



**RIPESS EUROPE – Solidarity Economy Europe
5th General Assembly 2016**

Round Table
Which public policies for SSE:
European legislation and spaces of co-construction for the Social Solidarity Economy

The session that took place on Wednesday 22 July morning was dedicated to the debate on the Social Solidarity Economy and public policies, from local to national level, from European to international level. Here is a summary of the interventions:

Emmanuel Verny (Chambre Française de l'ESS)

Emmanuel Verny's speech was focused in particular on the institutional aspects and the challenges posed by the French SSE law of July 2014, called Hamon Law, from the name of the minister who signed it. The French Chamber of SSE which he represents was also a result of this law. Certain parts of the law are technical and tied to earlier legislation which regulated the SSE enterprises. It focuses on legal definitions and also includes a section on the transmission of a company to its employees, if possible in the form of cooperative.

Article 1 defines what is the ESS and indicates who is part of it. This article has been discussed at length. It has allowed to facilitate and solve in part the debates that have crossed through the movement and bring together social economy and solidarity economy as social solidarity economy (SSE). The French SSE is not defined by its statutes, the law indicates that the SSE is a way to envision an economic activity, based on solidarity and the way of doing enterprise. It has some characteristics, such as the fact of not having making profits as its sole goal, the re-allocation of the majority of profits in the object of the company, etc. It includes start-ups and corporations – but only if they comply with 4 additional criteria: democratic governance, collective ownership, as well as the fact that there's no speculation on the company's capital. This French definition takes the opposite direction of the European definition, which targets businesses with a social purpose.

Challenges: the scaling-up of SSE raises many questions. It is reformulated by the French Chamber of the SSE in the following way: it is less about a change of scale as it is to have more influence on society by offering different criteria, by defending values, by involving young people, by bringing enthusiasm and dynamism, by restoring confidence in a society that is consumed by mistrust: in other words, by developing citizenship.

Patricia Andriot (RTES)

The RTES is a French network of local public authorities. In a context of decentralization, which remains progressive and an acceleration in taking account of the local level, communities have demonstrated a willingness to exchange, to develop a public policy for the SSE. These are already 133 local authorities that make up the network: regions, departments, cities and more rural towns. The RTES organizes days of exchanges on various topics. The co-construction is at the heart of the issues that it defends. Public policy must be built in time, with all the concerned actors.

The SSE is perceived more as a vector than as a sector of the economy, something that builds over time independently of the government in power, from the right or the left. The SSE is anchored and is more and more institutionalized, it is diffused and really acts as a transformation vector.

It is an opposite to the very compartmentalized logic of public policy in France, offering a more transversal vision: indeed, due to lack of budget allocation, elected representatives must bring together several departments and services. The SSE in this sense represents a lever to advance. The strengths of the SSE lies in the fact that it is economy and employment, which allows to draw attention and mobilize public money, but it also represents a solution to the impasse of capitalism and liberalism. Blockages reside in the lack of culture of the elected who perceive themselves as doers and not as facilitators of a common vision; the lack of culture of actors who are not accustomed to be heard and the legal bottlenecks in terms of tendering and procurement. The RTES is hoping to have the co-construction of public policies recognized at European level.

Yiannis Barkas (Greek Ministry of Labour)

S4A is a network in support of the creation of cooperatives and solidarity-based initiatives. Yiannis Barkas joined the Greek Ministry of Labour since last year as Adviser on SSE. The political and economic environment is particularly difficult in Greece with the Memorandum and the austerity measures or in France with the damage that could result in the Labour Act. As far as the European Commission is concerned, it does not support the SSE. Thus people have organized themselves, especially during the past 3 years which have been very rich in Greece, even though many have lost their enthusiasm lately.

The SSE in Greece was born as a response to the crisis, but people do not see the end of the tunnel or in which direction it goes. The SSE cannot be the only response to mass unemployment and austerity policies. The Greek law on the social economy is dated 2011 ; it is a good law that allowed actors to use this legal framework to develop many SSE initiatives. Since the SSE comes from the grassroots, it must take into account the autonomy of initiatives, thus policies may not be top-down.

A new strategic plan has been defined. A new law on co-operatives will soon see the day, unifying the 9 existing laws. It should provide a legal framework for takeovers of companies that have gone bankrupt or have failed. Greece needs horizontal tools where groups can exchange and share experiences and practices, but also financial tools.

The new law should propose a definition of the SSE, disconnecting it from the organisation statutes (cooperatives, foundations, etc.) and giving a new legal form for cooperatives. A national Committee of SSE which would represent the SSE in relation to the government, ministries and local authorities as well as in the European arena is also being conceived.

Juan Peris (Podemos / GUE-NGL)

In terms of control capabilities, such as budgetary control, the room for manoeuvre of the Parliament is also very limited. In addition, it is governed by a large majority coalition of Popular and Socialist parties. This alliance is very functional for the maintenance of the status quo – and opposed to any effective processing of change of the link between capital and labour, and the possibility for citizens to enter in the debate of the fundamental decisions on the economy.

The margins for action in the European Parliament, including its ability to initiate legislation, today is almost null and is made on the grounds of the European Commission. The Parliament does not have an effective grip on the great debates and themes - for example the management of the Greek situation or the migration crisis.

As a delegation of 5 MEPs of Podemos, it is not possible to propose to open a report on our own initiative – that is to say a political report, but to do so, there must be an agreement in the majority of the thematic Committee. For example, the ECON Committee must give its approval to open a debate on the issue of debt.

On the political and media levels, there is room for manoeuvre to attract the attention of political officers and citizens and therefore to include a number of subjects on the meta legislative agenda: to be the bearer of the link between economic and social agents; to establish a link between issues which have not been addressed so far in a solidaristic way; to try to mobilise a wider audience on issues that are treated as traditionally more confidential – cooperatives, associations,

NGOs, etc. and to make their actions that improve the quality of life visible.

The Social Economy Intergroup is composed of European Parliament members who come together to try to influence the agenda of the Parliament. They try to establish agreements around the SSE in a broad sense to advance legislation in favour of it. This area is largely dominated by conventional political forces. It is limited to the holding of thematic conferences that have allowed a certain trivialization of the categories of the social economy and have brought more confusion than clarity in our debates. Podemos was not invited – but M.V. Vergiat takes part of it for the GUE.

The GUE-NGL – which has only 52 MEPs out of 731, of very diverse political origin: feminist, environmentalist, traditional left, etc. — with the support of 13 deputies, has tried to push the SSE as the centre of interest, and it has become a strategic axis of the group. It is thanks to this that a process called European Forum of the SSE (EFSSE) was started, bringing together for its first edition around 300 people from 17 countries including 13 Europeans. Objectives: promote the discussion between the SSE agents and the regions, mobilizing good practices, developing legal instruments, etc.

All of this in the context of a vision of the left, necessary to reformulate the European project. This process will be continued until the end of the legislature – and can therefore finance strategic activities in this sector. The next forum will be held in Spring 2017.

There are 5 challenges for Podemos – GUE-NGL:

- Achieve a greater breakthrough, give visibility to the level of citizenship and political actors. Work on a political education and practical examples concrete able to transform the relations of production and work.
- Find and develop some common action with the unions – a link that needs to be consolidated
- The SSE Forum has to open on the Euro-mediterranean space: sustainable co-development, co-management of commons and of the humanitarian risks.
- Advance in theory and in practice – give hope to the realization of a collective power, and sustainable development. Reduce exclusions and reformulate a project of civilization.
- That we, social actors, participate in the change of the balance of powers: weigh on the European institutions so that the power be redistributed, and not solely in the hands of the Council of Europe.

Eric Lavillunière (Coordinator of Ripess Europe)

RIPRESS Europe is a network of solidarity economy that bears a political project of systemic change for economic, social and ecological transition. This change is built with all stakeholders: our enterprises and organizations, citizens, researchers, trade unionists, politicians, different forms of government...

The positioning of the RIPRESS Europe: we are a player in the social movement and therefore not a network of enterprises lobbying to defend vested interests.

This leads 4 questions:

1st policy question: what is your relationship to the social movements?

Some politicians, especially in Latin America, regarded them as true healthy democratic breath. We much discussed co-construction of public policy in our networks. It is clear that we can see progress in the participation of citizens for the policy development, but it is sometimes confined to simple consultation with organised civil society.

2nd question is: do you consider the SSE as solely an economic sector?

Around this issue, there is the construction of a depoliticized SSE vision that would only need technical support (articles of association, funding, training, procurement...). It also fits well with an economic vision which enshrines market economy, liberal, capitalist as the only way to apprehend it. Now, Jean-Louis Laville showed us to what process of confiscation of democracy through economic powers it corresponds. They try to make us believe that the only possible model is based on the dogma of free competition and undistorted market. The only room for manoeuvre remaining being the modes of social regulations, redistribution and legal framework on employment and labour standards.

3rd question is: what parties are for an economic paradigm shift?

This question refers to another issue: How do we get to vote for candidates who bear this change? Because it must be recognized that by the game of representative democracy, our project of society is little relayed. We can note that it is often an argument of the European Commission of hiding behind the Council's decisions.

The 4th question is: how to influence the European institutions?

The usual answer is by lobbying and applying for competitive tenders. Often they reproach us for not being good enough on it. It is probably true, but it is partly due to the fact that we do not want to give up our vision based on the collective interest and cooperation. Being heard would mean fully reviewing the way of functioning of the European institutions.

In conclusion, I propose to:

- Have a reflection on the foundations of public action and not just on how to increase our competitiveness;
- Assist members to build an argument to change the rules of the game, including a theoretical point of view (what we can do with our Advisory Board);
- Build alliances to bring this paradigm shift;
- Establish dialogue with those who may be sensitive to this vision.

Laure Longejans (Executive secretary of Ripess intercontinental)

Laure Longejans is the new Executive Secretary of RIPESS Intercontinental, based in Barcelona. This is the first time that the secretariat is based in Europe – it is a valuable opportunity to let some ideas of inter-cooperation among continents emerge.

Every 4 years, an intercontinental event takes place ; the next one in 2017 should be in Latin America. Cross-cutting working groups exist: communication, education, institutional relations, gender, etc.

The Intercontinental Ripess works on the construction of alliances with international movements and has a presence at different levels in the United Nations processes.

Judith Hitchman (Ugenci – member of the board of RIPESS Intercontinental)

The international dimension of advocacy includes the presence of the SSE in Social and Solidarity Economy Interagency Task Force of the United Nations, the International Pilot Group of the Meetings of Mont-Blanc (RMB) and the Coalition Habitat III, as well as on certain themes, such as the financing for development or the Sustainable Development Goals, introducing the concept of SSE in the documents that are produced.

The GSEF (Global Social Economy Forum) is a process of scaling of the SSE movement and very high level local authorities. It will take place early September 2016 in Montreal.

The theme of food sovereignty on both the local and international levels is one of the principal axes: the distribution channels are at the heart of the SSE and the concept was introduced in the Fao texts in Rome. It is now up to us to bring this discourse back to the field level. As for the European Union, it supported articles of those documents in favour of collectives of small producers.

[See Judith Hitchman's slide presentation].

Presentation of the public policies map project by Françoise Wautiez

Socioeco.org has developed a map of SSE solutions to show that the SSE initiatives are present across the economic spectrum and respond to the satisfaction of all needs. From this map, a public policy map was conceived to show in a geolocalized way and using a system of filters, what public policies exist in the world, whether it is at municipal, regional, national or international level ; policies to support a sector or co-construction, etc. The icons used also allow to see what field it covers, from health policy, to food, habitat, etc. This map, based on the information already contained in socioeco.org, will be presented at the GSEF to expand the sources of information and establish collaborations.