Report on the

Round Table on the Involvement of Organised Civil Society in the Implementation of the NRRPs – How can we make it work better?

**Background**

The round table in Sofia was organised by the European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) European Semester Group (ESG) as part of an effort to look into the elaboration, implementation and monitoring of national recovery and resilience plans (NRRP).

The EESC was represented by a delegation of Bulgarian members, comprised of Mr Georgi Stoev (Group I), Mr Plamen Dimitrov (Group II) and Mr Stoyan Tchoukanov (Group III). A Bulgarian-speaking EESC administrator provided support to the delegation during the preparations and on site during the event.

The round table was held in Sofia on 12 October 2021.

**Organization, representation and attendance**

The event was structured around the four chapters of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan: Innovative Bulgaria, Green Bulgaria, Connected Bulgaria and Fair Bulgaria. To ensure maximum representation, delegation members decided to organise the event through the Bulgarian Economic and Social Council (ESC). The organisers invited the Deputy Prime Minister for EU Funds Management, Atanas Pekanov, and the line ministers responsible for the areas covered by the NRRP. In the end, the national government was represented by Mr Pekanov and deputy-ministers for education and science, energy, economy, finance, and labour and social policy.

The round table was held at the Europa Hall at CITUB headquarters (1 Makedonia Square, Sofia). Due to Covid-19 restrictions, only 30 participants were allowed in the room; the rest could follow the discussions via video streaming. Excluding government representatives, there were 38 participants in total. For the complete attendance list, see Appendix I. The event was recorded.

**Involvement of civil society organizations in the elaboration of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan**

With regard to the involvement of civil society organizations in the discussions and the adoption of the NRRP, some participants stated that they have had both formal and informal meetings with the government, and that the proposals made by their organizations were largely taken aboard in the NRP. Others complained that they were not involved at all, and that none of their proposals were adopted. In informal conversations with the EESC administrator, the participants confirmed that both statements were true: workers' organisations and social partners were more successful in finding ways to discuss the NRRP and their proposals with the government than employers' organizations. According to the latter, there was indeed dialogue but it wasn't really open or two-sided; proposals were made but were not adopted without any explanation why.

The Bulgarian ESC discussed the NRRP on three occasions and had an opinion on the its most controversial aspects: coal plants and rule of law. The round table was the first discussion that wasn't held online.

ESC insisted that all proposals made by civil society organizations should be annexed to the NRRP with status comments, including rejection reasons.

**Possibilities for involvement of civil society organizations in the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan**

With regard to the involvement of organised civil society in the implementation of the NRRP, the Bulgarian ESC declared its readiness to act as monitoring committee in the implementation phase. The deputy minister for education and science, Vanya Stoyneva, spoke in favour of this, saying that the idea is already being discussed.

The ESC also stated that it has the capacity to review all strategic documents, as its members represent all sectors.

**Issues**

The EESC administrator encountered several issues in the preparation of the round table and on site in Sofia:

* Communication with the delegation – the administrator used delegation members' official EESC email addresses to communicate with them. It was later established that at least one of the members wasn't using his official EESC email at all, which led to a break of communication;
* Communication with the Bulgarian organisers – the Bulgarian organisers asked whether EESC can cover the costs for coffee and refreshments. The EESC administrator was granted approval to spend up to EUR 300 for this, and duly notified the Bulgarian side, explaining in no uncertain terms that this is a hard limit. Nevertheless, the organisers planned two coffee breaks and a lunch for the participants, the cost of which exceeded the limit, and asked the EESC administrator to pay for it. The matter was resolved by reducing the number of lunches and the refreshments;
* Deadline for questionnaires – the letter accompanying the questionnaire states that contributions should be submitted by April 2022. This period turned out to be too long and demotivating for participants. Although participants were asked to send the filled questionnaires before the event, and despite a reminder by the organisers during the round table, only one questionnaire was received.

**Appendix I: Participant list**

Double-click image to open full list.

