



International Raiffeisen Forum
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Address by Ivano Barberini, President,
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Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends

First of all, I would like to congratulate for the organization of this initiative and to thank you for your kind invitation to address you all today. It is a pleasure and an honour to be here together with you.

Co-operative enterprises are performing within a new and growing complexity. The restructuring of the global economy involves great opportunities and serious risks for all organizations which have to face new challenges, not simply on the economic front but also in terms of social solidarity.

The current situation is one of extreme vulnerability but also of great opportunities.

European social organizations are called in to share responsibilities and initiatives necessary to build a fair and non violent globalisation process.

IGlobalization does not inevitably lead to uniformity, but encourages us to look at the world in a multidimensional way, economic, political, technological and cultural. Globalization influences existing organizations and communities and creates opportunities for new connections and identities.

Like other enterprises, co-operatives are involved in building a multicultural environment, assuming diversity as a priority factor in the human resources management and are called in to share responsibilities and initiatives necessary to build a fair and non violent globalisation process.

This can be done only if the relationship between economic development and social cohesion is well understood. Global competition requires a cultural dimension as well as an economic one. While economic development changes and sometimes destabilizes communities, it must be clear that community cohesion is a necessary prerequisite for effective economic development; less cohesion translates into more vulnerability.

For this reason, it is important to recognize the priority of social objectives – health, employment, welfare, education – to ensure the necessary social cohesion: economic and social objectives must be dealt with together at both a local and global level. Globalization has reduced geographical distances but not social ones.

In a global economy “everything is connected“: economic development and peace, security and freedom, the fight against poverty and for health, access to knowledge and equal opportunities, the global and local dimension, the respect for the difference and the fight against terrorism.

The idea of a market and society, dominating in a large part of the world, and based on “business is business”, without solidarity, is no longer to wish for. There is the need to reintroduce the notion of social responsibility to the corporate sector, which cannot be mainly exercised in a national context but must conform to global standards.

Aiming for a development based on cultural homologation and a radical

transformation of the social environment, multinationals cause a painful loss of identity and solidarity.

On the contrary, the co-operative system is based on the participation of its members, sustaining and reconstituting social cohesion, representing a perfect example of a global network, which is present in all economic sectors, rooted in the local area and committed to exchanging relations between the north and south of the world.

Social cohesion is about membership, about participation in a network or a culture. Co-operatives are a microcosm of this phenomenon, containing many of the social and economic elements that are found in a larger society.

A shared sense of identity is a form of social capital that can enable group action on common needs, providing the opportunities for further development.

Ladies and gentleman, dear friends,

This is the context where the management of co-operative enterprises and the reason to be of the largest and most popular non religious and non political movement of the world are set.

This is also the reason why much is expected of the co-operative system. All this means that we must constantly research the best ways and conditions which will allow us to successfully confront the serious problems of humanity.

Special attention must be devoted to the co-operative reputation.

Everywhere co-operatives have to face a very difficult challenge: to provide a mutual advantage to members and to carry out their social role. They must perform, at the same level, if not better, of the best companies in their business sector.

To play this role and to succeed, they need a favourable environment, which must be the result of public policies together with the efforts of co-operators to reinforce the co-operative identity.

A fair globalization requires new legal procedural and institutional infrastructure for global business.

Recently, on the occasion of the International Co-operative Day, the UN Secretary General underlined that Governments and International organizations should promote and support co-operative development through appropriate policy and laws.

Every co-operative legislative reform in each country should refer to the international co-operative Statement and be funded on a political willingness and a continuous dialogue between co-operative organizations and government Institutions, each respecting the other's role and responsibility.

The legislative context should provide the laws and the tools to compete in the global market respecting a universal criteria accepted by the UN, ILO and other International Organizations.

A strong distinctive co-operative identity is an essential strategic resource with which to compete and which promotes a high social visibility. A shared sense of identity is a form of social capital that can enable group action on common needs and aspirations.

This is particularly important for Europe, where so many different cultural identities coexist – and are continuously growing – within such a comparatively small place.

Co-operatives will succeed economically to the extent that they can use and generate social cohesion and strengthen the relation among other co-operatives.

To act together to affirm the belief that the safeguarding of co-operation is not through a corporate approach, but through the safeguarding of a model of society based on the respect of cultural identities. Co-operation must communicate definite facts and plans while promoting a culture of solidarity.

Mutual aims and social responsibility represent a natural binomial highly distinctive of co-operative identity.

To understand people, recognizing legitimacy in every single cultural identity; to build a network of information, experiences and skills available to everybody, even to those who risk exclusion through lack of resources: it is an essential contribution that the co-operative movement can give to build a globalisation which brings together all citizens on the basis of the benefits it can provide, economically, socially and culturally.