

## Joint declaration of UNI Europa and Euro Coop

### European consumer co-operatives and trade unions together for employment and social inclusion

Consumer co-operatives represent a significant part of the commerce and retail sector not only through the size and number of employees but also through the specificities of their ethical values and founding principles. Co-operatives are companies which set for themselves the objectives of fighting against social exclusion, generating growth and jobs and supporting equality and solidarity.

Representing more than 30 million consumer-members, consumer co-operatives are a major actor on the retail market. Their overall turnover amounts to more than €75 billion, with more than 36,000 points of sale across Europe; these points of sale range from the local shop, often the last remaining store for the community in certain remote regions of Europe, to the hypermarket in urban shopping areas.

Stemming from their values, consumer co-operatives and trade unions have a strong focus on social responsibility. Hence, they favour a sustainable approach towards the activities of production and distribution taking into account the sustainable development of local communities, environmental concerns and the health and safety of consumers. The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives, highlighting the contribution of co-operatives to socio-economic development, in particular recognising their impact on poverty reduction, employment generation and social integration.

With the following, UNI Europa and Euro Coop wish to express a number of key issues that should be at the heart of sustainable and responsible growth, in particular in the retail sector:

#### **Employment**

Special attention must be paid to employment policy and working conditions: employees' personal involvement and development represent an actual asset for co-operatives.

Sustainable business and jobs are based on quality of services. Too often, retail jobs are considered second-rate ones, but retail workers are professionals who deserve decent working conditions vocational training and lifelong learning. It is difficult to develop quality services when the workforce turnover is high. Employment stability is important to develop workers competences and skills.

UNI Europa and Euro Coop ask the EU Institutions to regard the retail sector as a services industry that can improve its productivity and participate in economic recovery and growth by raising the quality of services to customers. They welcome the first European Retail Action Plan and are available to work together with the EU institutions for its proper implementation.

UNI Europa and Euro Coop believe that actively implementing social inclusion policies can mitigate the negative consequences the economic climate has on youth and older workers while also giving European commerce employers a competitive advantage.

#### **Social cohesion**

Commerce has a key role in geographically remote areas that suffer from a lack of economic activity. Sustainable forms of retail that are not necessarily oriented in maximising profits are reappearing. There

are lots of positive experiences in Europe that show how innovative solutions can serve the interests of all. Consumer co-operatives can and should represent one way of doing business in which making profits cannot be to the detriment of core values such as: solidarity, social inclusion, workers' participation, equality and quality jobs, founding principles of the co-operative movement.

The co-operative business model has shown to be more resilient to economic crises due to its long-term sustainable goals and the respect of ethical values and principles.

In addition, especially in periods of crisis, business solutions such as "white products" or company own-brand products can help low-income households to access certain consumer goods. The use of local producers is also a positive choice regarding local economic development and the fight against rural exodus.

### **Collective bargaining**

Collective bargaining and social dialogue show outstanding examples in some areas: lifelong learning, integration of women, young and older workers, reconciliation of professional and private life. Consumer co-operatives are competing through the promotion of social responsibility in Europe, by developing the involvement of workers in business processes and work organisation.

Consumer co-operatives' social and economic objectives, as mentioned above, are faithful to the history of the co-operative movement, based on agreements made for economic development and new trade union relations in several countries that are, more generally, among the aims of European social policy.

### **Restructuring, new technologies and crisis**

The retail sector is undergoing a deep restructuring of its working patterns essentially because of new technologies that have a massive impact on employment.

Without rejecting new technologies, change must be anticipated in order to avoid or minimise the social consequences of these technological advances as much as possible. Investing in new technologies implies investing in workers. In addition to public educational frameworks and legal obligations, collective agreements have a key role to play in maintaining and raising the quality services necessary to attract customers.

### **Fair Trade**

Consumer co-operatives have long supported Fair Trade products since their appearance on the market and have encouraged an effective adoption of Fair Trade policies at the EU level. Euro Coop and UNI Europa believe that Fair Trade raises awareness among consumers about the relations between developed and developing countries and serves as an example of coherence between trade policies and development objectives.

### **Conclusions**

UNI Europa and Euro Coop, sharing similar values and principles as described in this joint paper, wish to start a dialogue and a process of cooperation.

Therefore, they call on the EU institutions to support their joint work and future initiatives that will aim to strengthen the cooperation between the two organisations.

The national organisations of consumer co-operatives in 18 European countries make up Euro Coop. Founded in 1957, Euro Coop today represents the interests of over 4,500 local and regional co-operatives owned by a total of 30 million consumers across Europe, employing more than 450,000 people and accounting for € 74 billion in annual turnover.

#### About UNI Europa

UNI Europa is a European trade union federation. It unites national trade unions organising in service and skills sectors in 50 different countries. With 320 affiliated trade union organisations, UNI Europa represents 7 million workers.

UNI Europa represents workers in key service sectors vital to the welfare of European citizens: Commerce, Postal services and logistics, Information Technologies and Communication, Financial services, Temporary agency workers, Social insurance, Property services (cleaning, security), Graphical sector, Media, entertainment and the arts, Tourism, Hair and beauty, Gaming, Sport.