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Strategy paper

Cooperative future for Europe

The power of cooperation: a European success

Cooperatives are lead actors in the construction of the European Union. The contribution of cooperatives over time has been twofold. They promote values that have been at the heart of European cooperation and they translate those values into concrete opportunities for millions of European citizens.

Cooperative enterprises are owned and run by their members (consumers, producers, employees or local communities) who have an equal say in the business management and the way benefits are shared. They exist in all sizes, from micro enterprises to major companies, and focus on exploring new forms of entrepreneurship such as the collaborative economy. They operate in all sectors of the economy, from industry to services, healthcare to housing, agriculture to banking and energy to culture. Enterprises that do business in a democratic, sustainable and social way, as cooperatives do, help to build a wider Social Economy. Not surprisingly, they are also in a primary position to support the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda across Europe.

Cooperatives Europe, the European cross-sectoral organization promoting the cooperative business model, represents 140 million individual member cooperators, owning 176,000 cooperative enterprises and providing jobs to 4.7 million European citizens.

A Union for the people, by the people



Even if locally anchored, Europe matters to cooperatives. The European project has been created on the basis of values of democracy, solidarity and human rights. In its proud history, the European Union (EU) has pioneered social, economic and environmental standards, marked by great achievements built upon cooperation. At the same time, the EU's capacity to face today's major issues, like climate change, increasing inequality, unemployment and migration crisis, is now questioned. Furthermore, the rise of anti-European movements makes it even more challenging for the EU to deliver on these questions.

Cooperatives Europe supports a political vision of Europe that is people-centred - putting citizens in an inclusive way at the core of its concerns and building a strong community of nations that, with respect of diversity, refuses to be inward looking. Cooperatives, with wider social economy enterprises, are resilient and competitive enterprises meeting social and members needs. They are capable of providing shared solutions to meet the present and future challenges, as well as to promote social cohesion and sustainable growth and development.

Cooperatives Europe's key priorities

Following extensive dialogue and reflection with members, and informed by the work of the European Parliament and EU institutions, Cooperatives Europe has identified a high level agenda EU policy-makers, with a set of interlocking priority recommendations for action.

1. The Social Economy should be recognized as a key segment of the economy which, as an added value, aims to catalyze social cohesion.
2. The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) should remain a top priority on the European political agenda. In particular aiming at providing equal opportunities and inclusion. Social investment and legislation relating to social rights should be promoted as means of its implementation.
3. Entrepreneurship policies should be promoted across the diversity of enterprises models, taking into account, for example, the specifics of cooperatives in the design of action such as around financing or education. To help ensure this, an appropriate and enabling regulatory framework for cooperatives should be developed, to help ensure a level playing field.



4. Gender equality & women entrepreneurship should recognize cooperatives as important actors for empowering women entrepreneurs, as well as one of the form of business preferred in several Member States to provide employment opportunities to promote gender equality.
5. To mature and become sustainable, the collaborative economy would benefit from a positive European legal framework, preserving and stimulating in the process the emergence of innovative cooperative models.
6. International development outside the EU should use the cooperative model to strengthen the local private sector, so as to maximize impact and benefit for planet and people. This would include an explicit recognition of cooperatives in the EU External Investment Plan.
7. Invest in youth, in order to provide opportunities for young people to develop cooperative entrepreneurial projects.
8. Build an economy for the future. Europe should take further decisive steps towards an environmentally sustainable economy - engaging all stakeholders across society to achieve this - and a citizen centered economy, able to find a better balance between local and global.

As a conclusion, we call for a permanent and constructive dialogue with the European institutions to build tomorrow's Europe.

