



General Assembly of  
Cooperatives Europe

Prague,  
18 June, 2007

Address by Ivano Barberini,  
President,  
International Co-operative Alliance

Dear President, Ladies and Gentleman, dear  
friends,

I am very happy to participate in this General  
Assembly and the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Co-operative  
Convention. Thank you to Dame Pauline Green  
and Mr. Etienne Pflimlin for their invitation.

Cooperatives Europe, established in 2006,  
represents an important innovation in the

structure of ICA and can give a more effective contribution to the role and the development of the co-operative movement in EU in the whole European region and at global level.

In the current situation, characterized by rapid changes in the economy and society, social organisations and enterprises are facing the need to deeply re-think themselves.

Continuous change is not enough to make organisations more flexible, less expensive and bureaucratic, able to understand and manage phenomena and contradictions at the right moment.

To survive and to grow in the reality of 21<sup>st</sup> century we need to introduce radical changes, based on new paradigms. Innovation and commonsense, self-knowledge and

understanding of the outside world are essential requirements.

Only by joining strategic and incremental innovation it is possible to achieve a real change, which is always the result of daily actions and of medium to long-term actions. Mere incremental changes increase the options, the ways that bring to the result, but they usually fail to avoid obsolescence and crisis.

Strategic innovation is for the enterprise, as well as for all other sectors of human activity, a change of paradigms, of the points of reference of our daily behaviour.

The world, as we use to say, became small.

Many of the most important problems that enterprises must face, even in the diversity of the situations, are similar.

“Innovation in co-operative business” is the theme for the 2007 ICA General Assembly, which will be held in mid October in Singapore. It represents a unique opportunity for co-operators around the world to meet and exchange experiences and knowledge on processes of change and strategies adopted to face the challenges of globalised economy.

We need to get the signals of where the world is going at the right moment. The ongoing effort of many co-operatives trying to be a driving part of the innovative process surrounding them is an example of best practice which should be imitated by all co-operative organisations.

The concept of innovation is inborn in co-operation. “Movement” means in fact, “innovation”, as was meant by the founders of co-operation.

Anyway, real innovations are painful and very difficult. Our co-operative experience teaches us that it is a lot easier to change when things are going wrong.

It is much more difficult when a change is drawn from a complex vision and, sometimes, from an even more complex interpretation of short and long term scenario, because in the first case it is driven by necessity, in the second by culture.

Differentials of culture cause new contradictions to emerge. If they are not based on shared values and well managed by a strong leadership, they can slow or stop the change.

Definitely, innovation means to abandon what old and obsolete there is in the organisation, keeping in mind that the biggest challenge is to change co-operative strategies and, at the

same time, give value to the co-operative identity.

These topics will be discussed in the next ICA General Assembly. I hope, as usual, that there will be a high and active participation of European co-operators.

Finally, I wish you the best success for the future.

Thank you