



Period 2015-2020

Activity report of the "Social Economy Category"



European Economic
and Social Committee

Message from Alain Coheur and Krzysztof Balon

During the 2015 – 2020 mandate of the EESC, the Social Economy Category was able to continue its successful work, promoting the social economy through a variety of activities, whilst also providing new impulses for its further development in the EU and in the European neighbourhood. This of course wouldn't be possible without the excellent contribution of the Category Members.

Therefore, it is more than appropriate to express a deep gratitude to our Members, not only for their successful efforts, but also for the mutual trust and for the exemplary working atmosphere. We are also very grateful to the members of the Social Economy Intergroup of the European Parliament, which supported our work in an outstanding way. No less excellent was the Co-operation with the European Commission and with the governments of some Member States. Last but not least, it was the support provided by the EESC's Group III Secretariat, that made our achievements possible.

We are convinced that efforts to establish the social economy as a leading economic model in Europe will be successful. We wish all of us a lot of perseverance, but also joy and satisfaction on this possibly long, but necessary way.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Balon'.

Krzysztof Balon



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Coheur'.

Alain Coheur

Category Co-Spokespersons

Introduction to the Social Economy Category

During the years 2015-20, the Social Economy Category was composed of 30-39 EESC Members who collectively represented the multiple dimensions of the social economy: cooperatives, mutual societies, associations, foundations and social enterprises.

During these five years, the Category has striven to promote and defend the interests of the social economy to the widest possible audience. It has sought to gain recognition for the substantial contribution of the sector to Europe's socio-economic development and to the success of the European integration process. Moreover, the Social Economy Category has repeatedly demonstrated its usefulness as a platform, facilitating peer-to-peer learning, the exchange of best practices and close cooperation with the European Institutions and wider civil society organisations. Finally, over the years, the Social Economy Category has encouraged the mainstreaming of the Social Economy in EESC Opinions and other activities, as well as initiating two EESC commissioned studies on the sector.

Activities and principle achievements (2015-20)

Promoting EU policies favourable to the sector

Over this period, the work of the Social Economy Category facilitated the following:

- Adoption of the **conclusions of the EPSCO Council** of 7 December 2015 on «*The Promotion of the Social Economy as a Key Driver of Economic and Social Development in Europe*» (specific reference to the EESC in point 13);
- Adoption of the **Roadmap** «*Towards a More Comprehensive Ecosystem for Social Economy Enterprises*» on 4 December 2015, signed by representatives of the governments of France, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain;
- The decision by the European Commission to adopt a **Social Economy Action Plan in 2021**.

The Category also contributed to a number of key **EESC Opinions** on the social economy, for example:

- «The External Dimension of the Social Economy»;
 - «The Economy of the Common Good»;
 - «Building a Financial Ecosystem for Social Enterprises»;
 - «The European Social Fund+»
 - «Strengthening non-profit social enterprises as an essential pillar of a socially equitable Europe»
- 

Addressing key priorities for the social economy

In the years 2015-20, the Category was very active monitoring, evaluating and promoting a number of topics directly relating to the social economy:

- Regular updates on EU policies relating to the sector and to the work programme of the European Commission;
- Developments and legislation on the social economy at the national level in France, Poland, Slovakia, Luxembourg, Spain, Estonia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Finland;
- Support for and collaboration with the Social Economy Intergroup of the European Parliament, including outreach programmes to relaunch the Intergroup;
- Regular information on the activities of the Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurs (GECES).

The following topics were also discussed at the meetings of the Category:

- Employee Financial Participation;
- The added value of the social economy to the agricultural sector;
- The links between the social economy and the disability sector;
- EU support for social impact and social impact bonds (EaSI and EFSI funds);
- The implications for the social economy of the 2019 elections to the European Parliament;
- Financing the social economy through the ESF+ Regulation;
- The 6th EU programming period for INTERREG;
- Exchange of views on the EU-funded project for a European Network for Employers of Social Services (EU PESSIS 3).

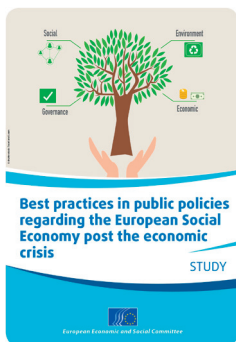
Thematic exchanges were held, inter alia, with the following individuals/organisations:

- The research centre CIRIEC, who were commissioned by the EESC for two studies on the Social Economy;
- The author of the book «*The Weight, Size and Scope of the Social Economy in Europe*»;
- The French Mutual MGEN on their report «*Not-for-profit is a European Issue for the Social Economy*»;
- Social Economy Europe on their publication «*Towards the European Action Plan for the Social Economy*».

Launching key new initiatives

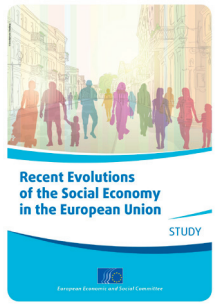
Two **EESC studies** on the Social Economy were initiated by the Category and published during this period, namely:

- «*Best Practices in Public Policies Regarding the European Social Economy Post the Economic Crisis*»



(<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/best-practices-public-policies-regarding-european-social-economy-post-economic-crisis-study>);

- «Recent Evolutions of the Social Economy in the European Union» (<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/recent-evolutions-social-economy-study>).



Moreover, a **declaration** on «The Added Value of the Social Economy in the Agricultural Sector» was adopted in July 2018.

Reinforcing links with relevant EESC bodies

Over this period, substantial efforts were made to coordinate activities with the EESC study group on Social Enterprises, with a view to ensuring an overarching EESC strategy. Emphasis was placed on regular exchanges of information, reciprocal support and the avoidance of duplication of activities between the two bodies. The cooperation was strengthened by the fact that for the period 2017-2020, one of the co-Spokespersons of the Social Economy Category was also the President of the study group on Social Enterprises.

Strong cooperation was also established with two other EESC bodies: the Farmers' Category and the Disability Rights Study Group. Joint events were organised with each of these bodies, in July 2018 and in March 2019 respectively. The topics of «The Added Value of the Social Economy in the Agricultural Sector» and «The Social Economy and the Disability Sector» were discussed. This cooperation clearly 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.

Improving the visibility of the sector

As is apparent from the above, the work of the Social Economy Category in the years 2015-20 has led to a vast outreach towards external social economy actors, other civil society organisations, academia, the European Institutions and national authorities. These links have been reinforced by the high number of events in which Members actively participated, notably, the co-Spokespersons of the Category. For example, during the period 2015 to 2017, the co-Spokespersons of the Category were regularly invited to attend the Bureau of the Social Economy Intergroup of the European Parliament.

These contacts were nurtured with a view to consolidating the role and contribution of the EESC's Social Economy Category to contemporary debates and will undoubtedly be reinforced during the upcoming mandate of the Committee.



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Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 99
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