socialplatform

To:
Michel Barnier
Commissioner for Internal Market and Services

February 10, 2012

Re: Social Platform position on the Social Business Initiative

Dear Commissioner,

We welcome the Communication on a Social Business Initiative, as we believe, if properly implemented, it can stimulate the development and consolidation of social economy and social entrepreneurship across the EU.

What we recommend?
We advocate for a social cohesion policy to accompany the single market to achieve a "social market economy" (art. 3.3 TEU) and we consider that public services and the social economy play an essential role in achieving this goal.

We suggest that European decisions on "social business" and "social enterprise" rely on the way they work and function rather than on their statues, legal forms and designations: as at present their concepts, definitions and designations are unstable and even contradictory, even at national level.

We recommend that the actions foreseen in the Communication include measures to support the well-established social economy players in Europe, as social economy and social entrepreneurship have been developed in the EU - at least in many member states - and beyond, for decades. All the actions foreseen in the Communication should be based on a preliminary collection of good practices existing in member states.

We consider the involvement of social economy organisations, including those representing users, an essential element for the success of this initiative. Therefore, we would like to be part of the consultative multi-stakeholder group on social business - to share our expertise on this topic with the Commission and the other members of the group.

How?
In the paper enclosed, you can find our proposals on how to:

- **Facilitate access to private funding**: we support the creation of a European Social Investment Fund to help attract private investors, but think it premature to set out an EU regulatory framework for national social investment funds.

- **Facilitate access to EU funds**: The new Structural Funds and the EU Program for Social Change and Innovation in particular.

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- **Increase visibility of social enterprises:** We consider it premature to develop a European label for social enterprises, considering the diversity of concepts, legal frameworks and level of development across the EU. We encourage a step by approach and welcome the proposal to create a data-base of existing labels at national level. The Commission, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, including CSOs, could issue a guide containing non binding criteria that could be taken account by member states while defining a national label.

- **Reinforce the managerial capacities, professionalism and networking of social businesses:** Both formal and informal education should play a pivotal role in raising interest in entrepreneurship, specifically social entrepreneurship, at an early age. Encouraging creativity, self-confidence, critical thought, societal values and participation.

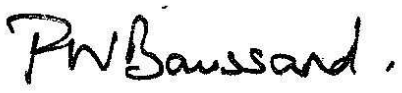
- **Improving the legal environment:** We do not support the creation of a European statute for social enterprises, but do call for a European statute for associations, foundations and mutual societies, and the revision of the European statute for cooperatives.

As you know, Social Platform is the largest civil society alliance fighting for social justice and participatory democracy in Europe. Consisting of 45 pan-European networks of NGOs, Social Platform campaigns to ensure that EU policies are developed in partnership with the people they affect, respecting fundamental rights, promoting solidarity and improving lives.

We hope that we can count on your full support of our proposals when implementing the Social Business Initiative in cooperation with member states.

Yours sincerely,





Conny Reuter

President

Pierre Baussand

Director

Enclosed: Social Platform response to the Social Business Initiative