

Karine Pflüger
Social Economy Europe

SOCIAL ECONOMY EUROPE INTO THE EUROPEAN POLICY MAKING PROCESS

Social Economy Europe is the EU level organisation representing and promoting social economy in Europe. Social Economy Europe's members are divided into three main categories: international and European organisations (AIM - International Association of Mutual Health Funds; AMICE - Association of Mutual Insurers and Insurance Cooperatives in Europe; CEDAG - European Council for Voluntary Organisations; COOPERATIVES EUROPE - Common platform of the cooperatives within Europe; EFC - European Foundation Centre); national organisations (CEGES - Conseil des Entreprises, Employeurs et Groupements d'Economie Sociale (FR); CEPES - Spanish Business Confederation of Social Economy (SP)); network organisations (FEDES - European Federation of Social Employers; REVES - European Networks for Cities and Regions for Social Economy; ENSIE - European Network for Social Integration Enterprises). Social Economy Europe is open to European organisations representing new forms of social economy enterprises as well as to national representative organisations that gather several social economy families.

THE EUROPEAN BACKGROUND FOR SOCIAL ECONOMY EUROPE: FROM 1989 TO MARCH 1998

In 1989 the European Commission published a Communication entitled *"Businesses in the 'Economie Sociale' sector: Europe's frontier-free market"* and the social economy sector was politically accredited by the creation of a Social Economy Unit within DG XXIII Enterprise Policy, Distributive Trades, Tourism and the Social Economy. The European Commission promoted several European Social Economy Conferences throughout the 1990s.

NOTES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

An informal Consultative Committee for Co-operatives, Mutual societies, Associations and Foundations was established in 1994 and gave its opinions on a number of issues, including the proposed multi-annual programme for co-operatives, mutual societies associations and foundations (1994-96); the Commission's Communication on Worker Information and Consultation, CMAFs and Regulations governing competition; the White Paper on "Teaching and Learning, Towards the Learning Society"; the Commission's Communication on "Promoting the Role of Voluntary Organisations and Foundations in Europe".

In 1997, the "Third System and Employment" pilot action was launched, putting in the forefront the role of social economy companies in local development and job creation.

FROM MARCH 1998 TO NOVEMBER 2000

By its Decision of 13 March 1998, the Commission created the **Consultative Committee for Co-operatives, Mutual societies, Associations and Foundations** (CCCMF). For two years this Committee was chaired by the Commission. Its members represented the 3 large "families" of co-operatives, mutual societies and associations/foundations and were drawn from organisations representative of Social Economy at national and European levels. It assisted the Commission's decision-making processes in the field of the social economy by responding to its requests for opinions on the major political and social questions. It also took initiatives in expressing views on issues that had a bearing on the Commission's social economy policies. The Committee agreed a work programme according to identified priorities, which included issues related to the European Statutes for co-operatives, mutual societies and associations; the rules relating to VAT, possible discriminations and the need for special measures or exemptions ; proposals for the establishment of national resource and development centres for the Social Economy; the standards required and how they match the reality of the Social Economy in the Applicant States in the context of the enlargement of the European Union.

NOVEMBER 2000

The re-organisation of the formal consultative structures of DG Enterprise and the creation of the Enterprise Policy Group resulted in the dissolution of the Consultative Committee as a formal body. On 17th November 2000, the members of the Committee decided to create, in its place, an autonomous **European Standing Conference** (Conférence Européenne Permanente) of Co-operatives, Mutual societies, Associations and Foundations (CEP-CMAF), in order to continue giving co-operatives, mutual societies, associations and foundations better visibility at the political level and to demonstrate more easily the importance of the social economy structures in the economic and social life of Europe. Two representatives of the sector also have a seat on the Enterprise Policy Group.

JANUARY 2008

In January 2008, the CEP-CMAF changed its name into **Social Economy Europe**. The changes were made firstly, because the pronunciation of "CEP CMAF" was not quite easy. Secondly, because the name "Social Economy Europe" indicates a movement towards opening and extension, while respecting the values specified in the Social Economy Charter. Social Economy Europe remains attached to the various families of social economy but aims to emphasis our common criteria, while respecting the families' diversity. Finally, this new name wants to underline the will of social economy actors to create a gathering space allowing them to speak with one voice about the broadest issues.

Social Economy Europe as the representative organisation of social economy at EU level:

Social Economy Europe considers that each family is in a better position to defend its positions and tackle specific files they are concerned with. But at the same time, it is essential to determine the connecting thread where all components of social economy at European level can come together, in order to establish and formulate large common goals, which Social Economy Europe will then be able to bring forward more efficiently.

The role of Social Economy Europe is to make sure that policy makers at European level take into account the specificities of Social economy organisations and enterprises. The EU has to acknowledge that they can produce quality jobs, devotes a large budget to training and ensures a genuine social dialogue. Social Economy organisations and enterprises are engaged in economical and social creativity and innovation and have been pioneers in the field of social innovation (recycling, micro-credit – insertion through work – fair trade and finance – etc.). They also characterise themselves with a high potential in terms of advanced technical innovation.

Through its work, Social Economy Europe aims at defending the general interest, as a large proportion of social economy organisations and enterprises, in the fields of health or cooperative action, try to combine their members' interests with the collective or general interest.

Social Economy Europe has the task to continue showing that social economy organisations and enterprises' way of doing business meets with a series of expectations and criteria determined in the Lisbon Strategy. The 10% jobs in Europe social economy represents cannot be ignored. On the contrary, the territorial rooting of social economy organisations and enterprises can also act as a defence against economic relocation, therefore being an undeniable actor in social, economic and territorial cohesion. What is more, there is a largely under-exploited potential of creating socially fair organisations and enterprises in the countries of Eastern Europe.

NOTES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Social Economy Europe and its partner institutions at EU level:

Strong with the historical link with the European Commission, Social Economy Europe is working closely with DG employment and Social Affairs and DG Enterprise. Through its strong membership, Social Economy Europe is also in contact with DGs Internal Market and Services, Competition and SANCO. Social Economy Europe is present to conferences and meetings organised by the Commission on topics relevant for social economy. Social Economy Europe is also very active in raising social economy concerns by answering European Commission's consultations.

The European Parliament has acknowledged the importance of social economy at European level with the creation of the Social Economy Intergroup. The Intergroup is now co-chaired by Ms Ferreira (PES) and M. Mauro (EPP). The Social Economy Intergroup is an observatory and a vigilant body, watching closely European policies linked with social economy such as social cohesion, social protection, health, insurances, services of general interest, competition, corporate social responsibility, employment policies... The Social Economy Intergroup is holding monthly meetings. Representatives of cooperatives, mutual societies, associations and foundations together with representatives of civil society and employers have the opportunity to meet with MEPs, representatives of the European Commission and of the European Economic and Social Committee.

Social Economy Europe is also working very closely with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) of the European Union, through the Social economy category. The EESC is a consultative body that gives representatives of Europe's socio-occupational interest groups, and others, a formal platform to express their points of views on EU issues. Its opinions are forwarded to the larger institutions - the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament. It thus has a key role to play in the Union's decision-making process. The Social economy category brings together 36 members (35 of whom belong to Group III and 1 to Group I) from cooperatives, mutual societies, associations, foundations and social NGOs.

Social Economy Europe will increase its working links with the Committee of the Regions, the political assembly that provides local and regional authorities with a voice at the heart of the European Union.

CONCLUSION

Social Economy Europe three main objectives are as follow: promote social economy as a sector that produces both economic and social wealth; promote the role and values of the social economy actors throughout Europe; reinforce political and legal recognition of the social economy at European level. Social Economy Europe, as representative organisation at EU level aims at having the EU institution recognise that social economy is everywhere, for anyone, at anytime. Social economy organisations and enterprises are an integral part of the European social model and play an important role within the objectives of European policies, in particular for employment, social cohesion, entrepreneurial spirit, governance, local development etc... The EU welcomes exchanges between the civil society and the EU institutions, even though a clearer framework for the distinct relationship between them should be established. Therefore, it is the duty of Social Economy Europe to be active at EU level in order to promote social economy into the European policy making process.