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'I/A' ITEM NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Social Fund as part of the National and Regional Partnership Plan set out in Regulation (EU) [NRPPlan] establishing conditions for the implementation of the Union support to quality employment, skills and social inclusion for the period from 2028 to 2034

- *Partial general approach*
= *Statement by Italy*

Delegations will find attached a statement by Italy to be included in the minutes of the Council.

STATEMENT BY ITALY

Italy thanks the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the intensive work carried out on the proposals for regulations concerning the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund, including Interreg, and the European Social Fund. We acknowledge the significant progress achieved during the negotiations and appreciate the improvements introduced in the compromise texts.

In particular, with regard to the ERDF/Cohesion Fund Regulation, Italy warmly welcomes the inclusion of the article on the “right to stay,” proposed by Italy and aimed at strengthening—consistent with the Strategy promoted by Executive Vice-President Fitto—the attractiveness of territories, access to essential services, connectivity, and the conditions that enable people to remain in more fragile areas. We also positively assess the strengthening of provisions on support for disadvantaged areas, regional innovation and transformation, and sustainable urban development, as well as the transfer of provisions relating to Interreg from the general NRPP Regulation to the sectoral ERDF/Cohesion Fund Regulation, with a more detailed articulation that allows for better recognition of the specific nature of European territorial cooperation.

As regards the ESF Regulation, we welcome the strengthening of support for the demographic transition and a clearer specification of the Fund’s contribution to objectives relating to quality employment, skills, education and training, social inclusion, the fight against poverty, and access to services.

At the same time, Italy expresses reservations about certain aspects of the legislative texts under approval.

First, the sectoral regulations still do not sufficiently delineate the scope of intervention of the cohesion policy Funds, nor is this aspect clearly specified in the Regulation on national and regional Partnership Plans, even though the mission of these Funds is defined by the TFEU. This is compounded by the absence of a dedicated financial allocation for Cohesion Policy and its Funds. In this regard, the Italian proposal to include a sectoral annex identifying the areas of intervention and the relevant indicators for ERDF, Interreg, and ESF has not been accepted. Such an instrument would have strengthened legal certainty, programming clarity, and the visibility of the Funds.

Secondly, it is considered that the development of fundamental rights and the promotion of the rule of law should constitute a horizontal principle rather than areas of intervention for the Cohesion Policy Funds.

Third, the ESF Regulation does not provide for the possibility of supporting technical assistance interventions, as has always been the case in previous programming periods. This option, which is foreseen for the ERDF, is essential to ensure effective programming and implementation of interventions in the areas of employment, skills, social inclusion, and social, health, educational, and training services.

Italy will continue to participate constructively in the legislative process, with the aim of strengthening the coherence of the sectoral regulations, preserving the identity of the cohesion policy Funds, and ensuring a clear, proportionate programming framework, fully consistent with the objectives laid down in the TFEU.
