The Future of EU policies for the Social Economy:
Towards a European Action Plan
Social Economy Europe

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Social Economy Europe

I. Explanatory note

On 24th October 2017, the bureau of the European Parliament's **Social Economy Intergroup** (SEIG) - formed by MEPs Jens Nilsson (S&D, SE), Ramón Luis Valcárcel (EPP, ES), Marie-Christine Vergiat (GUE/NGL, FR), Sven Giegold (GREENS/EFA, DE), Sofia Ribeiro (EPP, PT) and Elena Gentile (S&D, IT)- met European Commission Vice-President for Jobs, Growth, Investments and Competitiveness, **Jyrki Katainen**, and Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, **Marianne Thyssen**. **Social Economy Europe** (SEE) also participated in the meeting -through its President, Juan Antonio Pedreño, and its director, Víctor Meseguer- as the organisation in charge of the secretariat of the **Social Economy Intergroup**.

During the meeting, Social Economy Europe was invited -by Jens Nilsson MEP, Co-President of the SEIG- **to produce a document on the future of the EU policies for the social economy** to be delivered to Vice-President Jyrki Katainen and Commissioners Thyssen and Bieńkowska in the first months of 2018.

As a reply to this request, this document defines a series of axes and actions that may serve as a basis for elaborating a European Action Plan for the social economy.

The proposals included in this document take into account the very important work that has been carried out by all EU institutions and particularly by the European Commission in recent years to support the development of the social economy. Furthermore, these proposals are the result of a consultation process in which all Social Economy Europe members have actively participated.

II. About the European Parliament's Social Economy Intergroup

The European Parliament's Social Economy Intergroup, formed by **80 MEPs** of **6 political groups,** is a European Parliament informal body of key importance when it comes to mainstreaming the social economy perspective into the legislative and non-legislative work of the European Parliament. Furthermore, it serves to ensure a permanent dialogue between all European Institutions, Member States and the social economy sector.

The bureau of the Social Economy Intergroup is formed by **5 Co-Presidents**:

- **Marie-Christine Vergiat** (GUE/NGL , FR)
- **Ramón Luis Valcárcel** (epp , ES)
- **Elena Gentile** (S&D , IT)
- **Beatriz Becerra** (alde , ES)
- **Sven Giegold** (The Greens / EFA , DE)

and **2 Vice-Presidents**:

- **Sofia Ribeiro** (epp , PT)
- **Georgi Pirinski** (S&D , BG). Social Economy Europe is responsible for the Social Economy Intergroup's secretariat.

Social Economy Europe

III. About Social Economy Europe

Social Economy Europe (SEE) was created in November 2000 under the name of CEP-CMAF -*the* ***European Standing Conference of Cooperatives, Mutuals, Associations and Foundations***- with the purpose of establishing a permanent dialogue between the social economy and the European Institutions. In 2008, CEP-CMAF changed its name and officially became the "Social Economy Europe".

SEE members are the European organisations of **mutual and cooperative insurers**, **non-profit healthcare players**, **health mutuals and health insurance funds**; **industrial and service cooperatives**; **foundations**, **associations of general interest**, **work integration social enterprises**, **paritarian institutions of social protection**, **ethical banks and financiers**, **and the European Cities and Regions for the social economy**. At national level, SEE represents the national social economy organisations of France (**ESS-France**), Italy (**National Third Sector Forum**), Portugal (**CASES**), Spain (**CEPES**) and Belgium (**ConcertES**).

Social Economy Europe's mission is to:

- Represent the interests of the social economy in the European Union so that the main EU policies promote and take into consideration this enterprise model; Promote the dialogue and the inter-cooperation between its members and develop new services of common interest;
- Boost the visibility of the economic and social impact of the social economy and of the values and principles that define this virtuous enterprise model;
- Support the Member States and the national organizations aiming to promote the development of the social economy.

SEE believes in a European Union that is determined to promote economic and social progress of its Member States, and that acknowledges its key role as global social economy leader.

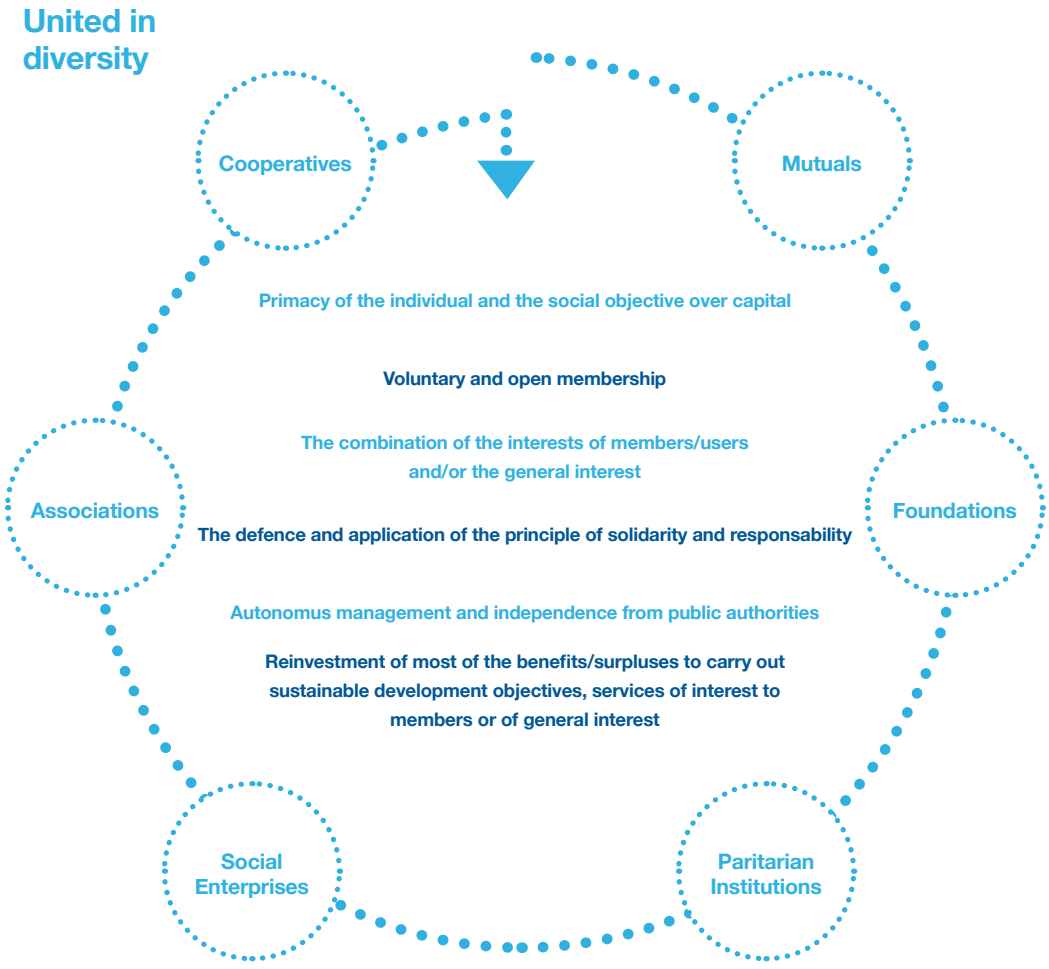
SEE believes in:

- A diverse economy at the service of people. A democratic, sustainable and inclusive economy, strongly committed to society;
- A more favourable ecosystem for the development of the European social economy, that will keep offering innovative solutions in response to societal demands.
- The social economy's active participation in the development and implementation of the main socio-economic policies of the European Union.

IV. What Social Economy can bring to the European Union

The Council of the European Union defined the social economy ***as a key driver of economic and social development in Europe***[1]. According to the European Economic and Social Committee' study on the ***Recent evolutions of the Social Economy in the European Union***[2] **there are *2.8* million social economy enterprises and organisations** in the European Union, that employ ***13.6* million people** and represent **8% of the EU's GDP.** Therefore, the social economy is a crucial part of the EU socio-economic landscape.

The social economy refers to a wide diversity of enterprises and organisations -cooperatives, mutuals, associations, foundations, social enterprises, paritarian institutions of social protection etc.- that share common values and features such as the primacy of the individual and the social objective over capital, a democratic governance, and the reinvestment of most of the profits/ surpluses to carry out sustainable development objectives, services of interest to members or of general interest.



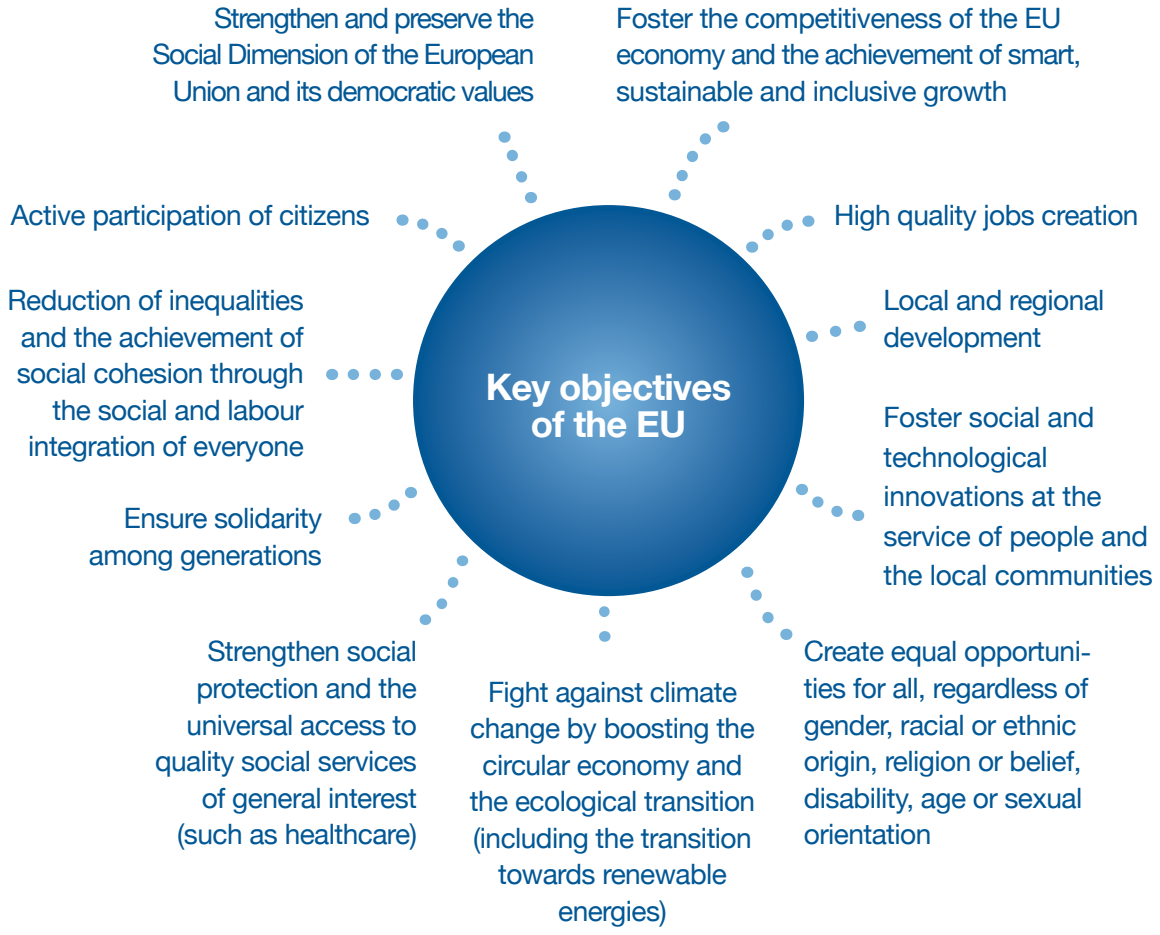
1. Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions, The promotion of the social economy as a key driver of economic and social development in Europe, 2015, http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15071-2015-INIT/en/pdf
2. European Economic and Social Committee, Recent evolutions of the Social Economy in the European Union, 2016, https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/recent-evolutions-social-economy-study

Social Economy Europe

The social economy is formed by enterprises and organisations of all sizes -ranging from SMEs to large companies and groups- that operate in all the economic sectors such as: industry, education, healthcare and social services of general interest, agri-food, ethical and cooperative banking, insurance, renewable energy, re-use and recycling, retail and consumption; housing, tourism, culture and leisure, building, professional services, digital economy, etc.

Because of its strong social commitment, the social economy offers innovative solutions to the main economic, social and environmental challenges of our time.

In short, the social economy is an enterprise model for the future of Europe that, thanks to its defining values and principles, contributes to several key objectives of the EU:



Social Economy Europe

The social economy is "a European success story" that has increasingly gained political visibility as a sector that constitutes an important pillar notably in terms of employment and social cohesion across Europe[3] and as key actor for the achievement of the **United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, setting up the sustainable development goals. In this sense, the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the European Economic and Social Committee, Member States, the Commission Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship and social economy representative organisations have consistently called for the development of an ambitious European policy for the social economy with adequate resources proportionate to its socio-economic weight in the European Union.

In 2016, the European Commission adopted the ***Start-up and Scale-up Initiative***[4] containing a section on social economy and social enterprises. **On that basis, the Commission has set up and implemented (in 2017 and 2018) a series of actions**[5] **for the social economy and social enterprises, structured in five pillars:**

1. **Access to funding;**
2. **Access to markets;**
3. **Improving framework conditions;**
4. **Social innovation, technologies and new business models;**
5. **International dimension**

However, the implementation of these important actions will come to an end in 2018. In this context, social economy representative organisations, led by Social Economy Europe; the European Parliament's Social Economy Intergroup, the European Economic and Social Committee and an important number of Member States are calling on the European Commission to take a step forward towards a **European Action Plan for the social economy.** This Action Plan shall serve to boost the visibility of social economy enterprises and organisations; support them to generate social and technological innovations; improve their access to finance and EU funding; remove the legal obstacles impeding their ability to grow and operate in the Single Market on an equal footing with other types of companies; as well as inspiring public authorities from the EU and its neighbouring countries to promote the growth of the social economy as a driver of economic and social progress for all.

3. Ibid

4. European Commission Communication, Europe next leaders: The Start-up and Scale-up Initiative, 2016, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2016:733:FIN

5. http://ec.europa.eu/DocsRoom/documents/26812

Furthermore, this Action Plan should also serve to boost the uptake of new technologies in social economy enterprises and organisations. Digitalisation, blockchain, big data and artificial intelligence, among other emerging technologies, represent an enormous opportunity for the growth of social economy companies and for the creation of social economy start-ups in Europe.

By adapting to this technological revolution, social economy enterprises will bring their values of solidarity, democracy and sustainability to the new economy.

In May 2017, the governments of Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden adopted the Madrid Declaration ***"The Social Economy, a business model for the future of the European Union"*** [6] calling on the European Commission to *"include in its working plan for 2018 a European Action Plan 2018-2020, adequately financed, which will promote the social economy enterprises in Europe and boost social innovation (…) this action plan should address the economic and social development and social cohesion of all citizens, with a particular emphasis on the disadvantaged and vulnerable ones, and should involve – through specific system actions – all actors operating in the social economy"*.

6. Madrid Declaration, The social economy, a business model for the future of the European Union, 2017, http://www.lavoro.gov.it/notizie/Documents/2017-05-23-DICHIARAZIONE-MADRID-English-Version.pdf

V. Proposal for a European Action Plan for the Social Economy

A European Action Plan for the social economy, with a proposed duration of 5 years (2020-2025), shall be a key tool to systematically incorporate the social economy into the different socio-economic policies of the European Union, as well as into its actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The objectives of this proposal for an Action Plan are the following:

Objective 1 Recognise the social economy as a transversal actor in the main socio-economic policies of the European Union:

Social economy enterprises and organisations operate in all the economic sectors and represent an important part of the European economic and corporate landscape (more than 10% of all EU business), demonstrating that the diversity of enterprise models enhances the competitiveness of our economies. Therefore, the social economy should be taken into account by the European institutions, Member States and all public authorities in the design of their socio-economic policies.

Objective 2 Promote the convergence and coordination of the different public authorities involved in the promotion of the social economy by defining strategic objectives and benchmarks at EU level:

Various administrations at local, regional, national and EU level are directly involved in the regulation and promotion of the social economy. Therefore, it would be important to set-up a European policy framework for the social economy to enhance the coherence, complementarity and coordination of the different policies and regulations, remaining respectful of the principle of subsidiarity.

Objective 3 Foster a conducive ecosystem for the growth of the social economy in Europe, improving its contribution to key EU objectives and allowing social economy enterprises to take full advantage of the single market and of EU funds and financial instruments:

The social economy has been one of the drivers of European integration, offering innovative solutions to address evolving socio-economic challenges. The EU institutions should initiate appropriate actions to foster the development of the social economy and to unlock all its potential for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth at the service of European citizens.

In line with these three objectives, this policy proposal includes **20 policy measures** and **64 actions** structured in **7 pillars:**

1. **Establish a common understanding of social economy enterprises and organisations in Europe**

2. **Improve the visibility of social economy enterprises and organisations and of their values and characteristics**

3. **Measure and further document the weight of the social economy and its effective contribution to the socio-economic development of the European Union**

4. **Provide in the framework of the European Single Market a conducive ecosystem for the growth of social economy enterprises and organisations, supporting them to access to finance and scale up, and by establishing the necessary legal framework, allowing them to fully operate trans-nationally in the Single Market.**

5. **Further integrate the social economy in EU funds and programmes, such as the ERDF, ESF Plus and the cohesion funds**

6. **Foster the role of the social economy in the external action of the European Union**

7. **Consolidate and strengthen a permanent and structured dialogue between EU institutions and the Social Economy**

Priority 1

Establish a common understanding of social economy enterprises and organisations in Europe

To develop effective EU public policies for the social economy, it is necessary to establish an operational social economy concept defining the scope of this socio-economic reality, remaining respectful of the diversity of the European social economy. This operational concept would improve the convergence and coherence of the different social economy policies at EU and Member State level, preventing the use of **contradictory** concepts, that could hinder the growth, the mutual recognition and the visibility of the social economy's enterprise models.

Therefore, it is a priority to **advance towards a European legal framework for all social economy enterprises and organisations *(policy measure 1)***,

Such a legal framework will provide social economy enterprises and organisations with legal certainty and unlock their potential to grow and to fully operate cross-border in the single market, in line with the requests of the European Parliament's Report on the Single Market Strategy (2015/2354(INI))[7] :

> *(…) whereas a low level of recognition is enjoyed by social economy enterprises at European level, and whereas most of these enterprises are not recognised by a European-level legal framework, but only at national level in some Member States, with different legal forms; whereas this lack of an EU legal framework hinders the capacity of such enterprises to operate cross-border within the internal market;*

—> Social Economy Europe therefore proposes to introduce a European Commission recommendation establishing the main principles and characteristics of the social economy, as well as its main legal forms: cooperatives, mutuals, associations, foundations, paritarian institutions and social enterprises *(action 1)*.

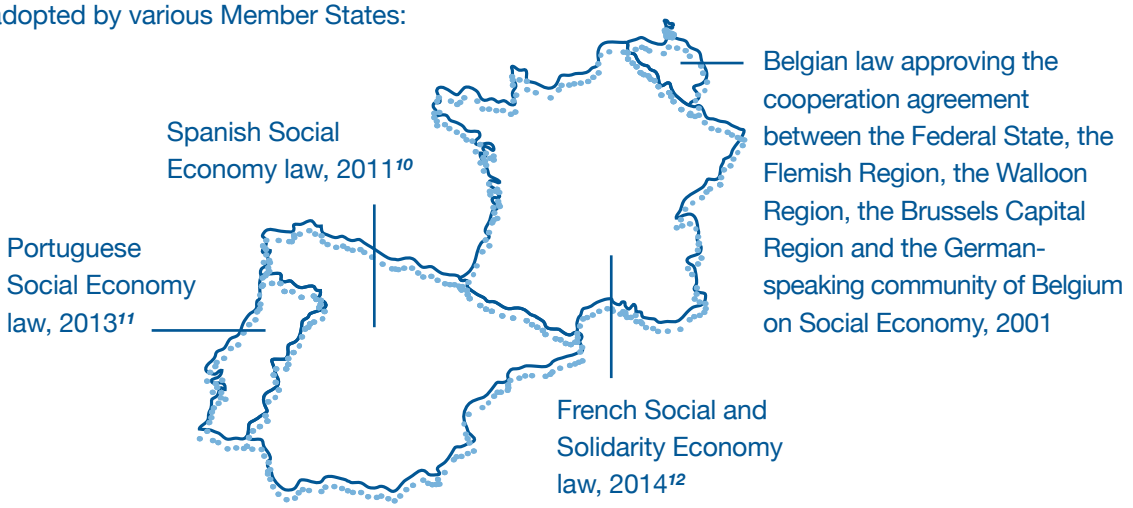
The European Union has the sufficient acquis to establish a common understanding or an operational definition of the social economy that could serve as a basis for the development of public policies at EU and Member State level. As stressed by the report of the European Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship (GECES)[8] , the principles and values of the social economy established in the Social Economy Charter of the CEP-CMAF[9] are an excellent basis to develop legal and policy frameworks at European and Member State level.

7. European Parliament Report, The Single Market Strategy, 2016, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A8-2016-0171&language=EN

8. European Commission Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship, Social enterprises and the social economy going forward: a call for action from the Commission Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship, 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/growth/content/social-enterprises-and-social-economy-going-forward-0_en

9. CEP-CMAF (European Standing Conference of Co-operatives, Mutual Societies, Associations and Foundations), The Social Economy Charter, 2002: The primacy of the individual and the social objective over capital ; Voluntary and open membership.

In fact, these principles have obtained a legal recognition in the social economy laws that have been adopted by various Member States:



The adoption of these laws has objectively constituted an enormous step forward, fostering the development and implementation of public policies at national, regional and local level, as well as raising the visibility of the social economy in the above-mentioned Member States.

Furthermore, the principles and characteristics defining the social economy -established in the **Social Economy Charter**- have also been recognised in several official documents of the European Union institutions: Council Conclusions on the Social Economy[13], European Parliament Reports[14], EESC studies on social economy[15] etc.

To conclude, the adoption of a **European Commission recommendation** establishing the main principles and characteristics of the social economy, as well as its main legal forms, would serve to:

- **Foster a common operational understanding of the social economy that will improve its visibility at EU and international level and improve the legal certainty for these enterprises and organisation in the Single Market;**
- **Support the growing number of Member States planning to develop social economy laws and/or public policies;**
- **Foster convergence and coherence between the different social economy legislations, improving mutual recognition and removing the existing barriers hindering the capacity of social economy enterprises to fully take advantage of the single market through cross-border operations.**

In parallel to this recommendation, SEE proposes to continue exploring and undertaking actions to create a legal framework for all social economy enterprises and organisations at European level.

10. https://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/the-spanish-law-on-social-economy.pdf

11. https://www.cases.pt/wp-content/uploads/Lei_de_Bases_ES.pdf

12. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000029313296&dateTexte=&categorieLien=id

13. Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions, The promotion of the social economy as a key driver of economic and social development in Europe, 2015, http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15071-2015-INIT/en/pdf

14. European Parliament, Report on Social Economy, 2009, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A6-2009-0015+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN

15. European Economic and Social Committee, Recent evolutions of the Social Economy in the European Union, 2016, https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/recent-evolutions-social-economy-study

Priority 2

Improving the visibility of social economy enterprises and organisations and of their values and characteristics

Social economy enterprises and organisations contribute to the building of a more competitive, inclusive, participative and sustainable Europe. Moreover, they offer highly innovative solutions to current and emerging socio-economic challenges.

Furthermore, in the current context at which the European Union is strongly committed to implementing the United Nations' ***2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development***[16], it is important to underline that the social economy is a key actor for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Social economy enterprises and organisations foster gender equality and equal opportunities for all by ensuring decent working conditions and creating quality jobs (with a special focus on the social and work integration of individuals in a situation of vulnerability); as well as by ensuring a universal access to social protection and to high quality social services, such as healthcare and education. Likewise, social economy enterprises and organisations are at the forefront in boosting sustainable agriculture and rural development; responsible consumption, the circular economy and the transition to renewable energies and energy democracy, contributing to a more socially and environmentally sustainable economy. All these elements are at the core of the 2030 Agenda.

In order to unlock the full potential of the social economy, it is fundamental to improve the visibility of the social economy's business models, their defining values and their economic, social and environmental impact, with European society and public authorities. Therefore, Social Economy Europe proposes to:

Set-up a European Communication Strategy to improve the visibility of the social economy (policy measure 2) consisting of the following actions:

—> **The annual organisation of a European Day of Social Economy Enterprises *(action 2)***. Since 2016, the European Economic and Social Committee has been organising an annual European Day of Social Economy Enterprises: the impact of this event could be strengthened by involving in its organisation the European Commission and social economy representative organisations. Furthermore, the Commission could invite Member States to organise similar events at national level.

16. United Nations, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2015, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

—> **Consolidation of EU Presidency conferences on Social Economy *(action 3)***, by including the social economy in the common agenda of the Member States holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU that work together closely in groups of three, the so-called "trios", in order to ensure the organisation of at least one EU Presidency Conference on the social economy over an 18-month period.

—> **Extension of the European Social Economy Regions pilot project *(action 4)*** aiming to raise awareness -at local, regional and national level- about the social economy as an entrepreneurial model based on shared values (primacy of people and of the social objective over capital, democratic governance etc.) contributing to a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the achievement of the SDGs across the European Union and worldwide.

—> **Elaboration by the European Commission of reports and studies on the trends and evolutions of the social economy in Europe *(action 5)*.** Taking into account the positive results of the European Commission studies on different social economy forms such as mutuals or social enterprises, SEE proposes to the European Commission to include a specific chapter on the social economy in its Annual Report on European SMEs.

—> **Development -in close cooperation with Member States and social economy representative organisations- of training sessions on social economy addressed to public authorities at EU, national, local and regional level *(action 6)*.** Such training will allow public servants to improve their knowledge about social economy enterprises and organisations and their capacity to take into account this socio-economic reality in the design of policies and regulations on industry, enterprise support, employment, provision of social services, state aid or public procurement, among other policy areas.

Foster social economy entrepreneurship, by encouraging the inclusion of the social economy in the curricula of all levels of education and training. (policy measure 3)

Education and training are key factors in the preparation of young people for the new social, technological, economic or environmental challenges that are shaping the current and future developments of the labour market, and in building a society based on the core values of the European project.

The dissemination of social economy entrepreneurship through all levels of education is an excellent tool to promote a more socially responsible, sustainable and participative corporate culture based on the primacy of people over capital.

Furthermore, we observe that youth entrepreneurship is growing in particular in the regions that have included the social economy in the education curricula and which have to adapt to a changing environment. Therefore, we propose to the European Commission to:

—> **Carry out a study on social economy entrepreneurship education in Europe, covering all levels of education and training *(action 7)*.** The study will serve to identify best practices, as well as to establish guidelines on the promotion of social economy education at Member State level.

—> **Set up a voluntary method of coordination between Member States, coordinated by the European Commission, to perform peer reviews, improve the exchange of good practices and the implementation of the guidelines on the promotion of social economy education *(action 8)*,** especially in new areas demanding new skills, the incorporation of new technologies and the promotion of innovation.

—> **Support the promotion of social, technological and environmental innovation in education, in collaboration with social economy organisations and through European programmes on education and research, via *(action 9):***

- European projects aiming to raise awareness amongst young people on the use of new technologies in the creation of social economy enterprises and on the new sectors in which they can start a new business.
- The participation of the social economy in European projects to exchange practices on the adaptation of the education community (teachers and students) to the new sectors and to the technological, social and environmental challenges that will shape the future of the labour market.
- Cooperation projects between social economy schools and research centres to promote innovative social economy business projects by students in the emerging sectors and/or with a technological basis.

Priority 3

Measure and further document the weight of the social economy and its effective contribution to the socio-economic development of the European Union

The development and implementation of an ambitious European policy for the social economy should be evidence-based through reliable statistics documenting the contribution of these enterprises and organisations to the major macro-economic aggregates. Alongside social economy's contribution to growth and to jobs creation, it is also important to measure the social and environmental impact of these enterprises and organisations. Therefore, Social Economy Europe proposes the following policy measures and actions:

Establish statistics on the social economy at EU-level *(policy measure 4)*. Based on the previous work carried out by the European Commission[17], in this area, as well as on the successful methodologies[18] that have been developed and implemented at national level; SEE proposes the following actions:

—> **Develop a European methodology of satellite accounts for the social economy *(action 10)*** which will measure the whole of the social economy and its diversity of organisational forms: cooperatives, mutuals, associations, foundations, social enterprises and other forms recognised in the national social economy regulations. This common methodology should be co-created by Eurostat and national statistical authorities in cooperation with social economy representative organisations, leading to the production of comparable statistics of the social economy at national and EU level;

—> **In line with the current efforts of Eurostat, set up a pilot project carried out by different national statistical authorities with experience on the social economy to test the development and implementation of a European common methodology of social economy satellite accounts *(action 11);***

—> **Publication by Eurostat of European social economy statistics *(action 12);***

Develop and implement methodologies to value the impact of social economy enterprises and organisations *(policy measure 5).*

17. European Commission, Manual for drawing up the satellite Accounts of Companies in the Social Economy: co- operatives and mutual societies, 2007, https://ec.europa.eu/growth/content/manual-drawing-satellite-accounts-companies-social-economy-co-operatives-and-mutual-0_fr

18. Portuguese Social Economy Satellite Accounts, https://www.cases.pt/contasatelitedaes/

Taking into account the different initiatives that have emerged to measure and value the economic and social impact of social economy enterprises, it would be important to strengthen the coordination among them at EU level in order to:

- Systematize the different techniques;
- Spread their application by social economy enterprises and organisations and public authorities;
- Be able to document, quantify and compare the impact of the social economy on the socio-economic development of the EU.

Therefore, we invite the European Commission to:

—> **Set up a working group with social economy representative organisations to systematize and improve the visibility of the tools to assess, value and quantify the impact of social economy enterprises and organisations *(action 13)***. These tools should be adapted to the capacities of social economy companies and organisations;

—> **Study with EUROSTAT the elaboration -in the framework of its actions to monitor progress in an EU context towards the implementation of the SDGs- of an assessment of social economy's contribution to SDG 8 "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" *(action 14)*.** In particular, it will be important to study social economy enterprises and organisations contribution to goal 8.5 "achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value"[19].

—> **Support the preparation of a report/study on the contribution of social economy enterprises to Europe's socio-economic development, with a specific focus on social and territorial cohesion *(action 15).***

19. United Nations, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2015, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E, p. 19.

Priority 4

Provide a conducive ecosystem for the growth of social economy enterprises and organisations, supporting them to access to finance and scale up and allowing them to fully operate transnationally in the single market

The European Institutions have consistently recognised the social economy's contribution to Europe's sustainable development. However, to unlock its full potential this recognition requires acknowledging the diversity of business models and their distinctive features in the design of entrepreneurial, economic, social, labour and environmental EU policies. Only then, social economy enterprises and organisations operate in the Single Market on an equal footing with other forms of enterprises.

In short, social economy can flourish only if a legal framework with suitable political, legislative and operational conditions is introduced at EU level. In line with this, we propose the following policy measures and actions:

Eliminating legal and administrative barriers for social economy enterprises and organisations in the Single Market *(policy measure 6).*

To ensure that social economy companies are able to fully participate in the Single Market, the Commission shall ensure that European legislation, when drafted or revised, takes into account the different business models including the diversity of social economy enterprises. Consequently, the Commission is invited to:

—> **Carry out an impact assessment when legislation is drafted or revised to ensure that it is appropriate and proportionate for all business models, including social economy enterprises *(action 16);***

—> **Draw up a study to identify the main legal and administrative barriers faced by social economy enterprises and organisations within the Single Market, and propose possible solutions at the EU level *(action 17);***

—> **Propose recommendations to facilitate the cross-border activities of social economy companies in consultation with the European organisations for cooperatives, mutuals, foundations and associations *(action 18).*** At this point, SEE wishes to recall that mutuals, associations and foundations request that the European Union equips itself with the legal instruments that, while respecting their management and governance models as social economy enterprises, would allow them to act at a transnational level in the Single Market, and take full advantage of it;

—> **Propose the necessary legislative reforms to increase the number of European Cooperative Societies (i.e. cooperatives using the Statute for a European Cooperative Society[20]) *(action 19);***

—> **Implement, in collaboration with Member States, pilot projects for boosting cross-border cooperation between social economy enterprises and organisations *(action 20);***

—> **Carry out a study on the concept of limited profitability *(action 21)***. Social economy companies and organisations (cooperatives, mutuals, associations, foundations, social enterprises etc.) do not completely fit into the European concepts of 'for-profit' (making profits) or 'not-for-profit' (not making profits). Social economy enterprises and organisations reinvest at least most of their profits/surpluses to carry out sustainable development objectives, services of interest to members or of general interest[21]. Therefore, Social Economy Europe invites the European Union to study and legally recognize the concept of limited profitability.

20. Council Regulation (EC) No 1435/2003 on the Statute for a European Cooperative Society (SCE), 2003, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32003R1435

21. CEP-CMAF (European Standing Conference of Co-operatives, Mutual Societies, Associations and Foundations), The Social Economy Charter, 2002:

Set-up a financial ecosystem for social economy enterprises and organisations *(policy measure 7):*

Access to finance is a key element of any public policy aiming to boost social economy. There are currently several EU financial instruments that support social economy enterprises, such as the microfinance and social entrepreneurship axis of EaSI and the European Fund for Strategic Investments, that promotes investment in social economy projects as one of its priorities. Furthermore, the proposed InvestEU programme includes social economy under its social investment and skills policy window.

On the basis of this proposal (InvestEU) and of the experience gained with the implementation of the EaSI programme, Social Economy Europe proposes to advance towards a comprehensive and coherent financial ecosystem for all social economy enterprises and organisations. This shall be achieved through an expansion and adaptation of the existing portfolio, in order to facilitate the creation, growth and scale-up of social economy enterprises. In line with this we propose the following actions:

—> **Adapt the existing financial instruments to the diversity of social economy forms *(action 22).***

The social economy comprises different organisational forms, as well as enterprises and entrepreneurial projects of all sizes -ranging from micro-enterprises and SMEs to large companies and groups. This diversity requires a wide-range of financial instruments to support medium and long-term projects and of different financial volumes. The microfinance and social entrepreneurship axis of EaSI currently provides guarantees for investments of up to € 500,000 for social enterprises, which excludes the clear majority of social economy projects covering all economic sectors.

The proposal to mainstream social economy into the social investment and skills policy window of the InvestEU programme represents a step forward that would allow the development of new financing options, in addition to the reinforcement of the existing EU microfinance programmes. Within this framework, we propose the following instruments:

> Guarantees between **€ 25,000** and **€ 500,000** for the launch and development of social economy SMEs of any kind, with a maximum coverage of 80%

> Guarantees between **€ 500,000** and **€ 5 million** to support the growth and scale-up of business initiatives in the social economy, with coverage up to 60%

> Guarantees for large financial operations of **€ 5 million** for all types of projects that can be assumed under the future InvestEU programme, in which social economy companies can participate with a guarantee of up to 50%.

Regarding the implementation of the InvestEU programme, Social Economy Europe proposes to the Commission the incorporation of these new financing options with a total allocation of **€ 450 million** for the first three years (2021-2023) so that the result of these instruments can be evaluated. For all this, the following distribution is proposed:

> 60% of the funds addressed to offering guarantees for social economy enterprises and organisations (**€ 270 million** of coverage in guarantees)

> 20% of the funds to support the liquidity of the financial intermediaries of the social economy (**€ 90 million** in liquidity)

> 20% aimed at complementing the action of financial intermediaries of the social economy (equity) with the aim of launching **pilot projects** related to financing and investments in **innovative social economy start-ups, social economy clusters, accelerators and incubators of social economy entrepreneurial projects** with social impact (for instance, financial support to ***worker's buyouts:*** business transfer to employees under a social economy form), or mechanisms of patient investment or public-private partnership among other priorities. The results of these pilot projects will be aimed at obtaining good practices and exchanging knowledge to identify and validate future innovative financing and investment mechanisms for the social economy (€ 90 million in capital and technical assistance funds).

Furthermore, SEE also proposes to incorporate **financial experts from social economy representative organisations** in the governance bodies of the future InvestEU programme, such as its Investment Committee, as well as to ensure a **wide diversity of implementing partners**, beyond the EIB, including national promotional banks and other implementing partners from the field including social economy financial institutions (such as cooperative and ethical banks and financiers and philanthropic organisations). These proposals would serve to add value and experience in the financing of social economy projects to the governance bodies of the InvestEU programme as well as to improve the assessment and evaluation of investments in social economy projects.

—> Strengthen the financial intermediaries of the social economy *(action 23)*

The diversity of the banking and insurance models existing in the capital markets of the European Union must be safeguarded and promoted. In this sense, SEE proposes to:

- Ensure that EU financial regulations adequately take into account the different business models of the financial intermediaries of the social economy, such as ethical and cooperative banks and other financial institutions specialised in financing social economy enterprises and organisations

- Reform the EU directive relating to undertakings for collective investment in transferable securities (UCITS) to authorise investors to use financing instruments adapted to social economy business models (cooperatives, mutuals, associations, foundations, social enterprises etc.)
- Update the banking rules to encourage investments in social economy projects, by social economy financial intermediaries
- Set up social capital reinforcement mechanisms that increase the capacity of social economy financial intermediaries to dedicate the available funds to financing real economy. This can be achieved either by adapting the required capital standards (with a reduction of the minimum capital required in the case of investments in social economy projects), or through a direct capitalization supplement for this type of funders
- Prepare measures to support the channelling of solidarity investments from private small savers into funds promoting the creation and development of social economy enterprises.
- Integrate non-accredited/non-qualified investors into the EuSEF regulation to allow all social economy financial actors to use this designation
- Adapt the EU legislation on capital-investment to favour individual's direct investments in social economy companies and organisations

Promote the creation of high-quality jobs by social economy enterprises and organisations *(policy measure 8)*

The creation and preservation of high quality jobs is one of the main contributions of the social economy to the socio-economic development of Europe and to the effective implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Therefore, any European policy for the social economy shall, in coordination with social economy's social partners and representative organisations, support the capacity of these enterprises and organisation to create jobs for all. Specific support is needed to help social economy enterprises to develop their full potential in generating employment opportunities for disfavoured groups. One group that requires specific attention is people with disabilities, which represent 15% of the EU's population. In this area, SEE proposes the following actions:

—> **Identify through a comparative study, the incentives and policy measures at Member State level in favour of the creation of quality jobs by social economy enterprises and organisations *(action 24).*** Such a study would serve to improve the exchange of best practices among Member States.

—> **Set up a structured peer review system between Member States, coordinated by the European Commission, to facilitate mutual learning and the exchange of good practices to support the creation of high-quality jobs by the social economy *(action 25)*.** As part of this exercise, attention should be paid to the special challenges that disfavoured groups such as people with disabilities face in their access to the labour market. The forthcoming review of the European Disability Strategy due in 2020 should be leveraged to that effect.

—> **Incorporate the Social Economy into the economic and social priorities of the European Semester, aiming to generate greater integration and coordination at European level of the policies to boost employment through the social economy, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights *(action 26).***

Set up at EU-level support and accompanying services for social economy enterprises and organisations and for social economy entrepreneurs *(policy measure 9)*

The social economy is not fully incorporated into the work agenda of the business advisory services promoted by the European Commission. This is the case of the Enterprise Europe Network that supports SMEs in strategic areas for their competitiveness, such as internationalisation, innovation or Research and Development. Therefore, it is a priority to increase the collaboration of social economy organisations that have advisory and support services for entrepreneurs at the local and regional level, with all the initiatives of the European Commission aimed at promoting competitiveness and business growth (scaling-up). In this respect, SEE proposes to:

—> **Boost cooperation between social economy structures providing support and accompanying services to entrepreneurs and the Enterprise Europe Network *(action 27),*** to increase the internationalisation of social economy enterprises and their participation in projects related to research and development.

—> **Conduct a mapping and a study of good practices in the field of services to social economy enterprises and entrepreneurs provided by the various support and representative organisations *(action 28).***

—> **Facilitate the networking at European level of local and regional structures providing support and accompanying services for social economy SMEs, as well as of social economy's social partners *(action 29*),** aiming to:

- Boost inter-cooperation between social economy enterprises of different Member States through this network;
- Facilitate the exchange of good practices and create EU guidelines and recommendations to promote and improve support services for social economy enterprises at national, regional and local levels;

- Set-up EU projects to support the development and dissemination of social innovation initiatives led by social economy enterprises and organisations;
- Better integrate the social economy into the ERASMUS+ programme to boost exchanges between staff of social economy enterprises in Europe;

Improve and reinforce the digital skills of the social economy and foster its development in the emerging sectors *(policy measure 10)*

Digitalisation, the adoption of advanced technologies or the incorporation of artificial intelligence are leading to the emergence of new demands and ways of working, producing and providing services. Moreover, new sectors and business models based on technology are also on the rise. The implementation of policy measures and actions to facilitate the incorporation and adaptation of workers and entrepreneurs of the social economy to this new context should be part of the new EU initiatives for the period 2021-2027 in order to:

> Increase the competitiveness of social economy enterprises by improving their creativity and innovation, as well as the acquisition of new skills, technologies and resources;

> Boost the uptake of new skills and technologies in social economy enterprises to strengthen their competitiveness and their capacity to provide effective solutions to the emerging social, economic and environmental challenges;

> Promote decent working conditions in the new forms of work that are emerging with digitalisation (sharing and collaborative economy). This could be achieved through the promotion of social economy business models, based on participation, solidarity and equity.

In accordance with this approach, the following actions are proposed:

—> **Analysing the level of digital skills of social economy enterprises and organisations and their role in emerging sectors *(action 30),*** through the preparation by the European Commission of studies focusing on:

- Identifying and assessing the evolution of innovative sectors, as well as the new market niches that could represent an opportunity for the growth of the social economy. Consequently, the social economy could add value to these sectors in terms of quality job creation or social innovation (providing innovative solutions to emerging socio-economic challenges);
- Following a needs-based analysis, prepare a catalogue of training tools to adapt companies and social economy entities, as well as their entrepreneurs to the future market trends and new emerging sectors;
- Identifying the added value of social economy enterprises and organisations in the context of digitalisation and major economic and social transformations
- Analysing how new technologies can facilitate the creation of trans-national social economy enterprises and organisations, and their impact on internal management, for instance, boosting participative governance.

—> **Joint organisation by the European Commission and Member States of events *(action 31)* to:**

- Raise awareness amongst the social economy on new opportunities offered by digitalisation and new emerging sectors where it has significant experience and provides added value[22];
- Awareness raising activities around the potential of social economy to generate employment opportunities for people with disabilities. SEE has a working group on "Social Economy & Disability" which can play a catalyst role in this exercise
- Identify and present good practices of social economy enterprises and organisations in socially and technologically innovative sectors, to discover the success factors and their challenges.
- Improve the visibility of the innovative solutions provided by social economy enterprises and organisations to the digital, social and industrial transformations, as well as of social economy's contribution to the achievement of the SDGs.

—> **Promote at the European level the organisation of training aimed at entrepreneurs and workers of the social economy *(action 32)*** to accompany their adaptation to the new social, economic, technological or environmental sectors in which they carry out their activities.

—> **Promote through the Enterprise Europe Network the participation of social economy SMEs in R&D projects and innovation clusters *(action 33).***

Promote responsible public procurement at the national, regional and local levels through reserved contracts and social considerations, foreseen in the new generation of public procurement directives *(policy measure 11)*

The new generation of public procurement directives -adopted in 2014- incorporates social and environmental considerations and includes reserved contracts that facilitate the access of social economy enterprises to public purchasing.

22. International Labour Organisation (ILO) International Training Centre, Social and Solidarity Economy and the Future of Work, 2017, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---coop/documents/publication/wcms_573160.pdf

The European Commission plans to launch actions to inform and train national, local and regional authorities on the application and use of these new instruments. Furthermore, the Commission also plans to update the "Buying Social" Guide and the guide on economic services of general interest. Social Economy Europe very much welcomes these initiatives and expresses its willingness to collaborate with the Commission. In this regard, SEE invites the Commission to:

—> **Organise national events on the transposition into national legislations and the implementation of the social considerations and other instruments (aiming at fostering the access of social economy enterprises and other SMEs) introduced by the new generation of public procurement directives *(action 34);***

—> **Ensure the participation of social economy experts in the elaboration of guidelines for the implementation of the measures foreseen by the Directives, as planned by the Commission *(action 35).***

Priority 5

Further integrate the social economy in EU funds and programmes such as the ERDF, ESF Plus and the cohesion funds

The close link between the social economy and the local sphere means that these companies play an essential role in strengthening the social and economic cohesion of the territories, especially in rural areas. The social economy is a natural partner of the national, local and regional public authorities in the design and implementation of their economic development strategies.

Therefore, social economy should play a key role in all the EU programmes and funds that will be jointly managed (shared management) by the European Commission and national authorities for the period 2021-2027, in particular the funds aimed at:

- Creating and keeping quality jobs;
- Supporting the industrial transformations and business development;
- Ensuring the provision of quality social services of general interest;
- Supporting social innovation and the social inclusion of vulnerable individuals;
- Promote territorial cohesion and sustainable local development, especially in rural areas;
- Backing energy transition, the uptake of the circular economy and the fight against climate change.

In this context, SEE invites the Commission to:

Evaluate the impact of the Structural Funds 2014-2020 on the promotion of the social economy *(policy measure 12)*

—> in order to **identify innovative or reference projects that allow new lines of work to be incorporated in the implementation of future funds *(action 36).***

—> **In line with the proposal for a regulation on the European Social Fund Plus, integrate the social economy among the funding priorities of the European Fund for Regional Development *(action 37).***

Ensure the participation and consultation of the social economy representative organisations in the preparation, execution, monitoring and evaluation of future cohesion policy *(policy measure 13)*

—> through the **establishment of standardized participation and consultation mechanisms to be applied in all Member States *(action 38).***

—> In line with policy measure 10[23], **strengthen the actions supported by the ESF and the ERDF in favour of the incorporation of new technologies in production processes, management and/or service provision by the social economy and the workers' acquisition of new capacities to adapt to the new social, technological and environmental challenges that will shape the labour market *(action 39);***

Prioritize the use of European cohesion policy funds to create poles of local socio-economic development through innovative clusters with the participation of the social economy *(policy measure 14)* by:

—> **Identifying and studying EU clusters lead or formed -among other- by social economy actors, that are recognised and promoted through local/regional development strategies such as the Smart Specialisation Strategies *(action 40);***

—> **Support the replication of this type of initiatives in other European regions *(action 41).***

In order to boost the impact of EU funds on the development of the social economy, SEE invites all Member States to make the social economy one of their funding priorities under the new Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, and especially under the ESF+ *(policy measure 15).* Therefore, SEE proposes to the European Commission to:

—> **Strengthen the existing mechanisms for the exchange of best practices and coordination between the ESF Managing Authorities (such as the ESF Social Economy Thematic Network) and other public authorities managing funds that are of key importance for the development of the social economy *(action 42)***

—> **Furthermore, integrate social economy representative organisations in the above-mentioned coordination mechanisms and networks to disseminate best practices in funding the social economy through EU and national funds *(action 43).***

In this regard, Social Economy Europe can disseminate the experience of its members in using the European Social Fund as a catalyser for the development of the social economy. For instance, the Spanish Member of Social Economy Europe -CEPES- was appointed by the Spanish Government as the "intermediate body" of the ESF Operational Programme for Social Inclusion and Social Economy, allowing the social economy to bring its experience and knowledge of the sector as a beneficiary and also as a manager of the ESF.

23. Improve and reinforce the digital skills of the social economy and foster its development in the emerging sectors (policy measure 10)

Priority 6

Foster the role of the social economy in the external action of the European Union

Social Economy Europe considers that the efforts of the European Commission to promote social economy in the international dimension of the European Union should continue after 2018 *(policy measure 16),* and invites the Commission to undertake the following actions:

- **—> Include the promotion of the social economy among the priorities of the EU External Investment Plan through its three pillars: European Fund for Sustainable Development, technical assistance and improvement of the investment climate *(action 44)*;**
- **—> Integrate the social economy among the funding priorities of the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) *(action 45)*;**
- **—> Support the adoption of a United Nation resolution on the promotion of the Social Economy *(action 46)*;**
- **—> Encourage third countries' governments to include the social economy in their national strategies to achieve the Agenda 2030 as a key driver to achieve most of the Sustainable Development Goals *(action 47)*;**
- **—> Further promote the inclusion of the social economy in the agenda of the international fora as a key partner for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. For instance, by strengthening the United Nations Taskforce on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSE) *(action 48)*;**
- **—> Promote the social economy enterprise model in third countries and elaborate studies on its situation and potential to contribute to sustainable economic and social development *(action 49)*;**
- **—> Support the inclusion of the social economy in the trade agreements signed with third countries or regional economic unions *(action 50)*;**
- **—> Promote conferences with international investment organisations and donors to support the development of the social economy at global level *(action 51)*;**
- **—> Promote in the G20 specific policies to support the social economy *(action 52)*;**
- **—> Support third countries aiming to elaborate social economy legal and policy frameworks *(action 53)*;**
- **—> Disseminate good practices on how the diversity of enterprise models contributes to economic stability and to enhance fair competitiveness *(action 54)*.**

Priority 7

Strengthen and consolidate the permanent and structured dialogue between eu institutions and the social economy

The success and applicability of a European policy for the social economy must be based on dialogue and cooperation between European institutions, Member States and social economy representative organisations. Both at EU and Member State-level there are directorates, taskforces, units and departments focusing on social economy policies that should have a key role in drawing up an ambitious and effective EU Action Plan for the social economy.

A permanent dialogue and consultation with social economy representative organisations, both at EU and Member State level, is fundamental to ensure the utility, efficacity and sustainability of the public policies for the social economy. Therefore, Social Economy Europe proposes a series of policy measures and actions to strengthen and consolidate an institutional system that gives greater capacity for dialogue and cooperation between EU public authorities and the social economy:

Maintain and strengthen the working fora on social economy of the Commission, the European Parliament, Member States and the EESC through the following actions *(policy measure 17):*

- **—> Re-establishment of the European Parliament's Social Economy Intergroup during the next parliamentary mandate 2019-2023 *(action 55)***
- **—> Formalisation of the European Commission's Task Force on Social Economy, in line with the recent creation of an informal Task Force *(action 56)***
- **—> In line with the European Commission' decision, maintain and strengthen its Expert Group on Social Economy and social enterprises as an open forum for dialogue between experts of the social economy including representatives of the social economy representative organisations *(action 57)***
- **—> Strengthen the activities of the European Economic and Social Committee Social Economy Category and Permanent Study Group on social economy enterprises *(action 58)***
- **—> Strengthen the Monitoring Group of the Luxembourg Declaration *(action 59)***
- **—> Invite the Committee of the Regions to create a working group on social economy *(action 60)***

Ensure the monitoring and evaluation of the Action Plan *(policy measure 18)*, through:

- **—> the creation of a Committee to monitor and assess the implementation of the Action Plan, which would be composed of the Directorates General of the Commission involved in the development of the social economy, Member States and of social economy representative organisations *(action 61)***

Facilitate a permanent political dialogue between EU institutions and social economy representative organisations *(policy measure 19),* through:

—> **the establishment of a structured political dialogue between high-level representatives of the European Commission and social economy representative organisations. This structured dialogue would serve to explore the possible role of the social economy in the strategic policies of the Commission *(action 62)***

Promote the participation of social economy representative organisations in the EU inter-sectoral social dialogue and support their recognition as social partners at national level, when needed *(policy measure 20)* through:

—> **a European Commission study on the participation of the social economy representative organisations in the social dialogue (sectoral and inter-sectoral) at EU and Member States level *(action 63)***

—> **on the basis of the conclusions of the above-mentioned study, develop in consultation with the European social economy organisations guidelines to promote the participation of the social economy in the European inter-sectoral social dialogue and in the national social dialogue instances *(action 64)***

Final proposal

Social Economy Europe invites the European Commission, within the scope of its competences, to draft a Communication that, under the name of European Action Plan for the Social Economy, serves to:

- **articulate new policy measures and actions to support the development of the social economy;**
- **establish a timetable for its execution;**
- **provide for a budgetary allocation for the Action Plan;**
- **develop indicators to assess the achievement of the objectives of the Plan**

The proposals and actions included in this document are made available to the Commission and the Bureau of the European Parliament's Social Economy Intergroup as basis for a future European Action Plan for the social economy that has been consistently requested by the European Parliament (and its Social Economy Intergroup), the Council of the European Union, the EESC and by social economy representative organisations, led by Social Economy Europe.

Special acknowledgement to our members:

AEIP: European Association of Paritarian Institutions
www.aeip.net

AIM: International Association of Mutuals
www.aim-mutual.org

AMICE: Association of Mutual Insurers and Insurance Cooperatives in Europe
www.amice-eu.org

CASES: Cooperativa António Sérgio para a Economia Social
www.cases.pt

CECOP-CICOPA Europe: European Confederation of industrial and service cooperatives
www.cecop.coop

CEPES: Confederación Empresarial Española de la Economía Social
www.cepes.es

CONCERTES: Plate-forme de concertation des organisations représentatives de l'économie sociale (Belgium)
http://www.concertes.be

EFC: European Foundation Centre
www.efc.be

ENSIE: European Network of Social Integration Enterprises
www.ensie.org

ESS-France: Chambre Française de l'Économie Sociale et Solidaire
www.ess-france.org

FEBEA: European Federation of Ethical and Alternative Banks and Financiers
www.febea.org

FTS: Forum Nazionale Terzo Settore (Italy)
www.forumterzosettore.it

REVES: European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy
www.revesnetwork.eu

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