

CECOP'S MANIFESTO FOR THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2019

WHO ARE WE?

CECOP - CICOPA Europe is the European Confederation of cooperatives active in the industry and services. Our network represents worker and social cooperatives, together with cooperatives of individual producers (artisan, self-employed, freelancers etc), which employ 1.3 million people in 15 countries.

OUR IDENTITY

Cooperatives from our network share the same characteristics as all cooperatives: they are democratically governed enterprises, strongly embedded in communities, and reinvest most of their benefits in order to ensure a long-term dimension. They are characterized by worker-ownership model, a very specific relation where the workers are the co-owners of their enterprise.

WORKER COOPERATIVES: the cooperative belongs mainly to the employees who jointly control and decide on all major entrepreneurial developments.

SOCIAL COOPERATIVES: specialised in the provision of services of general interest (social, health, educational, environmental services etc) or in the reintegration of disadvantaged workers, or both. Social cooperatives affiliated to the CECOP network provide, inter alia, employment to 30,000 disadvantaged persons.

COOPERATIVES OF INDIVIDUAL PRODUCERS IN INDUSTRY AND SERVICES: from masons to lawyers, from couriers to architects, from creative industries to IT consultancy, members mutualize common services and costs, combining autonomy and a certain degree of security and protection.





CONTEXT

In a global context constantly challenging the values of democracy and solidarity, social inequalities are rising. In Europe, whose economic model allowed for the development of both economic freedom and social protection, the founding principle of democracy and equality are endangered. The consequences of the latest economic crisis led to an identity crisis of the European project. After having ensured peace for many decades, democratic principles, international solidarity and common interests are put into question. Those who paid the highest price so far are the most vulnerable citizens and workers whose jobs were not protected and subsequently lost trust in both decision-makers and intermediary bodies. 2018 represents the sad 10th anniversary of the worst depression since 1929.

In a time when democratic values are challenged in ever more European countries; when xenophobic sentiments and actions are spreading all over Europe; when populist governments are not afraid to overstep the boundaries of the rule of law to take advantage of people's fear and to impose illiberal policies; at CECOP - CICOPA Europe we can proudly say that we believe in the European project and the unity of the European continent.



DEMOCRACY AT THE WORKPLACE

Our core values are at the heart of a social economic model, which is sustainable, people-oriented, and most of all constantly aiming at long-term effectiveness rather than short-term efficiency. Our engagement for the benefit of local communities, together with the applied economic democracy put us in the right position to fight social exclusion and counter populism. Our cooperatives provide space for workers' freedom of expression and give voice to groups which are usually underrepresented in society (youth, women, ethnical minorities, etc).

In a nutshell, we represent enterprises that bring democracy to the workplace.



RESILIENT AND FUTURE-PROOF

The cooperative model we represent was able to resist the economic shocks better and be more resilient. Resilience is not only due to the specificity of the ownership model our cooperatives practice since mid XIX century, but also to the intrinsic democratic and solidarity values that drive our work as we head into the future. Moreover, the resilience is also a result of a commitment cooperative support organisations are showing in accompanying cooperative enterprises from the start-up phase and through all the following stages of development.

The cooperatives from our network invest in innovation and emerging industries, provide decent work, make sure nobody is left behind, protect and promote the European industrial and artisan heritage by saving jobs that others consider disposable. In other words, we represent enterprises able to compete on the market without giving up

internal democratic governance, solidarity, social cohesion. At the same time, they pursue the common general interest and work toward the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, cooperatives are a “future-proof business model”, combining sustainability through their core principle of capital accumulation and adaptability to new societal challenges thanks to their innovative governance process.

By nature, we practice, boost and foster entrepreneurship be it in the framework of major businesses or small and medium enterprises (SMEs). We can proudly state that thousands of bankrupt or endangered traditional businesses have been bought out by the employees, who, by establishing a worker cooperative, saved their jobs, the suppliers’ jobs and, the local knowledge and skills.

Our forward looking cooperative model proves to be fit for change especially when facing new societal needs, such as the environmental and technological ones, and enables us to reinvent new forms of solidarity and mutualisation like platform cooperatives within the collaborative economy.

PROMOTERS OF SOCIAL EUROPE

Cooperatives are an important provider of social, health, educational, cultural, environmental and energy production and distribution services. They allow European citizens to benefit from basic services essential for a dignified life through a corporate model that is particularly equitable, democratic, participatory and inclusive of all stakeholders, and thereby able to reduce social inequalities. Since the emergence of social cooperatives in 1980’s, they have been committed in the social inclusion of the most vulnerable and marginalised citizens. We are thus a direct promoter of social Europe.



FUTURE OF WORK STARTS TODAY

Technological transformations provide new opportunities but they also produce distress for workers in need of upskilling and reskilling. Cooperative enterprises have proven a strong adaptability to knowledge-intensive production: in this regard, technological change can serve the purpose of democratic governance by making the consultation and the decision making process within the enterprise more accessible. In particular, digital democratic control of cooperative platforms is a way for the cooperatives to steer the change and ride the wave of technological advancement. In the case of social cooperatives, the enhancement and development of such technologies can positively affect the way they increase the quality of their work, involve the beneficiaries of their services in the activities of the cooperative or fight the undeclared work.

Unfortunately, technological development, combined with new models of organisation of work, demographic change, the expansion of online services, and the growing need of specific profiles, results in more and more people having to work in precarious working conditions and without access to social protection. Cooperatives allow self-employed, freelancers and other types of nonstandard workers to better pursue their common interest and mutualize risks but also solidarity. These cooperatives are searching inside the worker-ownership model solutions and inspiration for the Future of Work challenges.

In the light of the above and taking into consideration how crucial the next 2019 European Elections will be for all citizen and for the enterprises, CECOP deems the following goals as key to the development of cooperatives in the sector of industry and services.



GOALS FOR THE 2019-2024 TERM

- 1 Recognition of the worker-ownership as an employment relationship characterized by quality and promoted in EU employment policies
- 2 Maintain of the European Pillar of Social Rights as a priority in the EU agenda
- 3 A balanced social and economic approach in the EU: the EU social and employment policies should not be subordinated to the economic goals of the European Semester
- 4 Level playing field for cooperatives in EU policies (entrepreneurship, taxation, access to finance, etc)
- 5 Strong EU strategy that combines support for emerging industries and preserves traditional industry, which is often subject to closure and relocation, despite its profitability

IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THIS GOALS, WE DEMAND

- 1 A “Cooperative Test” - similar to the “the SME Test” - analysing the possible effects of EU legislative proposals on cooperatives
- 2 Support to Member States and adequate funding of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights
- 3 Promotion of and legislative support for the transfer of enterprises to employees in the form of worker cooperatives
- 4 Encourage Member States to adopt legislation regulating cooperatives in which the primary and direct purpose is the delivery of services of general interest
- 5 Encourage Member States to adopt legal framework for the establishment of cooperative groups and clusters
- 6 Leveraging effect at the European level for cooperative financial instruments
- 7 The continuity of the social economy intergroup in the European Parliament