

WINS

Promoting Workers' INvolvement in Social Economy Enterprises

WINS Transnational Meeting

1st of July, 2021 – 9.30 am to 12.30 pm CEST

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

The first transnational workshop of the WINS project took place on 1 July 2021.

Organised by Cisl, with the support of Diesis, the event had more than 70 registrations and more than 50 participants.

The work was opened by Francesco Lauria (Cisl) and the first part was coordinated by Vilma Rinolfi (Cisl). In their introductory speeches, Paloma Arrojo from COCETA and Vilma Rinolfi spoke about the importance of the social economy for Europe's future. At this time, the social economy can play an important role in ensuring that the restart of the European economy is based on principles of social equity and respect for the rights of workers. The trade unions and cooperative organisations, which are the main actors of the social economy, can play a central role in this regard. Both introductory speeches underlined this aspect as the central objective of the workshop: to identify common ground for a joint action of these two actors.

The idea of the organisers was therefore to start from the highest level, the European level, listening to the positions of the European Trade Union Confederation, with the intervention of Marina Monaco, from the ETUC, and of the European organisation of cooperative associations with the intervention of Diana Dovgan from CECOP. Both speeches focused on the role that trade unions and the cooperative movement can play in economic recovery, also thanks to the new perspectives opened up by the European Union and the commitments made by the European Commission.

After a short debate, the focus turned to some "practical" examples of social economy. In the second session of the workshop, coordinated by Francesco Lauria, four cases of cooperative enterprises were presented. The first two concerned the Italian cooperatives Food for me and 3L, and the others regarded the Spanish cooperatives Incoop and Ambulancias Andalucia.

The cooperative "Food for me" in Verona is an interesting example of an autonomous organisation of workers in the delivery sector. Fabrizio Creston, from the CISL of Verona, and Francesco Zenere, a worker member of the cooperative, reported how some young men and women, who had previously been riders for multinational companies, with no protection and security, organised themselves into a local delivery cooperative, with all the guarantees and respect for their rights. In this case, the union's initiative and the support and help it gave throughout the process led many of these young people to 'discover' trade unions, seeing for themselves how they are a vehicle for workers' rights.

The second case was presented by Attilio Dadda, from Legacoop Lombardia. The case of the 3L cooperative involved both the trade union and the cooperative organisations in resolving a state of crisis in the logistics sector. The dispute, which lasted 18 months, started with the aim of 'regenerating' a cooperative that did not respect social and mutualistic principles, which are fundamental to the cooperative system. The process of regeneration of the cooperative, which safeguarded 190 jobs, involved many social actors, some of whom, however, obstructed, sometimes heavily, parts of the process. Francesca Montalti of National Legacoop, who intervened in the case, underlined that cooperation is a resource especially in this moment when social tension is a real danger. Montalti appealed to the social forces to promote a dialogue that, as it proved to be effective in the 3L case, becomes an important element to manage the ongoing transition throughout Europe.

After the first two Italian cases, the focus shifted to the Spanish examples.

The first one was about the Catalan cooperative Incoop, established in the field of socio-cultural and educational services. The history of the cooperative was provided by Guillem Perdrix, from the federation of labour cooperatives of Catalonia, and Elena Bernet, a worker member of the cooperative. Incoop is a co-operative that is expanding despite the difficulties it faces, such as the strong geographical dispersion of the area in which it operates. The importance of workers' participation in the management of the cooperative was strongly emphasised and described in detail by the speakers.

Saturnino Martin, from the Andalusian Federation of Cooperatives, presented the case of the cooperative Ambulancias Andalucia, after briefly explaining its association and the cooperative system in Andalusia. Created as a consequence of a company crisis, the cooperative initially had to face many problems especially in the relationship with the public administration and, partly, with the workers of the old management. According to the speaker, in addition to the problems, there were key elements that favoured the success of the initiative. First and foremost, the training of the worker members, which made it possible to expand the services offered, making it

a first aid and home care cooperative and not only a transport cooperative. It has 70 members and 30 employees with an annual turnover of over 3 million Euros.

The third session of the workshop opened with the intervention of Gianluca Pastorelli, President of Diesis, who underlined the importance of the consultations that the European Commission is carrying out for the drafting of the European Action Plan for the social economy. Pastorelli, recalling that there are about 3 million cooperatives in Europe, employing a total of 15 million workers, hoped that in this process, the role of the social economy as an "employer" will be recognized, something that currently does not happen in a clear way. Therefore, Pastorelli underlined it was crucial that the social dialogue legitimises social economy enterprises as employers and recognised them as subjects for negotiation. Stressing this need, he recalled that the social economy has been recognised as one of Europe's 14 industrial ecosystems. As regards the relationship between trade unions and cooperative organisations, Pastorelli, after recalling the fact that social economy employers are allies of trade unions, went on to highlight the common aspects between these two important social economy actors: common roots - but also common operational shortcomings - and, above all, a person-centred vision of the economy. This is why the speaker hoped to continue working together to strengthen cooperation even in those countries - unlike Italy and Spain - where trade unions are not strong and the social economy is not developed.

The work was concluded by Giulio Romani, Confederal Secretary of the CISL, who used a metaphor to point out that it is impossible to reach conclusions because these meetings always leave openings for the future so that changes can be made. He suggested, therefore, that rather than conclusions he would limit himself to providing stimuli. After commenting on the significance of the cases presented in the workshop, Romani pointed out that trade unions and cooperativism were two sides of the same coin. Both are based on a deep sense of community which, at the moment, we need to rediscover in order to create a fairer world. And this, according to Romani, is a favourable moment for the relaunch of social rights. The pillar of social rights, but above all the European Union's latest initiatives, he stressed, were important but came about out of opposition rather than deep conviction. The measures were launched after a serious economic crisis and after a pandemic which had very serious repercussions on social balances. The risk, therefore, is that once the pandemic and the emergency have passed, we will return to the old patterns. This is why, according to Romani, trade unions and cooperatives must work to ensure that the social model becomes permanent. It is necessary to make society aware that the priority is not excessive economic growth but the sustainability of that growth, which must be not only environmental and digital but also social. In this sense, social cooperation must be the alternative to a profit-centred economic model.

Addressing the issue of digitalisation, Romani, while recognising its importance and the great opportunity it offers to work remotely, underlined the risk that it could lead to a loss of a sense of community. The social partners, in this case, must ensure that the digital world plays a role that makes it a meeting place for the community.

The meeting ended at 1 p.m.