



Press Release

European organisations representing co-operatives launch International Year of Cooperatives 2012 with EU political agenda.

BRUSSELS, 12 January 2012 – The European organizations representing co-operatives at EU level kick off the United Nations' International Year of Co-operatives today with the launch of their 2012 political agenda, 'Co-operatives for Europe – Moving Forward Together'.*

This political agenda builds on the Europe 2020 strategy by bringing forward co-operative solutions. It stresses a more co-operative way of doing business, which is modern, collective, responsible and sustainable. The aim of this agenda is to provide a platform for a dialogue with policymakers, in order to bring about concrete solutions for today's key economic, social & environmental challenges.

The United Nations has proclaimed 2012 the International Year of Co-operatives. As declared by the UN Secretary General Mr. Ban-Ki-moon "Co-operatives are a reminder to the international community that it is possible to pursue both economic viability and social responsibility".

Co-operatives are businesses owned and democratically controlled by their members. Business decisions by co-operatives are guided by specific principles and values to satisfy the various needs and aspirations of their members. Locally rooted, co-operatives are a strong force in developing economies, as proven in the recent crisis. Co-operative enterprises have a strong presence in many sectors such as agriculture, banking, housing, retail or industry & services. They are also active in areas such as renewable energies.

Co-operatives in Europe represent 123 million members, 5.4 million employees and 160 thousand enterprises. According to recent research**, there are three times as many member owners of co-operatives as there are individual shareholders worldwide. There are 328 million people who own shares compared to 1 billion people who are member owners of co-operative enterprises.

"European co-operatives are a force to be reckoned with. However more needs to be done to ensure the diversity of business models in Europe and thereby the long-term stability of the economy", commented Etienne Pflimlin, Co-president of Cooperatives Europe.

"We are at a turning point of our history: our economic model cannot be driven by profit making exclusively. Resilience of co-operatives during the crisis demonstrates that businesses driven by people contribute to sustainability" said Felice Scalvini, Co-president of Cooperatives Europe.

* COOPERATIVES EUROPE as the European cross-sectoral organization and five sector organizations with COGCEA for agriculture, the EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF CO-OPERATIVE BANKS for the banking sector, CECODHAS HOUSING EUROPE for the housing sector, CECOP for industry & services and EURO COOP for the retail sector.

** Cooperatives UK report available at www.uk.coop/shareholders

