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**SOCIAL ECONOMY CATEGORY - 2019 ACTIVITY REPORT**

**Brief description of the Category and its members**

In 2019, the Social Economy Category was composed of 31 members representing cooperatives, mutual societies, associations, foundations, social enterprises and social NGOs.

The meetings of the Category provide the forum for information exchanges, peer learning and opportunities to contribute to social economy initiatives at the European and national levels. Close contacts are also maintained with other EESC bodies, notably the Study Group on Social Economy Enterprises, which is managed by the INT Section.

**Main achievements of the Category in 2019**

Following political decisions on the budgetary levels for all EESC Categories, 2019 was marked by a return to three meetings per year for each Category.

The activities of the Social Economy Category in 2019 were marked by three priorities. Firstly, to assess the interest in the social economy among the newly instated MEPs and to galvanise support for the establishment of the Social Economy Intergroup of the European Parliament. The Social Economy Category discussed this topic at two meetings, sharing information and encouraging individual Members to contact MEPs and encourage them to support the creation of the intergroup.

The second priority in 2019 has been a focus on EU and local funding for the social economy. This topic was debated in each of the three meetings of the Category, (social impact bonds and social outcomes contracting, the ESF+ Regulation, INTERREG, peer to peer, private sector and national level financing).

Thirdly, following on from close cooperation with the Farmers' Category in 2018, the Social Economy Category in 2019 worked closely with both the EESC's Disability Rights study group and with the study group on Social Economy Enterprises. This cooperation illustrates the horizontal nature of the work of the Social Economy Category and the extent to which it can complement the activities of other EESC bodies.

**Overview of the Category meetings outlining main topics and speakers**

* **7 March**, afternoon – first meeting

As recommended in the 2018 activity report of the Social Economy Category, in the context of the new European Disability Strategy, in 2019 closer cooperation was established with the EESC's Disability Rights Study Group. Within this context, a six-person panel debated the inter-dependencies between the two bodies, with speakers including the president of the EESC's Disability Rights Study Group, representatives of the European Commission (DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs), the European Disability Forum, the Grupo Social ONCE and Social Economy Europe.

The meeting on 7 March also provided the opportunity to fulfil the second recommendation of the 2018 activity report, namely to showcase successful EU funded projects on social impact bonds and social outcomes contracting. Thus, a five-person panel exchanged information on social impact bonds in the Alpine Region financed by the EU's INTERREG programme and on EU support for social impact through the Employment and Social Innovation Fund (EaSI) and the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI). Presentations were also given on local development and community assistance by the upcoming Finnish Presidency of the Council of the EU and innovation funds by representatives of the European Association for Information and Local Development (AEIDL).

* **21 June**, morning – second meeting

The second meeting of the Category was divided into two parts. First there was a discussion on the outcome of the elections to the European Parliament, noting in particular the high turnover in MEPs at these elections and the implications for the social economy. The keynote speaker was a representative of Athenora Consulting, who presented the composition of the new European Parliament and evaluated the implications for the social economy.

The second part of the meeting was dedicated to the topic of financing the social economy through the ESF+, peer to peer and the private sector. Speakers on this panel included the Chief Executive Officer of the European Foundation Centre and representatives of the Spanish Social Economy Employers' Confederation (CEPES) and of the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion).

During the meeting, the members of the Social Economy Category were also updated on preparations for the next meeting of the EESC's European Day of Social Economy Enterprises, scheduled to take place in Strasbourg on 27 November. The Committee co-organised this event, entitled ''The Social Economy: mobilising cities, regions and civil society. Pact for Impact for the European Union'', with the city of Strasbourg and the French Ministry for Ecological Transition and Social Economy. The EESC was directly responsible for the organisation of two side events, sent a delegation of members and contributed to the drafting of the conference's final declaration.

* **14 October**, afternoon – third meeting

The third and final meeting of the Category in 2019 provided the opportunity to share information and to galvanise support for the campaign to relaunch the Social Economy Intergroup of the European Parliament. The keynote speaker was a board member of Social Economy Europe and secretary-general of ConcertES. The speaker outlined activities to date to identify supporters of the Intergroup among MEPs, to coordinate and generate support for the Intergroup, including the collection of signatures from MEPs.

The second topic discussed at this meeting related to EU financing for the social economy at the national level. The exchanges were centred on how to influence the ESF+ Regulation, in order to extend its coverage. Currently the social economy is viewed only as an instrument for improving access to employment. The other benefits of the sector, such as providing high-quality, accessible and affordable services of general interest, as well as tackling poverty and supporting active social inclusion and local development, are not referred to in the ESF+ Regulation.

Finally, the members of the Category were again updated on progress towards the upcoming EESC European Day of Social Economy Enterprises, scheduled to take place in Strasbourg in November 2019.

**Other events with the participation of the Category spokespersons**

* 28 March, Leuven: high-level conference on social investment in service markets at the Irish College of the University of Leuven;
* 9 April, Dublin: conference on socially responsible public procurement "Buying for Social Impact", coordinated by Social Economy Europe (SEE);
* 20 May, Paris: conference "Buying for Social Impact", coordinated by SEE and ESS-France;
* 6-9 June, Bucharest: 7th CIRIEC International Research Conference on the Social Economy, "Social and Solidarity Economy: moving towards a new economic system";
* 27 June, EESC, Brussels: conference of the Federation of European Social Employers;
* 3 July, EESC, Brussels: "The Social and Solidarity Economy in Tunisia – what support from the EU?"
* 10 and 11 July, Paris: "Pact for Impact" event;
* 5 September, Prague: "Partnership for social entrepreneurship: the role of municipalities, cities and regions";
* 18 September, Brussels: conference on social entrepreneurship at the EESC;
* 2 October, Riga: conference on "Buying Social Impact" coordinated by the SEE;
* 7-11 October, Brussels: Committee of the Regions event, "Regions and Cities, pillars of the EU's future";
* 4 November, EESC, Brussels: conference on satellite accounts;
* 13 November, Sofia: high-level conference on the occasion of 100th anniversary of the National Union of Worker Producer Cooperatives;
* 20 November, Brussels: event by SEE to stimulate the creation of the Social Economy Intergroup at the European Parliament;
* 27 November, Strasbourg: European Day of Social Economy Enterprises;
* 4 December, EESC, Brussels: conference on Social Housing.

**Category initiatives (opinions, publications including links)**

Support from the Social Economy Category for an open letter to MEPs and national governments on the necessity for the ESF+ to include the additional and specific objective of supporting the social economy.

**Challenges and suggestions for 2020 and the first semester of 2021**

2020 and the first half of 2021 will provide the opportunity for a number of key activities for the Social Economy Category, including:

* Actively contributing to the discussions on the upcoming EC Social Economy Action Plan;
* Focussing on relevant forthcoming EC policies and events, e.g. the 6th programming period for INTERREG and the European Social Economy Summit in Mannheim in November 2020;
* Taking the lead in a coordinated EESC approach vis-a-vis the European institutions to ensure that support for the social economy constitutes a separate specific objective of the ESF+ Regulation;
* Discussing the topic "Economy of Values" with the renowned Polish professor, Jerzy Hausner, one of the initiators of the annual "Open Eyes Economy Summit";
* Establishing close working relations with the renewed Social Economy Intergroup of the European Parliament;
* Coordinating activities with the INT Section, which will continue to organise the annual European Day of Social Enterprises, even though the Section's study group on Social Economy Enterprises will be dissolved at the forthcoming EESC renewal.

It should be noted that from October 2020 the Social Economy Category will be the only EESC body which will bring together social economy actors. Hence, it is imperative that efforts concentrate on raising the profile of the Category, both within the Committee, among European institutions and civil society actors. For this reason, the first meeting of the Category following the Committee's renewal should take place in 2020.

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**APPENDIX**

**Overview of language arrangements for Category meetings**

**LANGUAGE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SOCIAL ECONOMY CATEGORY
IN 2019**

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| **DATE** | **DURATION** | **ARRANGEMENT** |
| 7 March 2019 | ½ day | Requested: ES CS DE EN FR IT / ES CS DE EN FRObtained: ES DE EN FR IT / ES DE EN FR |
| 21 June 2019 | ½ day | Requested: ES DE EN FR IT / ES DE EN FRObtained: ES DE EN FR IT / ES DE EN FR |
| 14 October 2019 | ½ day | Requested: ES DE EN FR IT / ES DE EN FR ITObtained: ES DE EN FR IT / ES DE EN FR IT |

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