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European Economic and Social Committee

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EESC welcomes the Commission's receptiveness on its Social Economy Study

Under the title "Social Economy: a key sector for growth and jobs" the EESC has held today a seminar to launch a study about Social Economy in the EU, which shows that Social Economy enterprises employ over 11 million people (almost 7% of EU workers) and have an important market share in almost all economic sectors. The Seminar was inaugurated by Commissioner Verheugen, responsible for EU enterprise and industry policy, who welcomed the study and acknowledged the importance of Social Economy enterprises for the EU economy.

"Social economy enterprises, linking profitability to solidarity, have the capacity to reply efficiently to the challenges of the 21st century and to achieve the Lisbon goals. The Commission is convinced that the overall development of the sector is beneficial to Europe. We are therefore committed to contribute to its promotion", declared Mr Verheugen addressing the inaugural session of the seminar, which brought together 200 participants, mainly representatives from Social Economy enterprises.

Commissioner Verheugen also committed to take into consideration the study's conclusions and recommendations: "I promise that the Commission will not only read this report but will also take its proposals into account and draw on its conclusions for our future initiatives and policies"

According to the study, commissioned by the EESC to CIRIEC (International Centre of Research and Information on the Public, Social and Cooperative Economy):

- From a macroeconomic perspective, the Social Economy in Europe is very important, in both human and economic terms. It employs over 11 million people, equivalent to 6.7% of employees.
- Associations alone employ 7 million people and they account for over 4% of GDP and a membership of 50% of the citizens of the EU.
- 240,000 cooperatives are economically active, providing employment to 3.7 million people and having 143 million members.
- Health and social welfare mutuals provide assistance and cover to over 120 million people.
- Insurance mutuals have a 23.7% market share.

The study also concludes that Social Economy contributes importantly to creating new jobs, retaining jobs in sectors and business in crisis and/or threatened by closure, increasing job stability levels, bringing jobs out of the black economy into the official one, keeping skills alive and exploring new occupations and developing routes into work for groups that are especially disadvantaged and falling into social exclusion. As such, the study continues, "Social Economy is an indispensable contributor to achieve the Lisbon economic,



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employment and social cohesion goals and a powerful job-creating sector in Europe with greater sensitivity to employment than the other sectors of the economy”.

Despite its quantitative and qualitative relevance the study argues that the Social Economy suffers from institutional visibility at EU level due to its absence from the national account systems (which impedes accurately measuring its real economic weight), the lack of European statutes (which does not allow Social Economy enterprises to compete on a common levelled playing field with other companies) and its unjustified absence from the social dialogue (despite employing over 11 million workers).

Miguel Angel Cabra de Luna, EESC Member, spokesperson of the EESC Social Economy Category, showed his satisfaction for “the fruitful and productive debate about how we can advance the Social Economy agenda at EU level” and welcomed Commissioner Verheugen receptiveness. “The tone and the content of Mr Verheugen’s speech show that there is a change of attitude within the Commission. It seems that they have realised of the importance of our sector for the EU economy and that are now more receptive to our demands. In the EESC Social Economy Category we will keep working to maintain this momentum”.

For more details about the seminar, please refer to the EESC website:

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu>

The study and the executive summary are available at:

http://www.eesc.europa.eu/groups/3/index_en.asp?id=1405GR03EN

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