

MICHEL BARNIER

Membre de la Commission européenne

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Dear Mr Piki,

First of all, I would like to thank you for your kind invitation. I apologize for not being able to come to this important International Conference about social entrepreneurship, but take the opportunity you give me to pass on to the participants of your event a snapshot of my strong believe in social economy, which is a subject of a long European tradition. I have no doubt: social entrepreneurship has a bright future in Europe.

Like all of you, I am convinced that social entrepreneurship has a high potential because it is not only about appropriating value, it is also about creating value which includes positive externalities that the market fails to consider. I believe that social entrepreneurship is one of the smart ways to unlock social and economic innovation in the Single Market. Social entrepreneurship is about meeting unmet social needs neglected by the market and also, sometimes, by public authorities. It should contribute to put back the citizens at the heart of the Single Market.

These are the main reasons why policy makers have to support the social entrepreneurship. And these ideas are shared by José Manuel Barroso, the President of the European Commission who declared, during the launch of the Social Innovation Europe Initiative in Brussels last month: "Social innovation should be at the core of our social market economy and also contribute to make our social market economy more competitive". Social entrepreneurship offers a solution to reconcile innovation needed to be competitive and the social dimension. We should not forget that the market economy is embedded in the social sphere and has to face social needs.

For a few years the Commission has shown its interest in the social economy and social entrepreneurship. The need to allow new forms of social economy in Europe and to bring back citizens at the heart of EU policy-making has been fully acknowledged by the Commission.

It was what it tried to achieve in the Communication of October 2010 "Towards a Single Market Act" which aimed to "re-launch" the Single Market. This Communication includes 50 proposals "for improving our work, business and exchanges with one another" and a chapter entitled "New resources for the social economy" in which there are three proposals.

Mr Sebastjan PIKL
Director
Inštitut NOVUM
Tržaška 2
1000 Ljubljana
Slovenia

The first proposal announced a Social Business Initiative in order to support and accompany the development of socially innovative corporate projects. With this aim in view, the Commission has the intention to use different means like social rating, ethical and environmental labelling, revised rules on public procurement and the introduction of a new regime for ethical investment funds.

The second proposal exposed measures to improve the quality of the legal framework of the various entities which are engaged in the social economy. We propose to improve the framework by proposing a European Statute for foundations. We also would like to verify the efficiency of the European Statute of cooperation by launching a consultation on the quality of the current framework for mutuals. We would like to investigate the potential obstacles for the cross-border development of this type of structure.

The third one dealt with the corporate governance and the improvement of the transparency of the information provided by business on social and environmental matters.

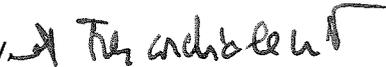
On the 13th of April, the Commission has adopted a new Communication, a final Single Market Act, focusing on 12 levers to foster growth and strengthen confidence of the citizens. One of these levers is dedicated to the social entrepreneurship and its priority action, that should be adopted by the European Parliament and the Council before end of 2012 deals with creating a European framework for social investment funds, the Commission announced last October.

This measure is the first brick of the policy-making to support social entrepreneurship in Europe.

In the coming weeks, I will convene some of my colleagues and their respective services to an internal workshop to identify the concrete measures that could be taken to design a coherent and consistent offer to support social entrepreneurship on a pan-European basis.

Our work will be translated in a communication to be adopted by the College next autumn.

To conclude, I want to invite all of you to the Conference the Commission will organise in Brussels on November 18th. This event will aim to fuel the debate on the Communication on Social Business Initiative that would be adopted by the Commission some weeks earlier, and touch upon social economy more broadly. I hope it will be as fruitful and full of promise as your International Conference. I encourage all of you to carry out collective and innovative reflections about Social entrepreneurship, and I look forward to receiving the results of your work and more broadly your contribution and your inputs that could positively contribute to our own reflection on this important topic.

Yours sincerely, 



Michel BARNIER