



# A RECOGNISED SOCIAL ECONOMY

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The social economy will hardly be able, today, to continue to be ignored or sent to a corner by national and international political leaders with decision-making powers or opposition responsibilities.

When in a few months time we see the approval by the ILO, by the OECD and, once again, by the European Parliament, of important documents on the social economy and social enterprises, we cannot help feeling that the tide is in its favour. As for the content of the reports, we will have to take advantage of much of what is proposed in them and still isn't law in our country.

The way had been cleared by cooperative, mutual and associative pressure groups, but above all by Social Economy Europe, which covers all of them from an inter-cooperative perspective.

In line with the demands of the pressure groups, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions have been approving various reports and initiatives to give citizenship to the social economy (and solidarity economy for many, see the use of SSE in the documents).

The European Council was then capable, unexpectedly by unanimity, to adopt the Conclusions of 7 December 2015 on "Promoting the social economy, a factor of economic and social development in Europe".

The European Commission had no choice but to follow their lead, which it did, belatedly, but keeping to the course and timetable, it should be said.

Following the creation of an Expert Group (GECES) by the European Commission, the OECD and various organisations of the United Nations system began to attend its meetings. The UN, internally,

also felt the need to create an intergroup between their various agencies, starting to debate the concept and practical potential of the social economy and social enterprise.

Of course, the next step could not fail to be the production of reports with the respective seal. In the case of the UN, the document came from the International Labour Organisation, the agency that first created a cooperative department, soon to become a century old. One of its first directors was Georges Fauquet, the man who has most influenced our António Sérgio in his theorisations.

I was able to personally participate in much of the journey made at international level until my retirement. I hesitated as to whether I would still be up to date to issue, after 3 years, an opinion on the documents, but I wanted to accept the invitation that was made to me.

I cannot talk about what is to come without first looking in the rear-view mirror. I recall my regret of never having seen the framework designed, after our 1974 April revolution, by the constitutional legislator regarding the full implementation of a cooperative sector in Portugal.

All the political parties swear to defend the Constitution of the Republic, but they have never bothered to apply and regulate everything the constitutional text points to.

We were always halfway there, something that was repeated when the Social Economy Basic Law was published in 2013. Just be reminded here, that there are laws and regulations awaiting mandatory updating for ten years, something that should have been done in 6 months as determined by the 2013 law.

The different actors in the sector do not help the situation. First of all, the Government, which forgets to regularly convene the National Council for the Social Economy (CNES), which the Prime Minister should preside over; the President of the Republic himself, a jurist, who prefers to superimpose a purely social sector on the cooperative and social constitutional sector, without adequate legal and constitutional support - his frequent interventions are heard in visits to Misericórdias and IPSS, but rarely he is seen visiting cooperatives or mutual societies; or the Portuguese Confederation of Social Economy (CPES), still linked to the incubator that assisted its inception, without taking her place, precisely at a time when it would be easy to send a clear message to the Portuguese about its importance. As we live in times of crisis and epidemics, social economy entities are like a survival balloon for many fellow citizens who need social support to stay “alive”.

It should be added, and we return to the Constitution of the Republic, that the non-inclusion of the National Confederation of Social Economy at the highest level in Social Dialogue is a sign of the downgrading of the cooperative and social sector vis-à-vis the public and private sectors of by the means of production, transmitting to the Country and its citizens the message that it is not worthwhile for them to come together to solve their own problems, leaving the way open to State or to capital as the only vehicles or actors of our development. One only has to compulsorily go through the Recovery and Resilience Programme to look for references to the co-operative and social sector, which will resemble “Where's Wally”.

We still have one semester to find an agreement by all the actors I have referred to. In 2023, the European Council will adopt a new Recommendation on the Social Economy. MEPs believe that the Recommendation “*should serve as a guideline to strengthen the legal and political framework of the social economy, especially in Member States where the social economy ecosystem is less developed, clearly highlight the support instruments made available by the EU and provide guidance on specific policies such as public procurement, employment and social policies, taxation, education, skills, training and the importance of connecting the circular economy to the social economy agenda*”.

Portugal will not be able to reach the preparatory meetings to discuss the text and the decisive votes without a broad internal debate on content and consequences. The three documents now approved will hardly cease to be the starting points of the internal discussion between the Government and the sector represented by the Portuguese Confederation.

I will not dwell on the content of each document, since CASES has already published a well done summary. But I will draw attention to various needs, situations, and old/future battle horses of mine.

Firstly, finally, I see a black-and-white proposal for the need for cooperative education at all levels of education. But more than this belated recognition of evidence, the proposal that education programs can be financed is to be welcomed.

The European Parliament “*considers it regrettable that social economy organisations do not appear to the same extent as the most conventional enterprises in the main business management curricula of secondary and higher education; calls, in this context, on industry representative bodies and*

*competent public authorities, in partnership with relevant stakeholders, to review and evaluate curricula and to make policy recommendations to academic institutions”.*

For the ILO, it will be necessary to *“integrate SSE into public education at all levels and invest in education and training of SSE workers and entities, including financial literacy, to increase their resilience and effectiveness”.*

The OECD, on the other hand, considers it necessary to *“include activities related to the social economy in formal and non-formal learning at all levels, from primary to post-secondary and adult education,” to do so by “leveraging, where possible, public funding instruments to facilitate access to programmes dedicated to education and training in the social economy within and alongside schools and universities”.*

Adding to all this the need for lifelong learning and cooperative education of the workers of the social economy organisations, it is believed that not only is the sector's framework of demands complete, but it is also considered unavoidable to definitively include this theme in the concerns of the European Council, and therefore also of the Member States.

It is therefore urgent that DG Education of the European Union work to propose a minimum common framework of subjects to be included in the curricula that will be taught, so that throughout Europe there will be a knowledge of the reality of the sector. From there, we would move on to the study and implementation of community educational pathways, and of a type of social Erasmus, which I proposed in GECES, financing the mobility and temporary exchange of cooperative and associative workers between similar organisations from different countries, which would allow on-the-job learning and the promotion of best practices at the level of each country and organisation, once the apprenticeship or temporary exchange of workers is completed.

The Portuguese Confederation of Social Economy should propose the meeting of a specific CNES on these educational matters, taking the Prime Minister with him to the meeting the necessary educational leaders to listen, and then work with the sector on the best way of national implementation of that which has been, for over a century, the concern of the educator that António Sérgio was.

And as we touched upon the problem of financing education, we can deal with the broader issue of financing the activities carried out by social economy entities.

Practically from the outset, cooperatives in Portugal were not allowed to develop business financing activities through organisations internal to the sector itself. In fact, the Governments of the 1st Republic, and then the Estado Novo, converged on imposing the Caixa Geral de Depósitos as a filter of support for cooperatives, and on reducing agricultural credit and restricting it to farmers for pure and hard agricultural activity (several diplomas that came out between 1918 and 1922). Not even after April 1974, despite the propaganda of the freedom of cooperative creation (article 61 of the CRP), the creation of cooperative banks was allowed (there were two attempts, one of which was even presided over by a former Minister of Justice of the Government of Sá Carneiro).

The result of all this is that the cooperatives, and now also some of the social economy companies, when they need to be financed, have to obey the rules of capitalist enterprises, imposed by private banks that do not want to recognise the rules of organisation and operation of cooperatives and other social economy entities, and use the need to comply with the European directives issued by the European Central Bank and those of the Bank of Portugal as justification. On the other hand, agricultural credit (and also to the mutual bank Montepio Geral) was allowed to extend its activity to the economy as a whole, which was done without the sensitivity to create products adapted to social economy organisations, particularly more favourable credit conditions in compliance with the constitutional regulations (Article 85), or the analysis of requests for financing taking into account the rules of operation and organisation of the entities of social economy, with its specific timings for democratic decisions.

In short, the public sector has its own financing rules, which it defines itself, the private sector has its own rules of organisation and financing that the State approves and controls, but the cooperative and social sector has not only to follow what the State wants, but also what the private sector allows it to do. They always try to destroy the best that this cooperative and social sector proposes to develop, by systematically using arguments of favouritism, often invoked through recourse to the courts (which is not specific to the Portuguese situation, by the way).

A reference to what the commented texts say, without trying to be exhaustive.

For the OECD, it will be necessary to “*support access to finance through:*

- a. Developing and pursuing, where possible, a comprehensive public funding strategy for the social economy, in line with the regulations on business aid, in order to improve the long-term financial sustainability of social economy organisations.*

- b. *Identifying barriers and supporting social economy organisations' access to key financial instruments and existing support schemes at all levels to expand their access to finance, including options such as direct loans, guarantees, venture capital or equipment financing.*
- c. *Increasing the financial skills and investment readiness of social economy organisations through training and education opportunities tailored to their needs, or through direct allocation of funds so that they can identify and respond to their specific investment readiness needs.*
- d. *Encouraging the use of innovative and alternative financing mechanisms, such as collaboration with ethical financing, credit unions, social banks and savings banks, as well as crowdfunding.”*

For the ILO, it will be necessary to “*facilitate better access of ESS entities to financial services, including where appropriate, varied and specific measures and instruments.*”

And the European Parliament “*takes note of the possibilities offered by InvestEU to support the social economy; calls on the Commission and the implementing partners to design financial products tailored to the needs of social economy enterprises under the “Social investment and skills” strand and to allocate sufficient resources to those products; notes that sound eligibility criteria should be developed for financial intermediaries who specifically support the social economy and considers that advisory services should be made available under the InvestEU advisory platform in order to maximise the potential of these financial intermediaries to take advantage of the InvestEU Programme; calls on the Commission to ensure that other InvestEU financial products, such as those for SMEs, are accessible by social economy organisations, most of which are micro, small and medium-sized organisations.*”

It is clear, from a simple reading, that social economy entities do not enjoy, in the present situation, rules identical to those available to their competitors in the remaining sectors that own the means of production. Therefore, CPES should prepare itself to present as soon as possible, and taking advantage of a likely mid-term review of the Recovery and Resilience Program, concrete initiatives to, perhaps via the new Banco de Fomento, solve once and for all the current discrimination and enhance the third sector model as a key player in the social and economic development of the country.

The specificities of the SSE are also evident in terms of public procurement and access to the single market in general.

There is a whole internal inter-cooperative work to be developed in order to achieve the best results in this area, which involves better horizontal and vertical structuring of the organisations in the sector and a partnership work between subsectors, which is still in its early stages. Since the social economy entities are mostly micro and small enterprises, they can only take part in public contracts when grouped together, according to the current requirements of accession to public contracts, and it must be the vertical entities of the sector itself (unions, federations, and confederations) who work to make this happen.

See what the European Parliament tells us on the matter:

- *“Calls on public authorities to consider socially and environmentally responsible public procurement as an investment in the socio-economic fabric with a great potential to combine social and competitive objectives;”* or
- *“Calls on the Member States to systematically adopt strategies to develop socially responsible public procurement, thereby linking the policy areas between the provision of services and products and the contribution to social objectives; considers that the transposition of the Public Procurement Directive should be accompanied by initiatives to increase knowledge of the relationship between public expenditure and its contribution to the achievement of the SDDs and to strengthen the capacities of public procurement officers and social economy organisations; calls on public procurement officials to carry out prior market consultations before drafting procurement documents in order to better understand existing needs and how social economy organisations can meet them.”*

The ILO, on the other hand, recalling the important Recommendation no. 193 that it approved at its 90th General Conference in 2002, proposes the *“introduction of supportive measures that enable access to information, finance, markets, technology, infrastructure and well-regulated and socially responsible public markets, especially when dealing with disadvantaged groups and people in vulnerable situations.”*

On the same note, the OECD proposes to allow access to public and private markets via *“facilitating access, where appropriate, of social economy organisations to public procurement opportunities; encourage the use of considerations and social clauses and/or environmental clauses in public procurement through clear national or local procurement strategies and through legislation.”*

I have always said it in my writings: there will only be a true single market when all the actors can act in it according to their own rules of operation and functioning. Cooperatives cannot be forced to operate in the markets according to the rules for public limited companies, as it would be expected that the latter would never accept to act in them according to cooperative rules, for example, the non-distribution of the results of the exercises to the partners. There is no need to discriminate against anyone, but it must be recognised that, as in other areas, special regimes, more or less temporary, must be provided for those who start from an unfavourable situation in relation to what is legislated or regulated.

I will now comment on two other issues that can be linked: the contribution of the social economy to the formalisation of the informal economy; and the transformation of private companies into social economy companies in which workers participate.

Portugal has already had experience in this area since the years following the April Revolution in 1974. I remember, on the first of these subjects, writing for one of the INSCOOP Bulletins of 1978 an article which I called “Cooperative Solar System,” which dealt with various formal and informal experiences that were drawn into the orbit of cooperatives once in need of legalisation, or that sought to function democratically while their participants did not see all their needs met. For example, mutual aid associations, which later would fully integrate the social economy, or the group construction of clandestine houses on the outskirts of Lisbon, in which all the actors had well-distributed tasks and built each other's houses, ending the experience the day everyone saw their house standing.

As for the second issue, there were two types of situation: the occupation of companies by workers or the handing over of the companies to the workers by the employer himself, as in the case of Telhado e Pereira, which gave rise to Tepclima and then to FNAC - Fábrica Nacional de Ar Condicionado. The results were not always the desired ones, and two reasons can be highlighted: lack of cooperative education, which in the short term led to the direction of the cooperative being occupied by the most capable or by the one in charge of the market connection, without any rotation in the management bodies; or the taking over of the direction by a group linked to a political party,

which progressively closed the cooperative to those who were not members of that party. I could also talk about the Agrarian Reform and what happened to the Collective Production Units as an example.

Because I know the Portuguese situation very closely, I have always felt constrained in the international discussions in which I have participated when this issue has been put on the agenda by other countries, but I believe that in ideological terms, and if the subject is properly evaluated, planned and followed up, there will be nothing to oppose the same transformation. If there were those who wanted and succeeded in transforming a cooperative into a public limited company (the GRULA case, among others), with the then INSCOOP turning a blind eye to this and not proposing, as their statutes determined, the dissolution of the cooperative by denouncing what had happened to the Public Ministry, why can the opposite transformation not be considered?

How did the reports in question look at this (the OECD is silent on the matter)?

The ILO *“recognises the role of the ESS in the transition from the informal to the formal economy, and supports the transition to the formal economy of all workers and entities, including those already part of the ESS;”* and also *“considers the need to pay attention to SSE workers and economic entities in the design, implementation and monitoring of strategies and measures that target the root causes of informality and facilitate the transition from the informal to the formal economy and the achievement of decent work and universal, adequate, comprehensive and sustainable social protection systems.”*

The European Parliament says it welcomes *“existing initiatives in the Member States to provide workers interested in the procurement process and cooperatives resulting from employee acquisition, legal advice, financial support, support in the preparation of business plans, the necessary data for external investors and business support structures.”*

And because *“it urges the Member States to include this topic in the 2023 Council recommendations, in order to continue to support these initiatives at regional and national level,”* that is to say that Portugal will have to promote a discussion on the topic in the coming months, in the light of its history and experience, without vetoing any solution from the outset.

If there is a theme on which I have been speaking assiduously, proposing concrete ideas, it is that of social innovation and local development.

Social economy organisations are locally based and do not relocate easily. They are also democratic and participatory, recognized by their users and the population in general, which makes them essential for any type of development policy that is designed and tried to be implemented.

It was therefore regrettable that when the report on the European Social Pillar was released, the social economy was forgotten. It was only months later that the European Commission came to recognise its mistake (which the Member States covered in Gothenburg, although our Minister of Labour at the time mentioned the strangeness of the omission, in a last press meeting of the European social economy, held in that city on the eve of the Council's approval of the "Pillar").

In fact, the role of the social economy will be increasing, since it has not been possible to reverse the situation of abandonment of inland territories in favour of the industrialised and tertiary coastal areas, leaving behind the older population that has in the social economy the only structured response available in the vast majority of cases. Therefore, I find it strange that our politicians in general, and mayors in particular, do not focus on the solutions that the social economy provides, and continue to privilege the private sector as an organisational form to promote, or that they continue to "cry" because the State does not provide them with the necessary financial resources, which they believe are owed to them when trying to implement any decentralisation initiative.

Let's start by quoting paragraphs from the reports.

The European Parliament *"calls on the Commission and the Member States to establish capacity-building partnerships and formal agreements with social economy networks in order to provide advisory services to social economy organisations such as personalised mentoring and guidance, capacity-building funding, training and education, incubation services and capacity building."*

And *"stresses that, in general, social economy projects require a close partnership with public entities, and therefore calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop, within the framework of macroeconomic governance envisaged at EU level, a social investment strategy in which social priorities are clearly identified and which can provide a framework for cooperation between public authorities and social economy organisations."*

The ILO *"values the local anchoring of SSE and its contribution, not only to lasting and innovative solutions that provide decent work opportunities, but also to the needs of disadvantaged groups and people in vulnerable situations, namely women, including in rural areas."*

There is also a need to “*strengthen interaction and partnerships between social economy entities and public administration at all levels, including local and regional.*”

This is not the place to resume the much I have written, but I cannot help but refer to the Cooperatives of Public Interest and the Social Economy Houses.

European pressure groups in the sector, Member States and universities and think-tank organisations, encourage cooperation between social economy entities and private companies as a way of gaining size and muscle to operate in the European market. It would be an optimal solution if, in the process, social economy entities did not subvert their own principles and operating rules.

But it will make sense that cooperation is also possible and desirable with the public sector, even if, with the latter, I argue that it should always be temporary. The non-public part should gradually acquire the capital of the public part in the legal cooperation structure as the results become positive, so that in time the partnership will become a cooperative or other social economy entity capable, on its own, of surviving and continuing to satisfy the interests of its members or associates.

In Portugal, it will suffice to make a few minor changes to the 1984 law on public interest cooperatives (it should have already been amended following the publication in 2013 of the Social Economy Base Law), mainly clarifying two aspects: the possibility of acquiring the capital of the public part by the private part, eliminating the current provision that the public part can end the cooperative whenever it wants to (art. 13), even if it unilaterally authorises a transformation into any kind of cooperative; and the possibility for all interested parties to join the cooperative through the acquisition of shares in it (art. 1), even if they are natural persons.

This last aspect is crucial when it is intended to show at the local level that the public interest cooperative is fundamental for local development in areas such as proximity services, schools, health or housing.

The discussion that fills our press and society today would not be avoided, and the many references to the passing of responsibilities without the corresponding financial envelope would not be avoided, by formalising cooperatives of public interest. Public funds would be reimbursed in the long term, without prejudice to the taxpayer not adhering to the cooperative, through the simple introduction of the aforementioned mechanism into the Law (and in a period perhaps shorter than the solution invented for Novo Banco via the Resolution Fund). And what a fine example of

democracy by the joint action of public authorities, local companies of various kinds, educational establishments and local populations would not be given.

The OECD report states that *“social innovation seeks new and cost-effective answers to social and societal problems, and refers to new solutions that primarily aim to improve the quality of life of individuals and communities, increasing their well-being as well as their social and economic inclusion. These solutions can be new services, new products, and new relationships with stakeholders.”*

It goes on to say that *“the social economy is a driver of social innovation, which in turn supports new models in the economy and society at large, such as fair trade, ethical finance, circular economy practices, and platform cooperatives.”*

He adds that *“broad and inclusive consultation of stakeholders, including under-represented groups, should be facilitated in the design and implementation of social economy initiatives.”*

Whether or not they take the form of cooperatives of public interest, with the participation of chambers, parish councils or other forms of local associativism, I proposed the creation at the local level of what I called Houses of Social Economy. They would be places of concentration of the services of social economy entities already existing in a given municipality, or adjacent municipalities, which would allow cost reduction and crossings of affiliates, creation of chains of services between cooperatives, mutual societies and associations for the benefit of their affiliates, but also the participatory creation of new initiatives of social economy or anonymous societies in areas in which the municipality is lacking. Here, the House of Social Economy would function as an incubator, enhanced by the creation of new jobs, population fixation, the use of local potential, from agriculture to services, under the direction of the most active in local society, whether they are elected locals, simple citizens or representatives of existing companies, teachers and other professionals.

When I first launched the idea, I had in mind the Maisons du Peuple that existed in Belgium or France at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. Later, a simple web search allowed me to conclude that in French-speaking Europe and Canada there are currently similar successful experiences. This is the challenge to the Government and the Portuguese Confederation of the Social Economy and, of course, to the representative structures of the local authorities and parish councils, which are also members of the National Council of the Social Economy, so that they can debate the issue there. Before I finish I will refer to the definition of social economy and related issues.

There is no unanimity in Europe on what should be included as a social and/or solidarity economy. Spain, Portugal, and then other countries have moved forward with laws on the matter, Social Economy Europe then proposed one, which was welcomed by community bodies, and now the OECD and the ILO are approving their own. For some, the type of legal figures to be included should be prioritised; for others, the important thing is whether the activity takes place in the social domain, so social enterprises should include the concept of social economy.

When this article comes out, a debate on social enterprise will have taken place among us, which will certainly have had a public position transmitted at the highest level by a member of the Government. What one wants to hear is whether our definition inserted in the Basic Law remains valid or should be changed.

I am very susceptible to what the reports refer to as pseudo social economy entities, which perhaps unfairly relate to the so-called social enterprises. There is a risk that, at the first opportunity when the social economy is recognized, opportunism will be accepted in its midst, even more so when it is known that there is no internal supervision by the State, nor by the National Confederation.

The ILO considers it *“important to combat the pseudo SSE entities for short-circuiting labour and other legislation, violating workers' rights, and the risk of unfair competition with other compliant and responsible companies, in particular micro, small, and medium enterprises, in queue with Recommendation No. 193.”*

Any profits or surpluses of the financial year must be reinvested in the company, the definition of a social economy company tells us, but this will only happen after one or more years of life, a period in which the company may have already received funds made available internally and at community level. Such profits or surpluses may result from activities that have not complied with operating laws and rules imposed on other compliant companies. And because of what cooperatives, for example, have suffered in the past, a single case of illegality ends up being publicised by the media as generalised, damaging an entire image that took time to build.

We must, therefore, be vigilant, and I do not see the amendment of articles 4 and 5 of the Social Economy Basic Law as necessary, unless an entire group of social enterprises is created under a future coherent legal regime and compatible with that of social economy enterprises. More distant seems to be the incorporation in the concept by eventual change of the values that the social economy companies must obey today.

I restate the OECD's position, which is difficult to be called a definition: *“agrees that, although national, subnational, and local definitions may vary in terminology and substance, for the purposes of this Recommendation, the following definitions are used: the social economy, also referred to in some countries as solidarity economy and/or social and solidarity economy, it is made up of a set of organisations such as associations, cooperatives, mutual organisations, foundations, and, more recently, social enterprises. In some cases, basic and spontaneous community initiatives are part of the social economy in addition to non-profit organisations, the latter group being often referred to as the solidarity economy. The activity of these entities is typically driven by social objectives, values of solidarity, the primacy of people over capital and, in most cases, by democratic governance and participatory governance.”*

A *“social enterprise is an entity, which sells goods and services, which fulfils a social objective and whose main purpose is not the maximisation of profit for the owners, but their reinvestment for the continuation of the achievement of its social objectives.”*

One of the recitals in the text approved by the European Parliament reads *“that the social economy encompasses various types of private entities, independent of public authorities, such as cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations (including charities), foundations, social enterprises and other legal forms, all of which are characterised by different principles and characteristics of functioning and organisation, such as the primacy of people, social purpose over profit, reinvestment of most profits/surpluses and democratic governance or participatory.”*

Finally, the ILO approved that *“ESS encompasses companies, organisations, and other entities engaged in economic, social, and environmental activities in the service of the collective and/or general interest, which are based on principles of voluntary cooperation and mutual aid, democratic governance and/or participatory governance, autonomy and independence, and primacy of the person and social purpose over capital in the distribution and use of surpluses and/or profits, as well as assets.”*

And further on, *“they put into practice a set of values that are intrinsic to their functioning and consistent with caring for people and the planet: equality and justice, independence, self-government, transparency and responsibility, and the pursuit of decent work and well-being. Depending on the national reality, ESS includes cooperatives, associations, mutual societies, foundations, social enterprises, self-help groups and other entities that operate in accordance with the values and principles of ESS.”*

The text is long, so I will not develop further points, which will certainly be part of the guidelines given to the Portuguese delegation in the Council.

For example, the need to have the European statutes of the European mutual society and European association approved, as well as the revision of the existing, but inapplicable, European Cooperative Statute of 2003; inapplicable because it copies the operating rules of public limited companies instead of following the rules of cooperatives.

This issue is connected with the cross-border action of social economy entities, at a time when borders were essentially eliminated. Serving people can imply crossing borders, so organisations must adapt to this reality, just as the Law must do, even if there are technical and fiscal issues that need to be studied and applied. This theme has been discussed several times in meetings between Iberian public administrations responsible for the social economy sector.

Afterwards, it will be necessary to try to extend the way in which the Iberian social economy satellite accounts are prepared to other latitudes, as well as to find the best ways of what is referred to as “measuring the social economy.”

And adapt public administrations to the service of the social economy, the single portal or the “one stop shop.”

The history of the social economy is long and heterogeneous, as can be read in the documents under consideration, but it seems only now that we are going to recognise it at European level.

We will recognise it, those who have been doing it for years and those who only now arrive, in the certainty that the social economy, or the social and solidarity economy, will be recognized.

Thus, let us be able to make recognition as complete as possible, on the one hand by endorsing the sector with the most current rules, on the other hand allowing it to compete in the single market according to its philosophy and practices of life, almost two centuries old, as is the case of associations or cooperatives.

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