

Co-operatives Europe General Assembly, Monday 18th June 2007

Annual Report

Speech – Pauline Green, Co President, Co-operatives Europe

Colleagues and Friends,

I am delighted to welcome you to this, the first annual meeting of Cooperatives Europe. This morning we take the chance to report back to you about our work, and to be accountable to you for the organisation, its direction, its governance and its finance. This afternoon we will open the 3rd European Co-operative Convention – our opportunity to work on a specific and very important strand of our work with the European Commission.

I am particularly pleased to follow Vit Vanicek in welcoming you to Prague and to be the first to express our genuine thanks to our good friends here in the Czech Republic.

We have had enthusiastic support at every level from Czech co-operators, for the organisation of this event, but also they take an active part in our constitutional development, the evolution of our policy and our work programme through their Board representative Jan Weisner, whose contribution I gladly acknowledge here today. We would ask you Vit to take back to all your colleagues our thanks for all their commitment and help. In so many ways, our presence here in Prague and the close working relationship with the DACR and Czech co-operators is symbolic of the evolution and direction of Cooperatives Europe over the past four years.

Colleagues, I am pleased to introduce the report of the Co Presidents of Cooperatives Europe and, as in Manchester, Etienne Pflimlin and I will share this honour by reporting back on different elements of the Cooperatives Europe work programme for which we have particular responsibility as Co Presidents, and making our comments on those parts for which we have common responsibility.

Let me remind you colleagues of the 5 key strategies of our work programme for 2007 that were agreed by members at our inauguration last November in Manchester.

Firstly, to promote and strengthen co-operative representation and institutional recognition. This area will be covered by Etienne who has the major responsibility for the work of the Consultation Committee of Cooperatives Europe.

Secondly, to enhance co-operative identity, visibility and image. Colleagues if the institutions can't see us, don't hear us and have no understanding of us – then we can't expect them to provide a supportive and enabling legislative and political environment for us to operate in. So if we are to maximise our co-operative presence, and if we are to strengthen our representation and recognition, then we have to improve our visibility and image.

That is why we need to produce excellent tools like our new look website, our monthly news headings and our new Members Directory – this is the first one and we think, with your help, we can make it better in succeeding years. This is the sort of document that is not only useful at a European level. When you are trying to argue your co-operative case with your media, with your national parliaments and governments, you can use it to good effect to demonstrate our co-operative reach into each and every part of the European continent.

Identity, visibility and image is also why we should all be using the dotcoop internet domain name – to differentiate our values driven model of business from those of dot com or dot co – and we shall have an exciting initiative to announce on that tomorrow.

Thirdly, to develop a strong co-operative enterprise system. This is an area that I am particularly interested and engaged in. It is about working with our members across the EU to strengthen their national and European voice, thereby giving members the opportunity to maximise their influence on policy and funding flowing from the European Union. But also supporting them to know what and where complementary co-operative activity is taking place in other countries, that could stimulate their internal co-operative development and evolution in their regions or country. I know how much the UK's co-operative renaissance owes to examples of good practice from Italy, the Nordic countries and Spain to mention just a few. I believe that we can all benefit from this greater understanding.

And part of our remit is to encourage an inter-sectoral co-operative voice in as many countries as possible. I was especially delighted, therefore, to take part last week in the beautiful county of Cork in Ireland, in the very

successful inaugural seminar of the Forum for the Co-operative Movement in Ireland, a brand new inter-sectoral body for Ireland still in its infancy, and we wish it every success in working with its strong federal bodies to make sure the voice of Irish co-ops is heard internationally.

You know that we are also half way through an EU funded project of a quarter of a million euros to make the case for co-ops to be part of the Social Dialogue. We promised that Cooperatives Europe would begin to build up a series of projects of this nature that impact on our national and international profile and operational capacity.

We are now also looking at EU projects for co-operative development in the Balkans and Montenegro, and to support co-operative international development along with the global office of the ICA and the other regions. We are, for instance partners in a proposal to the EU's Asia-Invest programme under the leadership of Legacoop.

And, we had a most useful first meeting between those European Board members present in Mexico for the meeting of the global Board of the ICA, and members of the Board of the Americas region. As a result we are looking at some type of common event between the European and Americas regions in 2008 or 2009.

Our work continues with the global organisation of the ICA to strengthen relationships, and I am pleased to tell you that we have now signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the President and Director General of the ICA that regulates the relationship between the two legal entities ICA – in Switzerland and Cooperatives Europe – in Belgium.

The Memorandum of Understanding was also part of the work to see the debts of the three other regions of the ICA, the Americas, Asia Pacific and Africa, wiped out. And in recognition of the European Region's help in supporting that process by offering 25% of its own reserves for that cause, the ICA has now transferred the remaining 75% of the reserves of the old ICA Europe into a bank account in Belgium in the name of Cooperatives Europe. Although this money cannot be spent without the agreement of the global board of the ICA, this 109,000 euros is greatly helping our financial management and operational efficiency.

However, the internal evolution of the global ICA continues to assume a disproportionate amount of time, and we will come back to that a little

further in the agenda when we deal with proposals for change in the global ICA.

There is so much more to do and not really enough time to do it, but be in no doubt that we are now moving ahead in all these areas.

Fourthly, to consolidate and increase membership in the European region. We are working carefully and steadily to build relationships with those countries and those sectors where we do not have solid contacts or where there are no members in the ICA. You will recall that we now have the opportunity under our statute to bring into regional membership of Cooperatives Europe, co-op organisations that have no relationship with the ICA, in an attempt to re awaken their interest in the work, role and priorities of the ICA, through active engagement with the region.

We hope that when we next meet we will have some progress to report.

You will also know that at Manchester we were delighted that five of the seven European sectors – Banking, Consumer, Worker, Housing and Pharmacies – felt confident enough to commit themselves to membership of Cooperatives Europe. You may also recall that Donal Cashman, the President of our agricultural co-operative colleagues made a statement promising that COGECA would give serious consideration to membership in the coming months. I am particularly pleased to tell you that on Thursday of last week, I was invited to make a presentation to the Presidium of COGECA, and was delighted that the Presidium in private session then made a unanimous decision to join Cooperatives Europe. On behalf of the Board of Cooperatives Europe, I am, therefore, asking you to formally accept COGECA into membership.

The fifth and final strategy priority is to good governance and sustainability

We continue to try and build our organisation in the context of best practice and co-operative values and principles.

In this period we are concentrating in particular on budgeting, financial management and transparency in reporting procedures. There is still some distance to go before we have this exactly right, but with the active engagement of the three members of our Audit and Control Committee we believe that we will succeed. We are a small organisation without all the requisite skills we need, but we have a staff group willing and ready

to learn. We are, therefore, also pleased to acknowledge the support of Guy Malacrida in Geneva whose patience we appreciate.

Colleagues,

There are huge expectations of just what we can achieve. We have to be able to manage those expectation and at the same time keep focussed on the five strategies we have agreed for the next year. I know that we can do it and I am now pleased to hand over to my Co President Etienne Pflimlin for his report.

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