

MEMORANDUM

E u r o p e a n P a r l i a m e n t
2 0 1 4 - 2 0 1 9

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S
SOCIAL ECONOMY
INTERGROUP



The European elections of 2014 are the opportunity to put in place actions tapping into the potential of social economy to face important challenges of the society. In this respect, the European Parliament has a decisive role to play in ensuring that these demands are fully heard and acknowledged by all the European institutions, and are reflected in European policies that meet the needs and concerns of all EU citizens.

SOCIAL ECONOMY &
THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



The European Parliament's Social Economy Intergroup

Created in 1990, the Social Economy Intergroup of the European Parliament has established an impressive track record as a platform and facilitator of the inter-parliamentary dialogue and as a linking pin between the social economy sector and Members of Parliament. With nearly 50 MEPs and 30 sector organisations, the Social Economy Intergroup of the European Parliament offers important networking opportunities and an invaluable source of information about the social economy sector in the European Union.

The rationale behind the Social Economy Intergroup is rooted in the diversity of the social economy which covers a variety of key policy areas in the European Union. The European Parliament has recognized the importance of the social economy at European level through the establishment of the Social Economy Intergroup.

Today, the Social Economy Intergroup is co-chaired by Italian MEP Raffaele BALDASSARRE (EPP) and Belgian MEP Marc TARABELLA (S&D). The vice-presidents are the German MEP Sven GIEGOLD (Greens-EFA), Italian MEP Patrizia TOIA (S&D) and the French MEP Marie-Christine VERGIAT (GUE/NGL). A secretariat, composed of parliamentary assistants and SOCIAL ECONOMY EUROPE, provides logistical support to the activities of the Intergroup.

The objectives of the European Parliament's Social Economy Intergroup are to:

- ◆ Promote the exchange of views on the policies and legislation related to the social economy
- ◆ Constitute a regular dialogue between MEPs and social economy actors
- ◆ Bring together MEPs from all political groups and all the Member States
- ◆ Ensure that the European institutions shall take into account the interests of the social economy and its actors in the development and the implementation of policies.

The Importance of Social Economy in the European Union

Social economy is an important reality in Europe, providing paid employment to over 14.5 million European citizens and representing about 6.5% of the working population of the EU. In countries such as Belgium, Italy, France, Spain and the Netherlands it accounts for between 9% and 11.5% of the working population. Particularly in the current period of economic and social crises, social economy is able to bring innovative solutions for social cohesion and inclusion, job creation, entrepreneurial spirit, growth and the promotion of active citizenship.

Social economy is a school of thought which integrates the constraints of the economy and social considerations. As stated in the Single Market Act “the social economy and social enterprises are key actors in delivering social innovation, inclusiveness and trust. Harnessing confidence in the Single Market and strengthening the social market economy demands highly responsible and innovative companies which can make a positive impact on society and the environment”.

Social economy actors are deeply rooted in the local realities and able to interpret emerging social needs and provide adequate solutions. Historically, they have contributed to job creation and have largely contributed to the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, also by linking environmental and social matters. It is precisely for its positive impact on the society, the economy and the environment that social economy has been recognized by EU Institutions. These conditions – promotion of active citizenship, inclusiveness and trust – are essentials to ensure that there is a place for everyone in our society.





*Marc Tarabella,
Co-Chair of the Intergroup*



“It is important that the Parliament understands better the reality and variety of social economy.”

“The Social Economy Intergroup almost celebrates its 25 years of existence and has proven itself over that time. The Intergroup is important for MEPs to get an overview and understanding of the diversity and activities of the sector.

The hearings of the Intergroup give MEPs, the social economy and the stakeholders the opportunity to share views and opinions and so to jointly contribute to the development of supportive policies. Thanks to the intergroup and the work of its members, the social economy truly is within sight of the European Parliament.”

“The social economy delivers the EU citizen a service. He should not be at the service of economy.”

“As a co-Chair of the Intergroup I supported various policy initiatives and contributed to the development of the social economy in the European Union. The social economy is important in both social as well in economic terms. The sector provides employment to tens of millions of Europeans. Social economy is a reality that we cannot and should not underestimate.

The sector integrates underutilized resources for economic activities, mobilizes resources at a local level, and strengthens the entrepreneurial spirit. Social economy stands for growth of employment and sustainable development and softens the sharp edges of the market.”



“The social economy should be fully recognized, especially in this economically difficult time.”

“The social economy should be supported in its further development. It is our chance to get out of the current financial and economic crisis. It is therefore a duty for politicians and policy makers within the European institutions to do their utmost to create an environment conducive to the further development of the sector.

The European Parliament should redouble its commitment to the spreading of the visibility and understanding of the social economy sector. We are on the right track, but not done yet. The next years will be important for the further development and appreciation of the social economy sector and thus for the future of the European Union.”



*Raffaele Baldassarre,
Co-Chair of the Intergroup*



“The Social Economy Intergroup is a good platform for exchanging ideas and political priorities.”

“I became only recently a Member of the intergroup. In the last months I enjoyed taking part in this very important platform for exchanging ideas and set political priorities for a sector which plays a valuable role especially in the current period of economic and social crisis.

The Intergroup is an important tool to contribute to the development of social policies at European level. It brings together Members of the Parliament, experts and stakeholders linking people from different political parties and Member States.

The Intergroup provides also a good setting to increase the attention to social economy within the European Parliament.”

“Social economy plays a fundamental role for European integration.”

“The impact of social economy can be quantified by looking at the employment provided by this sector as well as to the services provided to local and regional realities. On the other hand, the most valuable impact of social economy is in terms of values and inclusiveness. For this reason social economy is key for the European integration process. It allows to integrate economic sustainability with societal and environmental interests. It gives local communities the possibility to find collective solutions to problems which would be difficult to solve individually. In this context, social economy plays a key role for the development of specific sectors at local level which are able to bring innovative solutions and products on the markets such as in the case of renewable energy providers.”



“We need more sector-based and specific legislation to support the impact of social economy.”

“The Toia report of 2009 has set key principles for social economy and has paved the way for the development of further policies. In this context, the Commission has launched several initiatives to support progress in social economy throughout the European Union like, for instance, with the Social Business Initiative or with the renewed European Strategy for CSR.

In the years to come we need more sectorial legislation in order to set a solid legal framework for mutuals, foundations and associations which are active in social economy. Future legislation should tackle specific problems of the sector in order to provide all involved actors with equal access to the opportunities offered by the internal market.”



*Patrizia Toia,
Member of the Bureau*



“We have to safeguard the exchange of information between stakeholders and politicians.”

“I’m a member of the Social Economy Intergroup since I became a Member of the Parliament in 2004. Over the last ten years I learnt that it has been an excellent platform for the exchange of ideas with people from the sector.

The Social Economy Intergroup has proven to be a breeding ground for many good ideas, policy initiatives and reports. Thanks to the close collaboration with the stakeholders in the Intergroup I was able to draft a report that has proposed an outline for the further development of the social economy in the European Union. It is vital for the Parliament and the social economy that this Intergroup continues to ensure the exchange of information and a continuous dialogue with the stakeholders.”

“Despite the crisis, the social economy sector shows dynamism, resilience and even growth.”

“The Social economy is an important sector in the European Union. It provides paid employment to over 14.5 million citizens or 6.5% of the working population. It is therefore an important and growing sector, which even the classical liberal economists will admit. No-one can deny its dynamics and resilience.

The social economy deserves full recognition and full support to further develop. It combines economic sustainability with human and environmental values. It contributes to the welfare state, job creation, social innovation and good governance. all this without a financial profit orientation. Social economy has its own place in the internal market and it has chosen to put values before profits.”

“This legislature has brought a reversal, which should be reflected in the next five years.”

“The social economy sector deserves the support of the European institutions with both general as well as with specific legislation. The legislator should take into account the specificities of the actors of the social economy sector and provide them with equal chances and instruments in the internal market.

This is the good moment to start developing new strategies to harness the social economy entrepreneurs. The EU understands the importance of their contributions to the European society. The Strasbourg declaration of January 2014 has identified excellent opportunities that should be fully exploited in the next five years to make sure that the reversal in thinking and in acting continues.”



*Marie-Christine Vergiat,
Member of the Bureau*



“The Social Economy Intergroup is a useful tool for the sector.”

“The Social Economy Intergroup of the European Parliament is important to promote the social economy within the European institutions. It is also a tool for dialogue with the stakeholders of the social economy. All political groups, apart from the Euro-skeptics and the extreme right are represented and have the ability to start a dialogue with the stakeholders.

Never before has the European Parliament produced as many texts and taken as many political initiatives supporting the social economy as during this legislature. This shows that the members of the Social Economy Intergroup and the European Parliament are willing to move forward and that they are ready to discuss important issues for the sector with the stakeholders themselves.”

“Social economy enterprises are innovative, resilient and resistant.”

“The social economy plays an important role in the European Union. It has demonstrated solid assets both from a quantitative and qualitative point of view. Its enterprises have proven to be resilient and more resistant in times of crisis than the so-called traditional enterprises. It is clear that the sector has made a positive contribution to the development of the European project. However, this is not recognized by all, yet.

Some confusion about the expression of the real significance of the social economy and its conceptualization remains within the Institutions and among policy makers. “Social economy” and “social enterprise” are considered under the same denominator without really knowing what is behind. But more often, the figures put forward are those of the social economy. We use too often a different vocabulary, contributing to confusion.”

“We have to anticipate new policy initiatives from the Commission.”

“The Parliament has indicated the way to go in the report of MEP Patrizia Toia, adopted in 2009. It still is our roadmap. Substantial progress has been made on the path to legal recognition for all the families of the social economy, but there is still a long way to go. It is regrettable that the role of social economy enterprises remains too often linked to the policies for the most vulnerable only, whereas the real issue at stake is the recognition of the specificities of the social economy enterprises of their own values and their business models. The freedom to carry out an entrepreneurial activity, under whatever legal statute, should become a reality in the European Union. We have to anticipate new initiatives of the European Commission. Otherwise the social economy will be overruled by the dominant economic discourse of the European institutions and be at risk to lose its specificities for the benefit of capitalistic enterprises only. There has been a positive outcome and this must be carried on during the next legislative term in the European Parliament.”



*Sven Giegold,
Member of the Bureau*



“The Intergroup links people, parties and Member States.”

“I have been a member of the Social Economy Intergroup since the last legislature of the Parliament and I must say that there is an added value of the Intergroup as a platform and facilitator of the dialogue between MEPs, the sector and the European institutions.

The Intergroup links people from different parties and from different Member States and it is a good opportunity to give the social economy sector more visibility in the European Parliament.”

“The concept of social economy is gaining popularity.”

“Today, everybody seems to like the concept of social economy. Its capacity to keep and to create jobs, and to innovate while respecting social and environmental requirements, puts social economy in the heart of the attention of European policymakers.

But also locally, the concept of social economy is gaining popularity. In the energy sector in Germany for example, the number of local cooperatives and associations is growing. By their nature they engage citizens and so help to raise awareness and help to turn around to renewable energy. I'm convinced that this had never happened if it all was left to the conventional players in the energy sector. And there is a long list of sectors where social economy actors support the green vision to keep jobs and to add value to the citizens' own region.”



“Social economy actors still face difficulties.”

“Over the last years there has been done a lot to support the social economy sector. The European Commission has been supportive with its Social Business Initiative and a lot of progress has been made in the field of public procurement and the access to public funding.

But there is still a lot missing, which should be taken up as soon as possible. Social economy actors still face difficulties in developing cross-border initiatives. Cooperatives have to cope with a bureaucratic instrument, whereas mutuals, foundations and associations do not have any proper legal framework at all.”

REPORTS & INITIATIVES

	Giegold, Sven	Report of the Greens on strengthening European cooperatives and the wider social and solidarity economy in the context of the UN year of cooperatives (2012)
	BECKER, Heinz K.	Social Business Initiative - Creating a favorable climate for social enterprises, key stakeholders in the social economy and innovation (2012)
	GIANNAKOU, Marietta	European political parties and European political foundations: statute and funding (2012)
	REGNER, Evelyn	Statute for a European Foundation (FE) (2012)
	BERLINGUER, Luigi	Statute for a European mutual society (2012)
	TOIA, Patrizia	Contribution of cooperatives to overcoming the crisis (2012)
	MAURO, Mario	European Investment Bank - 2011 annual report (2011)
	BASTOS, Regina	Agenda for new skills and jobs (2011)
	DAERDEN, Frédéric	European Platform against poverty and social exclusion (2011)
	SCICLUNA, Edward	European statistical programme 2013-2017 (2011)
	AUCONIE, Sophie	European social entrepreneurship funds (2011)
	MORIN-CHARTIER, Elisabeth	European Social Fund (ESF) 2014-2020 (2011)
	CORREIA DE CAMPOS, António Fernando	Single Market for Europeans (2010)
	SCHROEDTER, Elisabeth	Developing the job potential of a new sustainable economy (2010)
	ŐRY, Csaba	Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States. Part II of the Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines (2010)
	DE ROSSA, Proinsias	Future for social services of general interest (2009)
	KIRILOV, Evgeni	Cohesion Policy: Investing in the real economy (2009)
	GÖNCZ, Kinga	European Progress Microfinance Facility for employment and social inclusion (2009)
	GÖNCZ, Kinga	Employment and Social Solidarity: Progress Program 2007-2013 (2009)



Public hearings to exchange on practices and policies in the EU

The Social Economy Intergroup of the European Parliament organizes public hearings on a regular basis. These public hearings are open to all interested MEPs and social economy stakeholders. During the last legislature, the Social Economy Intergroup has organized thematic public hearings about a broad variety of themes:

- ◆ Social Economy's response to the financial crisis
- ◆ European statutes for the social economy
- ◆ Financial Instruments for social economy enterprises
- ◆ The new Cohesion Policy and Structural Funds
- ◆ The social economy on the European agenda



Taking the initiative to develop favorable policies for the sector

During the last legislature, members of the Parliament's Social Economy Intergroup have triggered the demand for own initiative reports and policy initiatives. They did so to encourage policy makers to develop supporting policies for the social economy in general and its actors in particular.

And they did so successfully. More than 200 documents of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee have recognized the contribution to the European project and the need to take social economy into account in all social and economic policies.



Paving the way for new policy initiatives to support the sector

With a view on the upcoming European elections, the members of the Social Economy Intergroup of the European Parliament took the initiative to publish this Memorandum to express their visions, ideas and wishes and to stimulate the newly elected MEPs to continue their work in the next legislature.

They consider that the social economy and social economy stakeholders deserve full institutional recognition by all European Institutions and a comprehensive and consistent policy at a European level according to its strong presence in society and in economy.



ACHIEVEMENTS & ACTIVITIES



Continuation of the Parliament's Social Economy Intergroup

The new European Parliament should strengthen the spaces for dialogue on social economy within the European Parliament by establishing a successive Social Economy Intergroup, because

- ◆ Intergroups in general and a new Social Economy Intergroup in particular facilitates the exchange of views and opinions between the sector and the MEPs.
- ◆ A specific Intergroup for the social economy boosts transparency in decision-making and participation of social economy actors and EU citizens in the development of policies.
- ◆ There is a Social Economy Intergroup in place since 1990 and it has proven to be very useful.

Strive for full implementation of the EP reports on social economy

The Social Economy Intergroup members called for an own-initiative report on Social Economy. This report, adopted in 2009, includes lots of recommendations and needs implementation, because

- ◆ The social economy sector is still lacking necessary (legal) instruments and tools to further develop its activities on a level playing field.
- ◆ In the "Strasbourg declaration" of January 2014, the participants of the conference "Social entrepreneurs: Have your say!" called also on to follow all actions of the Social Business Act.
- ◆ Social economy actors deserve a fair and equal treatment on the Internal market and there is a need for a level playing field.

Support the development of the European social economy sector

The social economy sector represents more than 10% of all EU enterprises and 6% of total employment in the EU. It also reinforces social cohesion and civil participation. The sector needs full support, because

- ◆ It has proven to be resilient and sustainable, even in times of financial, economic and social crises.
- ◆ It is a factor for stable and sustainable economic growth, matching services to needs, increasing the value of economic activities serving social needs, fairer income and wealth distribution and correcting labor market imbalances.
- ◆ It helps deepening and strengthening economic democracy and prosperity in the European Union.

POLICY PRIORITIES 2014-2019



© Social Economy Europe, 2014

For more information:
contact@socialeconomy.eu.org
www.socialeconomy.eu.org

