialogue.

**The next transnational seminar is due to be held in Malta on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October, focusing on the *Gender Pay Gap and Equal Pay*.**

We look forward to seeing you there!

# EU Launches New AI Strategy



The EU must promote home-grown artificial intelligence platforms and decrease its reliance on foreign providers, Brussels has said, as it prepares to set out a new plan to compete against the US and China in the global race for the revolutionary technology.

According to a draft proposal seen by the Financial Times, **the European Commission's new "Apply AI strategy" will promote European-made AI tools to provide security and resilience while boosting the bloc's industrial competitiveness.** The strategy highlights the need to improve AI usage in sectors including healthcare, defence and manufacturing. The commission aims to "strengthen EU AI sovereignty" by accelerating the development and use of homemade artificial intelligence technologies, including policies to "accelerate the adoption of European scalable and replicable generative AI solutions in public administrations", the draft says.

**The strategy warns of "external dependencies of the AI stack" — the infrastructure and software needed to build, train and manage AI applications — which it says "can be weaponised" by both "state and non-state actors", posing a risk to supply chains.**

As the Financial Times notes, Such concerns have risen since Donald Trump's return to the US presidency, which has sparked widespread concerns about the EU's reliance on American tech and calls for digital independence in Europe. Meanwhile, China is challenging the US as a global leader in AI development, stoking **fears that Europe may have little influence over future use of the technology.** In recent years, Europe has become home to a number of promising AI companies, from French model maker Mistral to German defence tech group Helsing. But **the EU still relies on the US and Asia for much of the software, hardware and critical minerals needed to develop AI.**

According to the draft, public administrations have a central role to play to "help AI start-ups grow through increased demand for European-made open source AI solutions". European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen has recently said that the bloc wants to "speed up AI adoption across the board" via the Apply AI strategy in order to ensure that Europe doesn't miss out on the new technology.

**Brussels wants to position AI not merely as a productivity tool, but as a "strategic asset" that must be tightly integrated into the EU's institutional, industrial and security systems. To implement the actions in the strategy, such as supporting AI adoption in manufacturing and the health sector, the Commission is mobilising €1bn from existing financing programmes.**

The bloc also wants to prioritise implementation of European AI-enabled tools in defence, as European capitals rapidly increase defence spending in response to the threat from Russia and fears of US disengagement from European security under Trump. Brussels plans to "accelerate the development and deployment of European AI-enabled" command and control (C2) capacities. C2 systems, which are used to instruct troops and manage battlefield operations, are one of the so-called critical enablers that European militaries currently rely heavily on the US to provide through Nato. The European Commission also wants to "support the development of sovereign frontier models" for space defence technology.