

Europe Region of the International
Co-operative Alliance

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Cooperatives high on the agenda of the Cyprus Presidency

On September 28-29, 2012 the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU hosted a high-level cooperative conference in Nicosia as part of the EU's contributions to the UN International Year of Cooperatives. Around 200 participants attended the event, which was organised by Cooperatives Europe and the Cypriot Authority for the Supervision and Development of Cooperative Societies.

The role of cooperative enterprises in the European economy

The conference provided critical insights about the diversity and the economic weight of the European cooperative economy in particular to representatives from 17 member states' government representatives.

Constantinos L. Lyras, Commissioner of the Cyprus Authority for the supervision and development of cooperative societies, stated: "The long term view of cooperative enterprises has protected them against hazardous, speculative short-term focused investments. "

Neoklis Sylikiotis, Cyprus Minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, said:
"Cooperatives ensure sustainability and are continuously developing and innovating"

Costas Andropoulos, official from the EU Commission's Enterprise & Industry Unit, added:
"Cooperatives are developing economic activities not only in the classic sectors of agriculture or banking, but also in various innovative domains, such as health or renewable energy. Those efforts must be preserved, promoted and supported."

Better regulation through differentiation

EU policies tend to focus on harmonising rules and regulations for enterprises in general in the EU. The discussions, however, stressed the need for a differentiated policy making

approach for different forms of enterprises. The presentations and discussions highlighted the distinct cooperative form of business, which leads to different economic and social outcomes than their shareholding peers. Regulations taking those differences into account instead of pursuing a 'one size fits all' approach will clearly lead to better outcomes for policy-makers, cooperatives and the society at large.

Need for a revised European Cooperative Statute

The Commission's current consultation about the potential revision of the European Cooperative Statute was discussed with member states on the second day of the conference. While there was no overall consensus about the right way forward with this regulation, given the small number of cooperatives having adopted it so far, most participants stressed the need for simplification and clarification of its key objectives.

Klaus Niederländer, Director of Cooperatives Europe and moderator of the different cooperative sessions, summed up the lively discussions by stating: "In these times of economic uncertainty and social pressure in Europe, policy makers and cooperatives need to work more closely together to provide new solutions. Action is a must and simply waiting is not an option. New ways of collaboration will have to be tested."

Notes to the editors

Cooperatives Europe is the European cross-sectoral organization representing cooperative enterprises. On behalf of its 90 member organizations from 34 European countries across all business sectors it promotes the cooperative business model in Europe. Its members represent 123 million individual member cooperators owning 160,000 cooperative enterprises and providing jobs to 5.4 million European citizens.

A cooperative enterprise is a group of people acting together to meet the common needs and aspirations of its members, sharing ownership and making decisions democratically.

The United Nations proclaimed 2012 International Year of Cooperatives. This is an acknowledgment by the international community that cooperatives drive the economy, respond to social challenge, are resilient to the global economic crisis and are successful businesses that create sustainable jobs in all sectors. Member States, the United Nations and all relevant stakeholders are encouraged to take advantage of the IYC to promote cooperatives and raise awareness of their contribution to social and economic development and promote the formation and growth of cooperatives.

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