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COMMUNAUTE EUROPEENNE DES COOPERATIVES DE CONSOMMATEURS
EUROPEAN COMMUNITY OF CONSUMER COOPERATIVES

Euro Coop's comments on

Consultation for the Party of European Socialists Manifesto for the European election 2009

Euro Coop is the European Community of Consumer Cooperatives, whose members are the national organisations of consumer cooperatives in 17 European countries. Created in 1957, Euro Coop today represents over 3,200 local and regional cooperatives, the members of which amount to more than 23 million consumers across Europe.



Introductory remarks

Euro Coop welcomes the decision of the PES to consult civil society organisations in view of elaborating its manifesto for the June 2009 European elections. Our contribution will be divided into a general part regarding a cross-cutting issue which we feel should be present across all policies, namely the promotion of co-operative societies, and more specific issues relating to the areas identified in the consultation documents. Furthermore you will be able to find more details on each of the policy fields mentioned following the links to the documents, through our website or by contacting Euro Coop's Secretariat.

Promotion of co-operative societies.

According to the definition of the International Co-operative Alliance, a co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise¹.

The specific nature of co-operatives puts them in a privileged position to answer many of the questions raised in the consultation documents. They are democratic organisations, integrating the social economy sector, who work in a sustainable and ethical way.

Co-operatives put people at the heart of all their business. They follow a broader set of values than those associated purely with making a profit. Because co-operatives are owned and democratically-controlled by their members (individuals or groups and even capital enterprises) the decisions taken by co-operatives balance the need for profitability with the needs of their members and the wider interests of the community.

This is why consumer co-operatives have a progressive approach to environmental issues such as climate change, they push for more transparency at all levels and support a pro-active stance in trade-related policies.

In fact, the balance between the interest of individuals (the members), of the community at large and sound economic management puts co-operatives in the driving seat to reach the Lisbon agenda goals of growth and employment.

We feel that the European Union could do more to support and develop this kind of enterprises, thus promote true economic, social and environmental sustainable development.

Euro Coop therefore calls on the PES to insert in its manifesto a specific reference to the support and development of social economy enterprises and in particular of consumer co-operatives.

"Save Our Planet"

¹ Please refer to our document entitled "Consumer Co-operatives: democracy, development, employment" for more details on what is a co-operative and the main values and principles that they follow. The document will be available shortly in our website.

Under this heading several issues concerning environmental policies are mentioned.

Climate Change has been identified by consumer co-operatives as one of the major challenges of the 21st century. We agree with the analysis which is made on the discussion paper and we fully support the views expressed. Please see our position regarding the European Commission Green Paper: "Adaptation to Climate Change in Europe - Options for EU action" at:

<http://www.eurocoop.coop/publications/en/position/greenclimatechange07.asp>.

You can also find the commitments of Euro Coop and its call for action to its members at the following link:

<http://www.eurocoop.coop/publications/en/position/ClimateChangeENFR.asp>

Consumer co-operatives believe that more emphasis should be attached to the necessity of having an organised action in the field of Climate Change. If the EU is serious about adaptation, it should be ready to take tough political choices, looking critically at agricultural, transport and energy policies. The policies in these areas often directly contribute to Climate Change in significant amounts. The EU should thus ensure that it does not continue to encourage conflicting behaviour and that Climate Change should be a consideration in all EU activities.

In terms of energy policy, the priorities for the EU should concentrate in three main areas: reducing its dependency on fossil fuels, in particular by promoting energy produced through renewable sources; promoting energy saving and efficiency; and promoting individual lifestyles which are in harmony with environmental sustainability. Consumer co-operatives have a long record of measures in all these areas. Some examples of these best practices can be found at:

<http://www.eurocoop.coop/events/EN/conferenceclimatechange/ReportSeminarClimate07.pdf>

Consumption patterns are amongst the main causes of climate change. The way consumers behave, the products and services they buy, is reflected throughout the whole supply chain. Therefore consumer co-operatives believe that it is essential to promote sustainable consumption patterns to help curb the effects of climate change. This means to give greater emphasis to the promotion of environmentally-friendly products, commercial practices and information and education of consumers.

Euro Coop feels that the discussion document correctly recognises that "consumer choices and interests are a huge, largely untapped resource in the fight against climate change". Nevertheless, we feel that more actions can be identified in this field, namely:

- Promotion of "green" and "ethical" products. The EU should have a pro-active policy in trying to **mainstream consumer products which respect high environmental standards**, such as eco-labelled products, organic farming products, Fair Trade, etc. This pro-active stance should be based not only in information campaigns but through several measures of incentive, including fiscal incentives.
- Euro Coop feels that it is not sufficient to "stress corporate environmental responsibility for the fight against climate change". We believe that the EU

should **actively promote and support companies that comply with high environmental and ethical standards** because they have a multiplier effect across the chain. Again, we believe that the promotion of co-operative societies is fundamental because their specific nature enables them to respond more efficiently to the challenges ahead.

- Euro Coop believes that the EU should have a consumer policy that promotes the **empowerment of consumers** and not only their protection. Consumer policy should be reflected in all other policy fields and should provide for more conscious, critical and environmentally aware consumers.

Under the heading "save our planet" Euro Coop feels that a special mentioning should be made to agriculture. Agricultural policy is one of the main areas of EU intervention and it is an area that can highly contribute to the preservation of our planet not only in terms of fighting climate change but also throughout a whole range of issues. One of the issues on which consumer co-operatives have been very active is GMO's. We believe that GMO-free agriculture is the only sustainable option in terms of the environment but also in terms of economic and social sustainability. From another point of view, we feel that consumers should be able to choose what kind of products they buy and this can only be guaranteed by ensuring that European GMO-free agriculture can survive and develop. See our position relating to GMO's:

<http://www.eurocoop.coop/publications/en/position/declarationogms07.asp>.

Further to that, Euro Coop strongly encourages the EU to support and develop organic farming as a true sustainable production method.

"European Democracy and Diversity"

As an organisation, Euro Coop does not have a mandate from its members to discuss the political issues highlighted in the discussion paper entitled "European Democracy and Diversity". Nevertheless, as democratic structures, consumer co-operatives feel that the strengthening of democratic governance systems is a fundamental priority across all sectors of society and certainly the political arena. Therefore, Euro Coop will support any initiatives that can bring better governance and transparency to public affairs.

Transparency, in particular, is an issue that is not developed in the discussion paper. Nevertheless, we feel that there should be more EU action in this regard. The European Transparency Initiative is a first step in the right direction but for Euro Coop more could be done. We believe that political parties should support such initiatives and we would welcome if the PES included something related to this in its manifesto. Concretely we would welcome a statement supporting the European Transparency Initiative and committing to its development, efficiency and enforcement.

"New Social Europe"

Consumer co-operatives believe a truly sustainable development can only be reached by balancing economic growth with social objectives. In fact, co-

operatives and other social economy enterprises aim at fulfilling the members' **economic, social and cultural** needs and expectations.

Co-operatives alone account for more than 5.5 million jobs in Europe and this number increases largely if other social economy enterprises are taken into consideration. Consumer co-operatives put persons at the core of their activity and therefore they are active agents in the promotion of high standard employment in terms of rights, stability and life-long learning. The co-operative movement is engaged and seeks for more engagement in respect to social dialogue. In this respect, for figures and data, please see the results of a project managed by Cooperatives Europe in which Euro Coop was a partner:

<http://www.coopseurope.coop/spip.php?rubrique247>

In general, we agree with the ideas expressed in the discussion paper but once again we suggest that it should be inserted a special reference to co-operative enterprises as a model for meeting the Lisbon agenda goals and beyond. We would welcome from the European political parties a support of the ideas contained in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) recommendation 193 on the promotion of co-operative societies:

<http://www.ilo.org/images/empent/static/coop/pdf/english.pdf>

"Europe in the world"

The discussion paper "Europe in the world" raises some difficult and very pertinent questions for the future of the EU and its position in the world.

Euro Coop believes that the EU should take a leading role in issues such as climate change of securing safe and environmentally-friendly energy. We also believe that it is a duty of the European Union to promote **capacity-building** policies in relation to other countries in the world and in particular the less developed countries (LDCs).

In respect to our field of activity we believe that the EU should encourage an international trade policy which is value-based and not merely economic. In this regard, ethical trading schemes such as Fair Trade are valuable tools of development for LDCs and the active promotion of such schemes should not be considered a barrier to trade but, on the contrary, a main tool to achieve **long-term economic and social goals**. Euro Coop favours international agreements based on the idea of empowering LDCs instead of "charity-like" aids.

As mentioned before, Europe should fully support and strive to improve ILO's policies promoting employment and, in particular, recommendation 193 on the promotion of co-operative societies.

For more information on these or other issues contact:

Rodrigo Gouveia
Secretary-General
Tel: +32-2-285-00-70
Fax: +32-2-231-07-57
E-mail: rgouveia@eurocoop.coop