

ΦΟΡΟΥΜ ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΚΗΣ
ΕΠΙΧΕΙΡΗΜΑΤΙΚΟΤΗΤΑΣ

Greek Social Entrepreneurship Forum



Action Report

Roundtable on Public Policies for Social Solidarity Economy

Office of the European Parliament, Athens

15th March 2019

The roundtable was co-organized by the Greek Social Entrepreneurship Forum in cooperation with Heinrich Boell Foundation in Greece.

28 persons participated: members of Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) enterprises, representatives of informal and formal networks, representatives of institutions and competent authorities, representatives of political parties (Coalition of the Radical Left – Unitary Social Front, New Democracy, Movement for Change) as well as members of the academic and research community.

Mrs Olga Drossou, Director of Heinrich Boell Foundation Thessaloniki Office in Greece opened the discussion by presenting the work implemented by the Greek Social Entrepreneurship Forum and the Foundation for the promotion of SSE in Greece. In particular, she highlighted the actions implemented in the field of capacity building for existing and future members of SSE through the publication of practical guides (i.e. Guide on Setting up Social Enterprises), the organization of training seminars and the development of an open and accessible on-line educational platform (kalomathe.gr) as well as in the support of networking among SSE initiatives and enterprises and the facilitation of exchange and dialogue with the competent authorities through the creation of intermediate spaces for the co-construction of enabling public policies.

Mr Gianluca Salvatori, CEO of EURICSE- European Research Institute on Cooperatives and Social Enterprises, presented the results of the mapping study for enabling ecosystems for social enterprises in Europe on behalf of the European Commission and emphasized 4 critical factors for the promotion of social enterprises: a) a critical mass of initiatives, b) management and networking skills, c) relations with civil society and d) enabling public policies through partnerships with the field. He also presented the main developments in the forthcoming programmatic period at the EU level with reference to the new programme INVEST EU which brings together 14 different financing tools under a common roof. He concluded his contribution by emphasizing the importance of statistical monitoring of SSE enterprises through the establishment of satellite accounts for the sector.



Mr Vassilis Bellis, member of the Greek Social Entrepreneurship Forum and CEO of the Development Agency of Karditsa, presented the positive results in terms of the development of SSE in the wider region of Karditsa (6.5 % of regional GDP is produced by SSE entities) thanks to the ecosystemic approach adopted and the ability to forge synergies among different initiatives irrespective of their legal forms and fields of economic activity. These synergies are unfortunately hindered by the legal and administrative fragmentation at the governmental level.

The president of the Union of SSE agents in Athens, **Mrs Anna Koniotaki**, emphasized the necessity to forge unions based on the participation of active and operational SSE enterprises. She remarked that the legal framework for SSE is rather strict in Greece without counterbalancing the restrictive criteria with development incentives and institutional support. It is important to remind that the much needed Support Centers for SSE enterprises are not yet in place because of the administrative inability to advance payments to the selected beneficiaries for their operation. There is an urgent need to develop adjusted financial tools for the support of viable SSE enterprises as well as special programmes for the support of social enterprises.

The Special Secretary of Social and Solidarity Economy from the Greek Ministry of Labour, **Mr. Evangelos Nikolaidis**, highlighted that there are different perspectives and approaches for SSE in accordance with different conceptualizations and visions. The vision of the current government and Special Secretariat is to safeguard the equalitarian, autonomous and solidarity-based organizational aspects of the initiatives formed within the period of the crisis in Greece in the framework of the new cooperativist movement while enabling the economic consolidation of these enterprises. It is also significant to avoid patron-client relations as was the case in the past with certain types of cooperatives and the Greek government.

On behalf of the Movement for Change, **Mr. Dimitris Konstantopoulos**, referred to the contributions made by the Panhellenic Socialist Party (PASOK) with the introduction of the first law on Social Economy and Social Entrepreneurship in Greece in 2011. The new legal framework voted in 2016 gained a lot from this previous experience and this is why it was voted with the support of most of the political parties in the Greek parliament. However, more incentives are still needed possibly in the form of favourable tax treatment.

Mr. Georgios Dimaras, Vice Minister of Environment, endorsed the vision of the Special Secretary of Social and Solidarity Economy with regard to the strategic priority given to SSE by the government. He also added that any shortcomings related to the legal framework arising during its implementation maybe be resolved in the framework of interministerial and bipartisan meetings.



Mrs **Sofia Voultepsi**, head of the Immigration Sector on behalf of New Democracy, held that the promotion of SSE as a different sector is not related with political visions. It is a matter of practical steps on behalf of the competent authorities to design and deliver practical measures and tools. This is why there was bipartisan support by most of the political parties for the new legal framework on SSE. Despite initial hesitations, the setting up of the Special Secretary was also approved, but there is a need for recruitment with competent experts in order to deliver positive results. Finally, there is a need to organize wide information campaigns beyond the organization of the yearly SSE EXPOs.

On behalf of the Ecologist current currently in partnership with the Coalition of the Radical Left, **Mr. Yannis Tsironis**, highlighted that there is need for a clear political vision when designing the support of SSE in Greece. There are sectors where such entities may play a decisive developmental goal such as recycling, energy, agriculture and food production. It is significant therefore to design incentives so that SSE entities are directed towards these sectors of economic activity.

Mr. Karolos Iosif Kavoulakos, Assistant Professor at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, stated the need to move beyond the short-lived European funded projects by increasing the availability of national funds for the support of the sector. SSE initiatives should and could be supported as resilient enterprises in the crisis and as alternative localized development paradigms.

Mr. Nikos Chrysogelos, president of the Social Cooperative Enterprise Wind of Renewal and member of the Greek Social Entrepreneurship Forum, stressed the need to avoid over-politicization for the design of enabling public policies. What is needed is an ecosystemic approach based on a basic consensus on common principles and values. It is also important to remove any barriers hindering access to funds available for all other types of enterprises. SSE actors do not need to be guided towards specific sectors for the economy but supported in their decision to engage with a multiplicity of sectors of economic activity.

Mr. Yiannis Apostolidis, Coordinator of the SSE group on behalf of the Coalition of Radical Left, agreed that there are still areas to be rectified with regard to the public policies in Greece and the legal framework. He also insisted that existing successful policies in other fields (i.e. financial support through the Manpower Employment Organization for the support of SMEs) could be diverted towards the support of SSE enterprises. He also highlighted the necessity for the harmonization of the cooperative legislation in Greece and possibly for the creation of a Regional Department of the Special Secretary of Social and Solidarity Economy in Northern Greece in order to decentralize design and supervision.

Mr. Georgios Gritzis, Assistant Professor at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, highlighted the need to promote SSE in a threefold manner: linking funding to evaluation of social impact, training and capacity



building through the development of support centers and networking through the development of dedicated Chambers of SSE as well as the establishment of an autonomous research center.

The roundtable ended with brief comments by the initial speakers. **Mr. Salvatori** stressed the need to include all stakeholders for the elaboration of an effective strategy. **Mr Bellis** highlighted the need for the harmonization of the cooperative legislation in Greece in order to enable synergies and economic collaboration. **Mrs Anna Koniotaki** emphasized the need to foster the development of skills among SSE enterprises' members and to design adjusted financial tools.

The roundtable confirmed the wide bipartisan support for the development of Social and Solidarity Economy in Greece. In general, the participants evaluated positively the event according to the assessment and follow-up form. The issues raised were found interesting, the key note speeches were constructive and informative while the coordination of the discussion allowed for all interested participants to express their different views. However, given the number of issues at stake as well as the variety of the contributions made, it was not possible to delve into concrete matters and produce concrete results. Most participants agreed that there is a need for more opportunities of exchange and interaction between bodies of collective representation of SSE enterprises and the competent authorities through the organization of similar events, thematic sessions and open informative sessions in the future.