

SCALING UP SOCIAL ECONOMY ENTERPRISES IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE



Conclusions and impressions from the regional conference
organised by the Republic of Slovenia in collaboration with
European Commission, partner countries and organisations,
held on 24th and 25th April 2017
at Brdo Congress Centre, Ljubljana, Slovenia

The challenge: rewarding entrepreneurs for their contribution to social gains

Societies which have recognised the social impact of entrepreneurship and put mechanisms in place that encourage and reward the socially desirable consequences of their commercial activity perform better in terms of social cohesion and quality of life. Social entrepreneurs have traditionally been the ones able to cushion uncertainty and the undesirable effects on our societies caused by particular interests, a lack of resources, social imbalances and market failures. Moreover, they have been a much-needed interface between new ideas, with social impact on the one hand and their implementation, commercialisation and scaling on the other. Today, they are becoming the undergrowth of new forms of collaboration, innovation and new job creation, and even new forms of work, creative and industrial relationships. It has become clear that social enterprises as such, and many forms of collaboration and design for social innovation, represent a valuable transforming canvas in the process of shaping modern societies.

This publication is a result of the contributions and outcomes of a Conference entitled: SEE2: Scaling Up Social Economy Enterprises in South-Eastern Europe, convened at Brdo Estate in April 2017 and focused on the development of social entrepreneurship in the region of South-Eastern Europe. Organised by Slovenia, the European Commission and partner countries and organisations, the conference also sought to form a mid-term plan to stimulate the development of the social economy in the region, and encourage the passage from social enterprise to platforms of social innovation which contribute to the future of work and collaboration. One such platform is decisively the SIMI project (Social Impact Migrants Investing in social enterprises) intended for the Adriatic and Ionian region (EUSAIR). There are noticeable entrepreneurial and innovative dynamics, and important steps have been made in several EU countries in terms of the modernisation of the legal and regulatory framework. One common lesson for all is that social enterprise, defined by its purpose and organisational form – and in its many legal forms – should by no means be marginalised. Regulators should therefore reward entrepreneurs for their social impact and their specific contribution to social gains, regardless of their form of incorporation. That remains a significant challenge, not only in South-Eastern Europe.

Jurij Giacomelli, Editor

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Impressum

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Foreword to Scaling up Social Economy Enterprises in SEE



Tadej Slapnik
*State Secretary
in Office of the
Prime Minister
of Slovenia*

Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to write a Foreword to this journey through the Conference SEE2: Scaling up Social Economy Enterprises in South-Eastern Europe. The social economy is becoming more and more important in national economies, and EU Member States and the countries from the region of South-Eastern Europe recognise it as one of the most important partners of national economies.

Speaking for Slovenia, the importance of the social economy was recognised by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, which ranked it of high priority in government strategic projects, following its goal for the next 10 years of

reaching a comparable level of other EU countries from the existing level of 0.7% jobs created in this sector and 1% of GDP, to 6.5% jobs in that sector and 7% of GDP, today's average in the EU28.

From the beginning of the implementation of the project in 2014, Slovenia has made substantial steps towards better visibility and recognition of social economy enterprises and the importance of the social economy for the whole of society, and the number of social enterprises has increased by 300 percentage points. Strong evidence shows the increased awareness of people, both young and old, that the social economy is a very relevant area for job creation or for social inclusion. Social innovations are becoming mainstream in many areas and an indispensable part of technological and non-technological innovations. Facing the challenges of modern society, developing together with the digital transformation of society, the social economy is becoming more a recognisable sector, ensuring long term sustainable jobs and inclusive social cohesion.

In building a stable and robust social economy ecosystem, we can focus on the main objectives and concentrate on implementing activities in four areas, which we will develop even more in the future: social innovation, young people, local job creation and sustainable development. This would also go hand in hand with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030,

The full congress centre Brdo pri Kranju during the opening of the conference



which connect closely to innovative business models of social economy enterprises. With the help of the GECES general report, we can develop even stronger support for the social economy in our countries and at the EU level.

On the other hand, social economy enterprises can provide an appropriate response to specific questions, which today represent a challenge to the citizens of the European Union as well of the countries of South-Eastern Europe. These are the questions of mass migration which we faced in 2015. Social economy enterprises can act as important players in the facilitation of migrants and refugees in their transit or their integration into the community. Social economy enterprises should be therefore embedded in all relevant European initiatives and national programmes which support the integration of groups or individuals and their reintegration into their local environment after returning back to their own countries.

In many areas social economy enterprises can act as a driver for economic growth if supported by appropriate projects, programmes and financing. To make a step towards overcoming the differences between the EU Member States and countries from the region of South-Eastern Europe, arising from the different position of countries with regard to the rules stakeholders are facing in different European supporting programmes, the Ljubljana Declaration – Scaling up Social Economy Enterprises – towards stronger and more structured cooperation between the EU and South-Eastern Europe, was adopted between the Governments of Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo,* Albania and Luxembourg.

I hope together we will create a better world for today and tomorrow,

* This designation is without prejudice to position on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and ICJ Advisory opinion on the Kosovo declaration on independence.



The Slovenian government was the driving force behind the conference: Prime Minister Miro Cerar, Minister for Economic Development and Technology Zdravko Počivalšek and State Secretaries Tadej Slapnik and Mojca Štepič entering the conference



State Secretary Tadej Slapnik welcoming Goran Jeras, Manager of the Cooperative for ethical financing, Croatia to the conference



Association of Slovenian Forum for Social Entrepreneurship, represented by Mojca Žganec Metelko, thanked the Prime Minister dr. Miro Cerar with a plaque for recognizing the importance of social economy for the future development of Slovenia



Zdravko Počivalšek, Minister of economic development and technology, Republic of Slovenia



Ivo Vajgl, Member of the European Parliament



Aleksandar Vulin, Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy, of the Republic of Serbia



Participants attending the opening address of the Prime Minister of Slovenia

The opening of the agenda

More than 260 participants from South-Eastern Europe convened at Brdo Estate on Monday April 24th 2017 for a two-day conference discussing the development of social entrepreneurship in the region. Organised by Slovenia, the European Commission and partner countries and organisations, the conference also sought to form a mid-term plan to stimulate the development of the social economy in SE Europe.



Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia Miro Cerar arriving to the conference

“Slovenia has an increasingly powerful economic sector”

The Slovenian Prime Minister, **Miro Cerar**, said that his government was prioritising the social economy as one of the most important fields of economic development.

“Slovenia is striving to be in the leading position in the field of digitalisation and the green, circular economy,” said Cerar. “And we would like to do all that with a human face.”

“The social economy is one of the main drivers of social development: cooperatives, social enterprises and social innovation are all in our spotlight. I am very happy that the number of social companies in recent years has increased by 300%.”

Mojca Žganec Metelko: social entrepreneurship is still suffering from a confusion of terms. It should not be considered as social aid; it is entrepreneurship in the full meaning of the term, providing beneficial environmental and social impacts.

Cerar emphasised the role of social entrepreneurship in creating first jobs for young people, as well as in preserving and developing the social inclusion of older generations. He raised the importance of the Luxembourg Declaration, which urges the EU to contribute to creating an ecosystem conducive to the development of the social economy. He believes Slovenia can serve as a bridge between enterprises and governments.

The Minister for Economic Development and Technology **Zdravko Počivalšek** offered some figures at the European level, saying that more than two million social enterprises had created more than 14 million jobs and 7% of GDP. He also said that social entrepreneurship in Slovenia “does not represent the backbone of our economy”, but that this does not mean that it should be neglected.



Participants of the first plenary round table on the “state of play” of the social economy in Europe: Ulla Engelmann, Head of Unit DG GROW, European Commission, Belgium; the moderator: Denis Stokkink, Rapporteur of the Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship (GECEs), Belgium; Goran Svilanović, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council; Jaime Vera Calonge, Investment Manager, Impact Investing, European Investment Fund (EIF), Luxembourg

Connecting key players in social entrepreneurship in SEE and the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region

The State Secretary of the Prime Minister’s Office, **Tadej Slapnik**, said the regional conference aimed to link the players at the level of states, social enterprises, and the support environment, and to draw up a proposal for a project to develop social enterprises concerned with the migration crisis as part of the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region.

“Only six EU member states have social entrepreneurship regulated in their legislation, with seven having its status partially regulated,” explained MEP **Ivo Vajgl** (DeSUS/ALDE). The six countries are Slovenia, Italy, Spain, France, Luxembourg and Greece.

Vajgl said that the interest of the European Parliament in social entrepreneurship has increased in recent years. He emphasised the responsibility of social elites in the countries of SE Europe to prepare their citizens for EU membership, and the social economy is one such field. The topics of the Conference in Brdo aimed to increase stability in the region and bring people closer together.

Social entrepreneurship in Serbia...

“We only have to bring social entrepreneurship into our legislation,” said the Serbian Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy, **Aleksandar Vulin**, recognising that Serbia needs to le-learn some of the social practices that were

well established in Socialist times. “We need to get back to valuing solidarity and cooperative labour. At the same time, we should give wider recognition to social assistance for people at the social margins, who have never asked for help from the state, to regain their dignity.”

...and Slovenia

The General Secretary of the Association Slovenian Forum for Social Entrepreneurship, **Mojca Žganec Metelko**, offered a flashback to 2011, when the social sector began to connect, identify its needs and gain a legal framework. The Forum became the Government’s working partner. Since then, the number of social enterprises has

grown to 655, and the narrow definition of a social enterprise has widened to today’s understanding, when social enterprises have the opportunity to redefine themselves and encompass all legal forms.

Mojca Žganec Metelko encouraged the participants to support the development

of the South-Eastern Network for Social Entrepreneurship. She also emphasised the contribution of several social enterprises to the Conference, both through their services and as exhibitors at the social entrepreneurs’ fair held on the Conference premises.

In conclusion, she highlighted that social entrepreneurship is still suffering from a confusion of terms. It should not be considered as social aid; it is entrepreneurship in the full meaning of the term, providing beneficial environmental and social impacts. It therefore deserves equal treatment.

Only six EU member states have social entrepreneurship regulated in their legislation, while seven have its status partly regulated

Innovation for societal impact in practice

Thanks to the excellent job of the moderator, Jordan Jung from Social Innovation Exchange, the EIB Institute plenary round table “Social innovation for Societal Impact”, dedicated to social innovation in practice, spun one of the most dynamic and spontaneous debates of the Conference, forming a comprehensive arch of interrelated topics from the nature of innovative business ideas to different ways of capacity building in various socio-economic contexts and knowledge transfer towards the Central and Eastern European countries.



The EIB Institute plenary round table: Social innovation for Societal Impact – from an innovative idea to business featuring Teia Ciulacu from the social enterprise Recicleta, Pezana Rexha, founder of the company Design by Pana, Denis Avrilionis, founder of the software company Compellio, Christoph Birkholz, Co-founder and managing director of Impact Hub Zürich, Rodney Schwartz, CEO and Founder of the impact investment bank Clearly So and the moderator, Jordan Jung from Social Innovation Exchange

The panel considered the approaches exercised by three participants from the world of impact investing and support structures, together with the hands-on experience provided by two extraordinary entrepreneurs:

Teia Ciulacu, representing Recicleta, a social enterprise from Romania that became an EIB Institute Social Innovation tournament finalist, and **Pezana Rexha**, the founder of Design by Pana, a EIB Institute Social Innovation tournament finalist from Albania.

“Because of corruption it is much cheaper to throw everything in the rubbish and bury it. So how can I uphold a business model which cannot compete against that?”

Rodney Schwartz, CEO and Founder of the London-based impact investment bank Clearly So, revealed their unique proposition: “We work with impact entrepreneurs, not startups. We act as a middleman between the financial fund and the entrepreneur, and our role is to maximise the impact. We find ourselves in the role of translators of the needs of social entrepreneurs on the one hand and the expectations of financial institutions such as EIB on the other.”

“We are a normal company, for profit. No grants. We are fully flexible with regard to the entrepreneurs’ legal form. Sometimes you don’t find an impact in cooperative organisations and vice versa.”

Today 800 members participate in the Impact Hub in Zürich, said **Christoph Birkholz**, its Co-Founder and Managing Director, which is the result of continuous development by 4 owners and 48 employees. They are focused on something that brings value into the entrepreneurship: “We want to change the wrong things in the economic system. We look at social companies as businesses. We are an entrepreneurial venture too: for profit, no apologies!”

Compellio supports companies to validate their business model: what are the risks, how to start? While social entrepreneurs sometimes struggle with answering those questions, thanks to Compellio, a platform that can help them now exists and that is what technology can do to help social entrepreneurs.

“We see there are two typical profiles: nerds, who want to develop a startup, and others, who build a company out of necessity. The second one is different; they operate from remote locations. We help them get the same support as if they were seated, say, in Luxembourg.”

How important is the team?

Christoph Birkholz highlighted that the evaluation of the team’s combined skills is a crucial factor. It is the team that you invest in. **Pezana Rexha** tried to illustrate: “In Albania the team is a big problem. Think of how far we had to go to finally have a team... At the beginning it is not about skills. Sometimes it is just one person with a strong vision...”

How do entrepreneurs combine business with social issues?

A social entrepreneur is driven by an impact goal. “It is a part of the development process, how you evolve and implement your mission,” explained **Christoph Birkholz**. “In the traditional startup world it is much more about efficiency.”

This is the reason why every Impact Hub in their network around the world is established by independent owners. They make €7 million in revenue and launched an accelerator in April 2017.

Denis Avrilionis, an expert on impact investing from a software company seated in Luxembourg, presented the tool “Compellio”, which serves better structuring of the ecosystem for the social economy.

“When my father retired he became depressed, and when I saw that, I decided to bring all this together. We now have 16 people employed, orphans or those with disabilities. We are competitive in the market. And I am proud that big ideas can come from countries like Albania!”

Teia Ciulacu: “Social issues for us are the beginning of everything we do. At Recicleta we start from the environmental model and then go towards developing a business model. We do it for this reason. Then, we want to make it financially sustainable.” **Christoph Birkholz**: “In some cases we can benefit from the mission and in others we can’t.” While **Rodney Schwartz** maintained that in some circumstances a strong social mission may be both an attractive positioning tool



Christoph Birkholz, Co-Founder and managing director of Impact Hub Zürich

and a beneficial cost driver, **Pezana Rexha** disagreed: “Honestly, we had a fast break-even but I never spoke about our societal mission. In our case openly recognising that our products are made of garbage and produced by socially unprivileged people would not increase their attractiveness.” “And I pay them more than the others,” she added.

How about the role of government?

Both **Teia Ciulacu** and **Pezana Rexha** were rather disappointed with the circumstances in their own respective countries.

The case of Ricicleta: “We want to spread out and scale up!”



Teia Ciulacu during the panel discussion

Teia Ciulacu, a Romanian social entrepreneur, presented her enterprise Ricicleta (www.recicleta.ro). The initiative deals with the collection of waste materials by a dedicated team riding specialised cargo bicycles. The business idea combines special boxes for collection and sustainable means of transportation. A member of the team cycling the cargo bike rides an average of 25 km a day!

They currently run two cargo bikes and service 500 clients. So far they have collected 300 tons of recycled materials.

“We want to spread out and scale up,” said Teia Ciulacu, as she laid out her business model. It is based on three revenue streams: fees, collected paper and advertising.

She did not forget to emphasise that each cargo bike means one job created. By expanding she wants to overcome the limit of the 9 km range in which they can operate their services, which brings them an average of 3kg per serviced person per year. Within the current range they could service up to 15,000 people.

Towards the end of the roundtable Teia spoke up to point out an important issue burdening social entrepreneurs in the entire region of South-Eastern Europe. “Because of corruption it is much cheaper to throw everything in the rubbish and bury it. So how can I uphold a business model which cannot compete against that? In my country such things are happening. As you may know, in Romania we have had public upheaval against corruption. I cannot speak for other countries in the region, but I guess at some level everyone deals with similar issues. And we have to speak about that.”

“We see different profiles and circumstances across different countries. But If I were the government I would put as much effort into social entrepreneurship as possible,” said **Christoph Birkholz**.

Denis Avrilionis: “I teach business modelling at a business school in Luxembourg and I notice that the students come with the idea that enterprises are already created. When you become an entrepreneur you feel completely off-road.” That’s what we have to bear in mind when designing a proper ecosystem for social entrepreneurship.



Denis Avrilionis, an expert on impact investing from the software company Compellio

Pana by Pezana Rexha, the case of storytelling furniture from Albania



Pezana Rexha telling the story of her social enterprise Design by Pana

“As an architect I started to collect innovative eco furniture from local people, retired people and other social groups,” explained Pezana Rexha, looking back at the beginnings of her social enterprise. Her company works with underprivileged young people, typically orphans, who would otherwise have no social shelter.

“At 16 orphans go out of the institutions and eventually become criminals. They have got no other choice.”

“When my father retired he became depressed, and when I saw that, I decided to bring all this together. We now have 16 people employed, orphans or those with disabilities. We are competitive in the market. And I am proud that big ideas can come from countries like Albania!”

When talking about the conditions for social entrepreneurship in her own country, she emphasised the misperception of social enterprise. They could not get any market advantage by proving themselves to be a social enterprise; on the contrary, it would have been a handicap.

“Albania passed a law according to which I cannot call it a social enterprise. According to the law, only an existing organisation can fund a social enterprise, and it must be state-owned.”

Her doubts go further: “It seems like social enterprises serve as a cover for other things. Unfortunately, everything is so transparent... therefore I try to stay as far away as I can from the government. “

Social impact investing in social economy enterprises



Primož Šporar, the expert on social impact investing from Sklad 05, Slovenia

As with any other company, social economy enterprises need access to fast and flexible financial products to enable the growth and scaling up of their activities. Diversity of instruments in the social-financial market is one of main challenges in the majority of Central and Eastern European countries, both at the level of debt capital and equity and quasi-equity investments.

Due to the huge diversity of players within social economy enterprises (startups, not-for-profit organisations, SMEs, co-operatives etc.) a range of financial tools can apply, including donations at one end and risk capital at the other. This growing market shows huge potential and significant growth, and is an exciting challenge for all the stakeholders involved. The European Union clearly recognises the role and potential of **social economy enterprises** and uses many programmes to invest in them in different ways (the Interreg CEE Programme, the Interreg Adrion etc.). What about private investors, financial institutions and investment funds?

Commercial banks looking into the social economy sector

While the role of international financial institutions such as the European Investment Fund seems to be crucial, development also demands the inclusion of local commercial banks and financial intermediaries. Banks in particular are showing more and more interest in this growing market, but have a hard time understanding the specifics of **social economy enterprises**, even in 'safe' cases such as providing bridging loans. A step forward must



Plenary round table 3: Social impact investing in social economy enterprises with Giancarlo Miranda, CEO, Intesa Sanpaolo Bank, Slovenia, Mikka Pyykkö, Project Director at the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra, Sibil Sivilan, CEO, SID Bank, Slovenia, Deborah Smart, Head of Programmes - Grants, Social Investment Business, Lodovico Gherardi from the Managing Authority of the Interreg ADRION Programme, Jana Valkova and Chiara Casarella, Joint Secretariat of the Interreg Central Europe Programme, and the moderator, Primož Šporar from Sklad 05, Slovenia

also be made by development banks (e.g. SID Banka in Slovenia) to consider the development of accessible instruments such as social impact bonds. Transfer of knowledge and best practice

The case of Banca Prossima - Intesa Sanpaolo Group

The social enterprises sector encompasses a dynamic and growing segment of our society, a segment which even in times of economic downturn attracts an increasing amount of human and financial resources. For a bank, the sector of social enterprises represents a territory where traditional financial solutions meet non-traditional legal and business frameworks. This entails adaptations, modifications and a complete re-consideration of lending practices.

In fact, when it comes to fulfilling its financial needs, a social enterprise can benefit from a variety of alternatives, ranging from more traditional solutions (e.g. credit facilities) to more recent and innovative ones (e.g. crowdfunding). Hence, for a bank, funding social enterprises is ultimately a matter of financial innovation and creativity.

All of this makes servicing social enterprises a special challenge for a diversified international banking group, and one which requires a new, distinctive approach. In tackling this challenge, IntesaSanpaolo undertook a type of innovation in the commercial banking landscape. The vision is that the social enterprise sector, because of its broader definition, needs to be served by a dedicated, specialised bank.

To fulfil this vision, IntesaSanpaolo set up a fully-fledged banking subsidiary with the clear mission of growing a banking best practice for non-profit and social enterprises within the Group. It was this vision which led to the birth of Banca Prossima, a bank created in 2007 with a staff of 30 people (today in excess of 400), all selected from the employees of the IntesaSanpaolo Group who had personal experience in dealing with the non-profit and social enterprise sector, often as volunteers of charitable organisations.

should be considered in the CEE market to adapt effective programmes (e.g. Social Investment Business from the UK developing regional impact investment schemes). On the other hand, crowd impact investment should be further stimulated, and hopefully successful examples can build trust for investors to broaden their investment

Banks are showing more and more interest in this growing market, but have a hard time understanding the specifics of social economy enterprises, even in 'safe' cases such as providing bridging loans.

portfolios with social impact investment. Here trust goes hand in hand with investment-ready programmes performed by different incubators and accelerators. A growing need for financing social enterprises can also be observed in the segmentation and focus of financial instruments (e.g. fund for SEE active for working with migrants).



Giancarlo Miranda CEO, Intesa Sanpaolo Bank, Slovenia

The establishment of Banca Prossima was meant to show that a bank specialising in the third-sector could generate a tangible advantage for all its stakeholders, including its owners, although of course, vis-à-vis commercial banking standards, a difference in terms of expected profit targets had to be envisaged.

The assessment of the creditworthiness of a social enterprise requires a specific, non-standard angle. Indeed, the operating and legal features of such enterprises suggest a revised classification of an entity's income statement

The assessment of the creditworthiness of a social enterprise requires a specific, non-standard angle.

items. Some revenues, donations being a good example, tend to assume a proven recurring nature in the entity's income stream. In this respect, Banca Prossima, within the Group's validated procedures for setting credit ratings, allows enterprises to correctly re-classify such recurring income items, thereby ensuring a more accurate credit-risk rating. In several examples this has ultimately led to better pricing terms for the prospective borrower and to a mutually more satisfactory banking relationship.

Based on all the above, and on the full commitment of its staff and of the Intesa Sanpaolo Group, the vision and the mission of Banca Prossima are now a solid reality and a fundamental pillar of the Italian social enterprises sector. With today's €3.2bn of deposits, €1.7bn of outstanding loans, 58,000 clients and 60 branches throughout Italy, Banca Prossima has largely met the ambitious expectations which led to its establishment. Additionally, its consistent track record of profitability since 2011 (€9.8 million in 2016), and in the quality of its loan portfolio (with a mere 3.1% NPL rate), add to a picture of quality and excellence, and make Banca Prossima a successful experience and a benchmark for the funding practices of the social enterprise sector.

Non-financial investments to build “impact molecules”

In the light of SEE specifics, non-financial investments should also not be ignored. Building impact chains with the commercial sector in order to help SEE to reach markets and raise sales figures is one of the best ways. The same goes for the promotion and marketing activities of the SEE, where trust and understanding among the wider public must be built. Similarly, focused impact partnerships need to be built into the right ‘impact molecules’ to solve specific and complex societal challenges. As the European Commission has already recognised, social investment in people in **social economy enterprises** is of crucial

The establishment of Banca Prossima was meant to show that a bank specialising in the third sector could generate a tangible advantage for all its stakeholders.

importance for more effective development of the social economy.

The role of the social economy

Social economy enterprises can clearly play an important role in solving societal challenges, but it is important to understand that the financial risks must be minimised and activities need to have societal, financial and environmental impact. Bearing in mind that societal challenges are increasingly complex, a careful consideration of the role and impact of **social economy enterprises**, including their effectiveness, must be put on the agenda to minimise financial risks. A good example of this is the Finish Innovation Fund Sitra.



“The strategic goal should be to reach the EU's average level of 6.5% jobs in the social economy sector and a 7% contribution to the GDP”, was the message of the Plenary round table 2, Social economy in SEE: State of play which featured Jozo Radoš, Member of the European Parliament, Tadej Slapnik, State Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister of Slovenia, Goran Jeras, Manager of the Cooperative for ethical financing, Croatia, Victor Meseguer, Director, of Social Economy Europe, Belgium, Neven Marinović, Director of Smart Kolektiv, Serbia, Anastasia Andritsou, Head of Partnerships and Programmes at British Council, Greece and Veselin Penchev, Head of Public Affairs Eurasia business Zone, Up Group, Bulgaria



The Fair of social economy enterprises in Slovenia



The Slovenian social enterprise Moja štacuna showcasing their business at the Fair of social enterprises



Dorotea Daniele, Expert at ESF SE TN, European Research and Development Service for the Social Economy (DIESIS) and GECES leading the workshop on the European Social Fund

A new way to help migrants and refugees

The project proposal “SIMI - Social Impact Migrants Investing in Social Enterprises”

Mojca Štepic

State Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister
of the Republic of Slovenia



In recent years Europe has been facing a movement of migrants on a scale rarely seen in the last two centuries. The countries of South-Eastern Europe are typically identified as “transit countries”, through which large numbers of people migrate towards their desired destinations in Northern and Western Europe.

These countries are facing many of the difficult challenges that such mass migrations present, especially in satisfying the very specific needs of migrants and in building sufficient capacities in terms of staff, accommodation and tailored services for migrants.

Social enterprises have the potential to provide an answer to these challenges for several reasons: they are addressing the issues of social inclusion and social activation at the local level, as well as the challenges of high unemployment rates, especially among young people, and they can be an important driver of economic activity in local communities. They can therefore play an important role in engaging the potential of migrants at the local level, especially concerning sources, resources and capacities, and identifying investment-ready projects.

The Adriatic and Ionian region (EUSAIR) was and still is very exposed to the large-scale

migration and refugee crisis. In Dubrovnik in May 2016, representatives of the Governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia committed themselves, through a Joint

Ministerial Statement, to exploring the possibilities for strengthening the resilience of the EUSAIR region through mutual action, and invited the Transnational Cooperation Programme ADRIION to assist them in these endeavours.

The **Social Impact Migrants Investing in Social Enterprises (SIMI)** project proposal is the answer to these challenges, and it can provide specific solutions to help participating countries address this issue as specified in the Dubrovnik Declaration. In February 2017, through the SIMI project, Slovenia proposed to

the EUSAIR Governing Board that they build on the potential of the social economy and develop mechanisms that would ease the migrants' access to labour markets through social entrepreneurship.

In the long-term, the project's ambition is to attract financial contributions from various other sources by promoting the impacts of successful pilot projects in order to gradually build up a full Social Impact Migrant Investment Fund in the wider region and also to begin building synergies with other regions.



Drafting session for upgrading the SIMI (Social impact migrants investing in social enterprises) project in Adriatic - Ionian and Central region



The project's short-term objectives are to set up an initial structure for the development of the social economy for migrants' needs in at least three EUSAIR countries; to establish at least one pilot social enterprise aiming to provide services to migrants in each involved EUSAIR country; to facilitate their entry into the labour market; and to build the capacities needed for managing and facilitating the SIMI project in the EUSAIR region.

In the long-term, the project's ambition is to attract financial contributions from various other sources by promoting the impacts of successful pilot projects in order to gradually build up a full Social Impact Migrant Investment Fund in the wider region and also to begin building synergies with other regions.

The main activities and results within the project's implementation phase will consist of:

- selecting local test areas
- executing a survey to identify types of services and to look into tailored activities for the integration of migrants in the host countries and their reintegration into their home countries
- elaborating on the programme's area level guidelines and testing them – creating a framework for local experimentation
- preparing policy recommendations – creating a partnership model of an 'ecosystem' for social economy organisations dealing with migrants through the perspective of creating a financial

instrument – an investment fund to support the development and functioning of such an ecosystem.

During the regional conference “Scaling up Social Economy Enterprises in South-Eastern Europe”, the EUSAIR countries upgraded the initial Slovenian project proposal and much progress was achieved as project partners from three EUSAIR countries were identified; **Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. The partnership** to jointly create an ecosystem for social economy enterprises and support their activities in the field of assisting migrants **still remains open** to all the other countries of the EUSAIR region: to national/regional/local governments, public administration representatives, (international) institutions for ethical financing, research institutions, social economy networks, umbrella organisations, and finally to social economy enterprises and organisations as the main implementers of project's activities.

The partners of the SIMI project proposal firmly believe in the ability of the social economy to make **transformative changes** to the way the needs of the migrants are addressed and to provide a new way for them to unleash their skills, talents, knowledge and energy. This would benefit not only the migrants themselves, but also the overburdened public support mechanisms in South-Eastern European countries and the European Union as a whole.

The social economy in South-Eastern Europe is ready for take-off

Niko Korpar

Support, collaborate, develop, and grow. These were the buzzwords that set the overall optimistic and constructive tone of the 2nd day of the SEE2 conference. Throughout the series of roundtables and workshops, the participants and guests were united: the social economy in South-Eastern Europe (SE Europe) is an up-and-coming sector that has the potential to contribute to economic growth and increase employment, especially of young people and disadvantaged social groups. Moreover, social entrepreneurship promotes common European values, such as solidarity, dialogue and progress.



Participants of the ESF Social Economy Thematic Network (ESF SE TN) plenary round table discussing legislation for social enterprises: Apostolos Ioakimidis, an expert from GECES, Jean-Christophe Burkel, Director of ULESS, Luxembourg, Victor Meseguer, Director of Social Economy Europe, Belgium, Juan Manuel Sanchez-Terán Lledó, Assistant Adjunct Director of Social Economy and CSR (MEYSS), Government of the Kingdom of Spain, Piotr Wołkowiński, Polish Committee for Developing the Social Economy and the moderator, Dorotea Daniele, Expert at ESF SE TN, European Research and Development Service for the Social Economy (DIESIS) and GECES, Belgium

Key barriers to overcome

Nevertheless, barriers that hinder the development of social enterprises are still in place. Among these are the lack of strong legislation, institutional support, limited access to funding opportunities and a lack of harmonisation between programmes for different regions. While the first day of the conference was

Social entrepreneurship promotes common European values, such as solidarity, dialogue and progress.

dedicated to building transnational partnerships, the second was all about concrete and pragmatic measures that will allow new and exciting social enterprises to reach their full potential. It was no coincidence that the conference, located in the middle of the beautiful natural environment of Brdo pri Kranju, put much emphasis on the term ecosystem to describe the system of support for social

businesses which must be developed through collaboration between all stakeholders, from entrepreneurs to legislators.

Legislative frameworks are the basis for social enterprises, said **Dorotea Daniele** from the ESF Social Economy Thematic Network, the moderator of the plenary roundtable on legislation. The examples of Spanish, Luxembourg and Polish efforts at crafting legislative packages to support their social enterprises demonstrated the richness and variety of the social economy across Europe. Unity through diversity, the EU's motto, was once again demonstrated in practice: **Jean-Christophe Burkel**, the director of ULESS, the union for the social economy in Luxembourg, stressed the importance of adapting legislation

The examples of Spanish, Luxembourg and Polish efforts at crafting legislative packages to support their social enterprises demonstrated the richness and variety of the social economy across Europe.

The importance of stakeholder participation

Another point repeated throughout the day was the importance of dialogue. Effective policy can only be made through cooperation and collaboration between entrepreneurs, politicians, policy-makers, civil society and other stakeholders. The example of Luxembourg, where the not-for-profit sector accounts for 8% of GDP, shows the value of institutionalising dialogue. The immense success of the social economy in Spain can also be accredited to the recognition of the social economy at the highest levels of governance – in its constitution. Co-everything is the formula for success, said **Piotr Wołkowiński** from the Polish Committee for Developing the Social Economy, and several

based on each countries' experiences, history and needs, while **Victor Meseguer**, the Director of Social Economy Europe, argued for a clear and strong definition of the social economy at the European level, in which a key principle is established – that the social economy is not about *what* a company does, but *how* it goes about it.

The social economy in South-Eastern Europe is slowly becoming one of the engines of growth. All it requires is a boost in the form of laws, funds, networks and knowledge. The positive tone of the conference showed that it is clear what the next steps should be and that a win for the social economy is a win for Europe, for the economy and for society.

participants expressed similar views. Policies should be co-designed with social entrepreneurs, projects co-funded by connecting public and private investors, public officials should collaborate in identifying best practices and eliminating barriers, and transnational networks should be fostered to make sure entrepreneurs have the opportunity to cooperate across borders.

Exchanging ideas and experiences is also crucial for learning about doing business. Social enterprises in SE Europe often struggle with their financial sustainability. Despite performing socially beneficial services, financial results should not be neglected, stressed **Ewa**



The workshop on using the European Investment Fund to help social enterprises

Konczal, the Manager of the CEE European Department of the European Venture Philanthropy Association. To attract new investors, social entrepreneurs must also focus on understanding the financial consequences of their decisions. Each investor’s goal is to create a sustainable organisation which will be able to operate on its own for a long time. Thus, legislative efforts for enabling better access to funding must go hand in hand with making sure that entrepreneurs know how to handle those funds.

The European Investment Fund (EIF) is not only one of the most active facilitators of the social economy in Europe, it also recognises the potential of the sector in SE Europe. Its financial products are, unfortunately, not yet available for this part of Europe.

Active role of financial intermediaries is key

Financial institutions and intermediaries play a key role in managing the flows of funding that are made available through European, national or public channels. The financial structures in which social enterprises in SE Europe operate are not yet fully developed; however, the situation is improving. The European Investment Fund (EIF) is not only one of the most active facilitators of the social economy in Europe, it also recognises the potential of the sector in SE Europe. Its financial products are, unfortunately, not yet available for this part of Europe, explained **Jaime Vera Calonje**, the Investment Manager and Impact Investing expert at EIF. Limited access to European grants and other programmes for countries that are not yet Member States is a problem that will have to be overcome in the future – yet another reason why cross-border partnerships are beneficial for understanding each other’s issues. On the other hand, progress can be rapid once the funding is made available: **Marko Pavić** of the Croatian Ministry of Labour and Pension System explained Croatia’s plans to support its social economy with funding in the amount of €38 million from EU-funded projects.

Regional cooperation established to exchange experience and adapt support ecosystems to national contexts

We all should be proud to be living in Europe, the global leader in promoting the social economy and the values it stands for, stressed **Denis Stokkink**, the moderator of the final plenary roundtable and the President of the European think and do tank Pour la Solidarité. There is ample opportunity for improving and increasing the role of the social economy within the EU and the countries of SE Europe will benefit from these efforts. Social enterprises must become more mainstream, scaled-up and internationalised. They must be made more visible and publicly recognisable. Digital technology can and should be used for social innovation. We are on the right track, but there is much work to be done, agreed the participants. Fortunately, the variety of countries that are working hard to increase the size of the sector shows that the social economy is not ideological, but rather a pragmatic answer to the issues Europe is currently facing, such as youth unemployment, exclusion of certain social groups and poor economic growth. The European Union provides a stage where partners can meet and networks can be established: between cities, regions, countries and individuals.

One such achievement was made through cooperation laid out by **Tadej Slapnik**, State Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, who concluded the

conference by reading the Ljubljana Declaration, written and signed by all the participants. The document includes a list of recommendations and proposals for establishing stronger international networks between the countries of SE Europe and the EU in order to grow the social economy in this region of Europe.

Only through the exchange of good practice and experience can policymakers and social entrepreneurs in SE Europe gain the necessary skills and knowledge to kick start the social economy in their own countries.

As a key lesson, support ecosystems should be adapted to national contexts; however, as Denis Stokkink emphasised, no replication does not mean no cooperation. Only through the exchange of good practice and experience can policymakers and social entrepreneurs in SE Europe gain the necessary skills and knowledge to kick start the social economy in their own countries. Despite the fact that

each local reality is different from the others, there is much potential for common European frameworks, programmes, grants and other ways of supporting both Member States and the countries of the SE Europe such as Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo* and Montenegro.

This event was able to connect public officials and entrepreneurs and put forward the richness and diversity of the social economy in Europe. Slovenia played its role as a link between the EU and those countries well, and was thanked for the successful implementation of the conference.

* This designation is without prejudice to position on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and ICJ Advisory opinion on the Kosovo declaration on independence.

The Ljubljana Declaration – Scaling up social economy enterprises in South-Eastern Europe (SEE)

Towards a stronger and more structured cooperation between the EU and SEE

Continuing on from previous Conferences, and within the framework of the Conference SSE2: Scaling up social economy enterprises in South-Eastern Europe, held in Ljubljana on 24th and 25th of April 2017, the representatives of the Governments of Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania and Luxembourg adopt the following declaration:

We observe that the social economy has increasing recognition in the EU and internationally, but that social economy enterprises still lack appropriate recognition in certain EU member states and countries from the region of South-Eastern Europe. We therefore strongly recommend that the European Union commits itself to actively supporting the social economy at the European level and at the level of the South-Eastern region of Europe. We recognise the actions presented by the European Commission in order to promote the development of social economy enterprises in Europe, referring to the recommendations of the GECES Report 2016.

We acknowledge that “social economy enterprises” is the commonly accepted term

for a variety of organisations in the field of the social economy. However, we realise that there are differences in the definition of the social sector. Therefore, we believe that the definition of the social economy sector should be based on the mutual recognition of various types and forms of organisation acting as social economy entities in different EU and South-Eastern European countries.

We acknowledge that the social economy can act as a driver for economic growth if supported by appropriate programmes, projects and financing. But there are still differences between the EU member states and countries from South-Eastern Europe, arising from different conditions in access to finance provided by EU institutions. The countries of South-Eastern

Europe would therefore support the creation of a network of social economy organisations at the level of the region of South-Eastern Europe as a whole.

At the meeting in Ljubljana on 24th and 25th April 2017 we decided to adopt the following declaration:

- The European Union and the countries of South-Eastern Europe will put substantial effort into increasing the visibility and the recognition of the social economy and social economy enterprises at the European, South-Eastern Europe and international levels.
- Following the Luxembourg declaration, the European Union and the countries of South-Eastern Europe will acknowledge a common understanding of the scope of the social economy, and with respect to the diversity of organisations in their types and legal forms, take steps towards the mutual recognition of social economy organisations at the European level and at the level of South-Eastern European countries.

We acknowledge that the social economy can act as a driver for economic growth if supported by appropriate programmes, projects and financing.

- The European Union and the countries of South-Eastern Europe will take appropriate actions to create an ecosystem for social economy enterprises in the process of tackling the emerging challenges concerning migrants and refugees.
- European support for social economy enterprises will be strengthened and balanced for EU Member states and for South-Eastern European countries. Harmonisation of access to programmes and instruments will be strengthened, as convergence is needed for all European Member states and South-Eastern European countries.
- Social economy organisations are encouraged to create a strong network at the regional level of South-Eastern Europe.
- South-Eastern European countries are encouraged to join the Monitoring Committee of EU Member states on social economy and participate in regular high-level meetings of high-ranking political representatives in charge of the social economy.



A group photo of all participants of SEE2 : Scaling up Social Economy Enterprises in South East Europe

The three ways Slovenia is setting an example for the whole of Europe: The Ljubljana Declaration, the SIMI project and Tekstilnica

Niko Korpar

The SEE2 conference held at Brdo pri Kranju showcased Slovenia's potential to act as a bridge between the east and west; between the EU Member States and South Eastern European countries which find themselves in various stages of the integration process. Furthermore, it put on display the country's efforts to grow its own social economy sector, while also putting emphasis on fostering international partnerships.

Mojca Štepic, State Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, opened the second day of the conference by going through the list of measures Slovenia is set to implement in line with the EU's Cohesion Policy for the years 2014-2020. These include designing an effective business environment for social enterprises, and new educational opportunities for increasing the number of jobs that the social economy sector can offer. With new investments and partnerships, Slovenia is bound to reach a similar share of the social economy's contribution to overall GDP as the most developed parts of Europe. While much could be written about social enterprises in Slovenia, here we will focus on three ways that Slovenia made its mark at the SEE2 – besides serving as the host country.

The Ljubljana Declaration – a pathway for growing the social economy sector

The hard work put in by the participants resulted in the Ljubljana Declaration, first read at the very end of the conference by Tadej Slapnik, State Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia and one of the driving forces behind the event. Its aim is a movement

towards a stronger cooperation between the EU and the countries of South Eastern Europe for the development of the social economy, and it was signed by members of all the countries present: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo*, Luxembourg, Montenegro and Slovenia.

The Declaration states that the social economy still lacks recognition in SE Europe. Furthermore, there are still differences not only between the EU's Member States, but also between the Member States and individual countries from SE Europe, who strive towards the same quality of legislation and access to programmes and funds made available to the EU's members. It thus recognises the proactive ability of the EU in developing the social economy in countries which are not yet Member States. In light of this, it recommends that the EU strengthens its support of the development of the social economy in this region of Europe, where national economies are fragile and youth unemployment is high. It recognises that there are differences in the types and forms of social economy entities between countries; nevertheless, the social economy can act as a driver of economic growth for all of them.

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Presenting sector-specific best practices of partnership and growth in Europe: Danijela Dobrović, Creative Director at City Games, Croatia, Sebastjan Pikl, co-founder of Tekstilnica, Nadine Muller, Head of Department for Social Economy and Solidarity, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social and Solidarity Economy, Luxembourg, Ewa Konczal, CEE Manager, European Venture Philanthropy Association, Belgium, Predrag Stošić, Director of Radanska ruža, Serbia, Stephen J. Barnett, Director of Euclid Network, UK and moderator, Veselin Penchev, Head of Public Affairs Eurasia business Zone, Up Group, Bulgaria

Several measures have been identified as crucial turning points. International networks of companies should be created in order to facilitate the exchange of ideas, best practice and experience between social entrepreneurs. The visibility of the social economy in SE Europe should be increased and stories of success publicly recognised. Access to funding is especially important, so access to programmes aimed at developing social enterprises should be harmonised for all Member States and SE Europe. At the policy level, regional networks of cooperation should be encouraged.

The visibility of the social economy in SE Europe should be increased and stories of success publicly recognised.

The document is destined to be presented to officials from all the EU Member States and further steps will be taken to ensure that the list of concrete ideas and proposals is put into practice as soon as possible. Until then, Slapnik said, "Slovenia looks forward to other SE European countries taking the lead in the efforts and hosting the next instalment of the SEE² conference".

The SIMI project – social enterprises that help migrants

One of the workshops that took place at the conference revolved around creating a proposal for upgrading the Social Impact Migrants

Investments (SIMI) project. It was led by Mojca Štepic, who presented the results of the drafting session on the second day of the conference.

Importantly, this is a project that connects the Adriatic and Ionian regions of Europe, which have recently faced large numbers of incoming migrants looking for a better life and an end to persecution. Not only state institutions, but also companies in partner regions must adapt to the new geostrategic circumstance.

Migrants are in most cases barred from entering the labour market. This situation contributes to economic loss as well as to psychological damage caused by idleness and loss of self-worth. The proposal thus strives to develop social businesses doing services for migrants or carrying out other activities that involve working with migrants. As part of this, Slovenia will propose that easier entry into the labour market for migrants is included in the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR).

Furthermore, investing in social impact in the case of migrant-orientated social enterprises will require the creation of structures that will enable such investments, as well as attracting other sources of funding. The draft of the SIMI project calls for the creation of a fund dedicated to the social economy for migrants.



Sebastjan Pikl, one of the founders of Tekstilnica

Mojca Štepic was pleased to inform the audience that considerable progress was made during the conference. Under Slovenian leadership, two more partner countries have joined the project: Serbia and Croatia. The potential of regional partnerships in the social economy was once more made visible and, what is more, it was shown that the social economy can also play a positive role in responding to contemporary policy issues, such as the migrant crisis, and deliver valuable services to those who need them the most.

Tekstilnica – a beacon of the social economy in Slovenia

Tekstilnica is no ordinary social enterprise. Simply put, it is one of the most well-known and successful social businesses in Slovenia. Its core activity is collecting old textiles and reusing them. Through a network of collecting bins, Tekstilnica gathers 750 tonnes of textiles annually. It then sells either unsorted packages of textiles and sorted second-hand clothes or processes the fabric into usable rags

and wipes. The company operates independently from subsidies and grants and has big plans for the future – there is much more to be collected, and not only in Slovenia!

Behind its well-structured business plan is a set of goals that represent the social impact Tekstilnica has on its environment. Firstly, it tries to spread awareness of the importance of sorting waste materials, especially textiles which can be reused and reprocessed, and of buying only the clothes that one needs. Secondly, it tries to employ members of social groups that often struggle finding a secure job, in particular women over the age of 50. Yet another of its goals is to decrease the use of plastic bags through promoting the use of shopping bags made from reclaimed textiles.

What really sets Tekstilnica apart from other social enterprises is its international outlook. As Sebastjan Pikl, one of the founders of the cooperative behind Tekstilnica, explained in his presentation, their wish is to become a global social enterprise, and the plans are already under way! A project carried out in Burkina Faso, an African country plagued by persistent poverty, sent several containers of usable textiles to people in need. Tekstilnica is always looking for new opportunities to establish international cooperation and has a vision of establishing a global network of textile collecting and processing activities. The energy and openness

of its dedicated employees impressed all the participants at the conference and Tekstilnica has truly shown itself as one of the beacons of the social economy in Slovenia.

The potential of regional partnerships in the social economy was once more made visible and, what is more, it was shown that the social economy can also play a positive role in responding to contemporary policy issues, such as the migrant crisis, and deliver valuable services to those who need them the most.



The Fair of social enterprises featured many stories of success



Exchanging materials, but more importantly also Ideas and experience



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