To: President Juncker
Cc: First Vice-President Timmermans
Vice-Presidents Katainen and Dombrovskis
Commissioners Bieńkowska and Thyssen

Brussels, Tuesday 5th of July 2016

Re: request from the European Commission Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship (GECES) members to incorporate social enterprises and social economy as a priority of the European Commission Work Programme 2017

Mr. President Jean-Claude Juncker,

This letter echoes your personal willingness to see the European Union dedicated to being triple-A on social issues as well as the conclusions of the Council of December 2015[1] promoting social economy as a key driver of economic and social development in Europe and the 2011 European Economic and Social Committee opinion[2] on social entrepreneurship and social enterprises.

The European Union is currently going through a particularly difficult period marked by the rise of populisms and nationalisms, distrust towards political institutions and the refugee crisis. It is now essential that the values which originally founded the EU – i.e. democracy, equality, solidarity and social cohesion – remain at the top of the European Commission agenda. This notably implies that economic actors, which are, by nature, already carrying these values such as social economy and social enterprises, are strongly supported by the European institutions.
The reasons for the importance of this particular area are four, all of which are fundamental to the collective economic and social success of the Member States, individually and together. Firstly there is their **economic effect**: the social enterprise and social delivery are key parts of the economies of most Member States. Secondly is the **reach to and effect on people**, both those engaged and employed in social economy and social enterprises, and those whose disadvantage is addressed by it. Thirdly is an **engagement with our youth**, surely the future of the EU and our world, in which, across the EU and beyond we see a demand for effective and efficient social business as a part of their lives. Finally this focus on the social gives us the best prospect of achieving measurable progress with the **UN Sustainable Development Goals** to which the EU is party. The work of the European Commission Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship (GECES), created in 2012 for a duration of six years following the Social Business Initiative Communication (SBI)[3], can certainly help in bringing all of these benefits to the EU and its Member States.

The GECES is composed by 28 Member States representatives and 42 external experts[4] from the academic world, social enterprises, the financial sector, support organisations, local authorities, lobbies and advocacy networks. A renewal of its "external" members took place in 2015, under your presidency. This step also marked the beginning of the writing of a General Report which makes research-based recommendations for concrete actions to boost the development of social economy and social enterprises. The final version of the document is likely to be endorsed by mid-October

[1]Council Conclusions (7 December 2015), *Luxembourg Presidency, The promotion of the social economy as a key driver of economic and social development in Europe*, Brussels, 15071/15 SOC 711 EMPL 464.
[2]European Economic and Social Committee, opinion of 26 October 2011, Social Entrepreneurship and Social enterprises, INT 589.
[3] COM(2011) 682 final.
[4] The composition of the four Working Groups – rapporteurs and members – is detailed in annex.

2016 and presented at the Slovakian Presidency conference on social enterprises, organised on November 30th and December 1st 2016 and supported by the European Commission.

During the last GECES meeting of June 30th 2016, an official mandate was given by the 70 GECES members to the signatories of this letter firmly to ask you to incorporate into the European Commission 2017 Work Programme an EU Action Plan on social economy and social enterprises to strengthen EU support for social economy and social enterprises. Our initiative urges you to take into account the following issues:

- **The need of visibility, recognition and identity of European social economy and social enterprises**. Supporting a stronger place for social economy and social enterprises in public policies, nurturing a more assertive social enterprise community and developing a sharper picture on its societal added value will not only benefit social entrepreneurs and practitioners but also public administrations and the general public.

- **The challenges faced by European social economy and social enterprises with regards to access to funding**. As stated in the Luxembourg presidency conference "Boosting social enterprises in Europe" in December 2015, there is an urgent need to develop an adequate European financial eco-system capable of providing effective support for social innovation and social economy.

- **The necessity to construct an adequate regulatory framework for European social enterprises and social economy**. Legal and regulatory frameworks can clarify the definition of a social enterprise/social economy enterprise, its mission and activities and help to open up opportunities for fiscal relief, provision of support and access to public procurement and other markets.

- **The need for European involvement in supporting social economy and social enterprises across the world** in particular in the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It is indeed crucial to address these four themes to foster the development of social economy and social enterprises as drivers of social innovation, economic growth and social cohesion.

Sincerely yours,

On behalf of all GECES Members,

Denis STOKKINK, GECES Rapporteur Général, Chairman of the think & do tank POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ

Hughes SIBILLE, President of Crédit Coopératif Foundation, President of Avise and Chairman of the think tank Labo de l'ESS