



Φόρουμ Κοινωνικής Επιχειρηματικότητας

## **SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP FORUM 2014**

Athens, 20-21 November 2014

### **DECLARATION**

#### **The Contribution of Social Economy at a local, national and European level**

Social economy and social entrepreneurship are recognized as factors of social and economic cohesion in Europe, thus contributing to the building of a pluralist and resilient social economy. They are also engines of change, developing innovative solutions to the challenges faced nowadays. Operating in the common interest, they create jobs, provide innovative products and services, and promote the formation of a more sustainable economy, while contributing to the integration of democracy in economy jointly with environmental protection. They create new prospects and hopes for the future, based on the principles of solidarity and the empowerment of ownership, by supporting citizens in regaining control of the decision-making affecting their lives.

Social enterprises provide a prototype of a balanced combination of economic, social, cultural, and environmental needs. Social entrepreneurs, either as individuals or groups, are agents of change whose basic intent is the improvement of life quality of their fellow-citizens and local communities.



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Social Economy enterprises are profitable. They are effective and have demonstrated particular resilience during the crisis. In a period of economic downturn, facing challenges of aging population, youth unemployment, climate change and increase of inequality, Europe and Greece are in need of dynamic and effective social enterprises:

- new quality jobs are created
- environment, social and social gaps are covered, through environmental, technological and social innovation.
- democracy is integrated into the economy and new business models are developed, oriented towards the common interest
- economic activity is revived, local economy in particular.

### **A common field of principles, values and requests**

- The future of social and solidarity economy depends on its bottom-up development, together with the development of institutions for consulting and support by the social economy initiatives themselves.

- Best practices and know-how from other European countries may assist Greece in its social economy, at this critical moment when what is urgently needed is a change of its productive model and stimulation of real economy in a fair and sustainable way. Tapping into the full potential of all genuine intentions for the exchange of best practices and experiences may assist our country and society to transition from the crisis to an efficient reconstruction of the economy, with collaborative / social economy as its basic pylon.

- It is necessary to upgrade and give new meaning to the concepts of cooperative and collaboration, as well as their management and organization. It is necessary, therefore, to develop a new evaluation methodology and the incorporation of social criteria in funding proposals. It is also imperative to fully exploit, at a national level, the Community and national resources that concern social economy and small and medium enterprises, but in an effective and transparent manner, that will exclude the phenomena of client relationships, corruption and squandering that have prevailed in the past.



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- Social Economy needs to promote and guarantee the basic principles of democracy, equality and social benefit, through institutions and practices of social entrepreneurship networks, taking full advantage of the current European experience.
- National, regional and local authorities need to encourage the collaboration of social enterprises beyond boundaries and frontiers, for the exchange of knowledge and best practices. In a similar manner, state authorities also need to improve collaboration amongst themselves and develop their ability to support the development of social enterprises.
- Public authorities, central and local governance have to incorporate environmental and social characteristics in their public procurements for works, products and services, always based on European legislation and best practices. The staff dealing with procurements need to be better informed, and so do social enterprises and market factors; furthermore a cohesive strategy at a national, regional, and local level of implementation is required.
- A broader perspective of economic prosperity needs to be developed, that includes social indexes and promotes social impact in all reports and data referring to social and economic progress.
- A more powerful commitment has to be made, at a European, national, regional and local level, to encourage collaboration with bodies of social economy, with the aim of jointly formulating new support policies for social enterprises, based on a local framework.
- Ministries and regional authorities have to remove all existing obstacles and discriminations relating to the possibility of social enterprises, regardless of their legal form, accessing calls for funding programmes within the next programming period 2014–2020 and to all European Structural and Investment Funds, sustainability and social cohesion policies.
- It is imperative that a genuine dialogue is started on a new tax system which promotes social justice and environmental protection.



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- Cooperative Banks, as institutions of Social Economy, bear the duty to collaborate towards the development of suitable tools for the assessment of social enterprise business plans. These methodologies will have to effectively highlight and reflect the social and environmental criteria that differentiate not only cooperative banks, but also social enterprises from the competition. Nevertheless it is necessary to formulate alternative financial tools that are suitable for the promotion and reinforcement of social economy and entrepreneurship.
- The commitment to create an ecosystem for social enterprises based on the self-management of social / collaborative companies themselves has to be included in all policies.
- The development of structures for social solidarity and social enterprises does not negate the obligation for the provision of sufficient public funding for the guarantee of public interest services, such as health, education and social policies.
- Social economy enterprises need to communicate to the general public that theirs is a different / alternative business model, which intrinsically creates greater economic, social and environmental sustainability. The promotion of the cooperative identity and the spreading of the cooperative message through traditional and alternative means of communication are pre-requisites for every citizen to comprehend the cooperative difference and the superiority of collaboration.
- In order to take full advantage of the benefits offered by social impact reporting processes, it is necessary to promote a participatory dialogue, with the field of social economy as an obligatory agent.

*Athens, 21/11/2014*



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