

NATIONAL DIALOGUE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

25 November 2022

10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Kazimieras Antanavičius Hall

Members of the Forum,

I welcome the participants from all over Lithuania and the listeners from other countries.

I am happy to note that the dialogue on social enterprise development launched by the Social Enterprise Forum in spring is continued.

While the recent crises were largely deepened by the invasive and destructive war waged by the terrorism sponsoring Russia in Ukraine, social economy entities have demonstrated their extraordinary capacity to contribute to the building and strengthening of resilient communities and to managing fundamental socio-economic change. Last year, the World Economic Forum underlined that social enterprise sector, while addressing current social problems, surpassed other industrial sectors and created up to 12 % of jobs. It should be noted that the scale and impact of enterprises dealing with social problems is huge and amounts to **2.8** million social economy entities in Europe alone.

Last year, the European Commission adopted the **Action Plan for Social Economy**, which is already under implementation. The plan is designed to facilitate social investment in the Member States of the European Union and support social economy entities and social enterprises so that they can make an appropriate contribution through developing their activities, making a greater social impact, and fostering innovation and job creation.

In the face of today's ongoing crises, finding the proper ways to use policies, investment and awareness-raising campaigns is key to unlocking the potential of social entrepreneurship for making the recovery more inclusive, sustainable and fair.

The main goal of today's event is to discuss international good practices in the realm of legal framework and to lay the foundations for the dialogue between the main stakeholders of the Lithuanian ecosystem in order to accelerate the development of the social enterprise sector. A presentation on recommendations for Lithuania and on the legal feasibility study, currently under preparation by Diesis Network, will be made during the event.

This event will also offer us a unique opportunity to listen to experts from a range of countries addressing the achievements, challenges and lessons learnt from their respective ecosystems. Representatives of international organisations will share their insights on the importance of the legal framework and the role of its main elements in the development of the ecosystem, and colleagues from the European Commission will share their views on how the European Commission's tools can be of use in strengthening Lithuania's social enterprise sector.

Unfortunately, we have to acknowledge that the Lithuanian social enterprise sector is still going through the initial stage of development. There is no formal legal definition of social enterprise and no suitable conditions have yet been created for sustainable development of the sector. However, there is broad agreement on the need to promote the development of the social enterprise sector in Lithuania. Therefore, this and other similar work formats are essential for determining the specific steps that are most appropriate for our national context. This can only be done provided there is an active engagement of the social partners and cooperation with their counterparts from other countries, and given their best practice is taken on board. As we know, all the countries of the democratic world are selflessly supporting Ukraine today and providing the country with all the military and humanitarian assistance needed for its heroic cause. Two weeks ago, I had to visit Ukraine as part of the Lithuanian delegation and we bore witness to the horrors of Russia's criminal war there. We all have to be aware that Ukraine is boldly fighting not only for its own cause, but also for the cause of freedom and territorial integrity of democratic states worldwide. I have to note in this regard that Lithuania and Ukraine have signed a memorandum of cooperation. Like yourselves, I also share the firm belief that Ukraine will win a victory at some point and begin the reconstruction of the destroyed and ravaged housing stock, kindergartens, schools, hospitals and other vital infrastructure facilities, while the reconstruction work will be carried out by countries including Lithuania, *inter alia*, through pooling the efforts of the social enterprise sector.

I sincerely thank the Lithuanian Social Enterprise Association for the initiative, Diesis Network for their cooperation in drafting the feasibility study and the recommendations for Lithuania, and the speakers of this event who agreed to share their important insights and experience with us.

Have a productive event.

Let me now give the floor to Viktorija Bražiūnaitė, moderator of the first session.

Kazys Starkevičius

Member of the Seimas, Chair of the Committee on Economics of the Seimas