

The EESC calls for a long-term action plan for the Social Economy by 2018

2nd European day of Social Economy Enterprises gathers social economy players and policy-makers to create synergies and explore needed measures

During the 2nd **European day of Social Economy Enterprises (SEEs)** at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), over 130 social economy representatives called on policy-makers to **scale-up their efforts to enable the development of the Social Economy**.

In his opening speech, **Michael Smyth**, EESC Vice-President, said: *“Social Economy Enterprises have become crucial, not only because they contribute to social integration, territorial cohesion and new economic models, but also because they play a role in shaping the future of Europe”*.

He also called for a long-term roadmap for the Social Economy and to make it a real part of the Commission’s Work Programme for 2018.

“Europe has a chance to redefine itself, and we should promote the social economy in a very tangible way to address three key challenges: climate, the digital revolution and social issues”, said **Nicolas Schmit**, Minister of Labour, Employment and Social and Solidary Economy, Luxembourg.

The EESC has been working on the Social Economy for more than 10 years, and creating synergies with EU institutions to promote this agenda, explained **Oliver Röpke**, President of the EESC’s Permanent Study Group on SEEs. He invited all participants to actively contribute to *“shaping the future of Europe together”*.

The event introduced **four case studies** of innovative and successful European social start-ups:

- **PermaFunghi** (Brussels), an urban project to produce mushrooms from coffee grounds while creating sustainable jobs for low-skilled people.
- **Solidarity Salt** (Greece), aims to empower refugee women and develop the local economy. Gourmet sea salt is extracted from Greek salinas and packed in handmade bags.
- **HopHopFood** (Paris) is a digital platform aiming to reduce food waste and poverty by allowing consumers to use geolocation to exchange food.
- **6zerol** (Luxembourg) is a social economy enterprise incubator supporting entrepreneurs through training, funding and advice to help develop economically viable activities.

These success stories inspired the workshops, in which participants discussed the potential of SEEs to develop **new economic models**, promote the **integration of migrants** and boost **territorial cohesion**. Participants highlighted the positive role of SEEs in putting people before profit, building a more cohesive society, bringing innovation and empowering citizens.

They agreed that policy-makers have an important role to play in creating a favourable environment for the social economy to flourish, and urged them to create a EU legal framework for SEEs, reinforce public-private partnerships and ensure increased and easier access to funding.

Each workshop also made specific requests for policy-makers:

- The workshop on **new economic models** stressed the need to protect SEEs by creating a level playing field and putting an end to abuse of mainstream enterprises.
- The workshop on **integration of migrants** stressed the need for better EU migration policies to facilitate early access to the labour market and involve the media in sharing positive stories.
- The workshop on **territorial cohesion** called for a project at EU and local level to disseminate the good practices of **pro-bono activities** for the social economy by involving companies.

In the closing session, **Jens Nilsson**, Member of the European Parliament, called on the Commission to show more will in developing an overall EU action plan for the Social Economy.

Slawomir Tokarski, Director of DG GROW, European Commission, collected the messages from civil society and expressed the commitment to continue working together for a more social Europe.

"The Social Economy is not just an economic model; it is the solution to recover from the crisis, create quality jobs and make Europe more resilient and competitive", concluded **Martin Siecker**, president of the EESC's Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption.

The EESC recently approved an opinion on the [Start-Up and Scale-Up Initiative](#) and will vote on an opinion on [The external dimension of social economy](#) at its July plenary.