

**III Conferenza Organizzativa di CSVnet – MILANO - 16, 17, 18 maggio 2014**

**“Passi e Passaggi - Il volontariato che attraversa”**

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**“Expo 2015: temi, relazioni e occasioni”**

Ladies and gentlemen:

- I would like to begin my comments by referring to a statement by the EU Commissioner for the Internal Market and Services, Mr Barnier, who at a conference on social enterprises in Strasbourg in January, commented that "the Europe of 2008 simply does not exist anymore and it is time that we started taking action for a new Europe and a new model of European growth";
- These views were echoed in the declaration of that high level conference. Indeed, a plea was made for a new normality, for a "... new Europe, (one in which) all players need to look at growth and value creation from a wider perspective, by including social indicators and demonstrating positive social impact when reporting social and economic progress";
- The EU has made some attempts in this direction through a limited social dimension to the Economic and Social Union;
- But the time is now ripe and the momentum is here for us to push for this new model of growth – a model which clearly includes the concept of sustainable development that will be showcased at the Expo 2015 event in Milan;
- For 'Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life', which is the motto of the 2015 Expo, encapsulates many issues relevant to this new model, be it food security, biodiversity, energy or preoccupations for the world that we will leave to the next generations;
- The new model for growth that we envisage is very inclusive and includes a myriad of actors working at the local, national and international levels, including the social economy and volunteers;
- It is a model which is based on active participation, transparency, fluid networks and trust;
- It is a model which has humanity and alternative forms of growth at its centre and one which values social innovation and social investment;
- With this in mind, I would like to recall a study published by the European Volunteer Centre in 2013, on the 'Changing perspectives, in the context of the economic crisis and consequential austerity measures, on the role of volunteer organisations in the delivery of welfare services';
- The study concludes that with the onset of the economic crisis the State in several European countries have started using volunteers *more* than previously in the fields of housing and food & nutrition, whilst continuing at the same levels their use of volunteers in the fields of youth, children and the elderly;
- This shift towards greater use of volunteers is indicative of the changing status of Europe's welfare system, for let us not forget that Europe has 7% of the world's population, 25% of its output and 50% of its welfare spending;
- Alternative models of welfare provision, with volunteers and the social economy providing greater services is part and parcel of this new socio-economic model that I spoke of earlier;
- For in what has been described as the 'second welfare' we will increasingly see a mix of social protection and social investment programs which are provided by a multitude of economic and

social actors, linked to territories and local communities, but also open to trans-local partnerships and collaborations;

- And what better than to give *local* stakeholders, including social enterprises and volunteers, a role in welfare provision?
  - When local and regional actors have far greater proximity and knowledge of the local circumstances, they are much better placed to pioneer innovative solutions quickly;
  - Of course this necessitates involving social enterprises and wider civil society in the planning, implementation and execution of economic and social policy, something that perhaps national public authorities are not yet prepared for;
  - The fact is that whether we are discussing about volunteering in austerity-hit Europe or about the role of the social economy and of social enterprises in this new socio-economic model, there are similarities in the approaches;
  - For example, at the Strasbourg conference on social enterprises the participants recommended that there must be a stronger engagement at the European, national, regional and local levels with the social enterprise community in the co-creation of *new policies* to support social enterprises, suited to the local context;
  - Moreover, it was agreed that in partnership with the social enterprise sector, Member States, regional and local authorities must fully support the growth of social enterprises and help them build capacity. For example, through legal frameworks, access to finance, business start-up and development support, training, education and public procurement;
  - Several of these concerns are shared with the voluntary sector;
  - Whether it be difficulties in identification, in capacity-building, in measuring activity or measuring impact, both the voluntary sector and the social economy share common challenges to finding their place in the new socio-economic reality post the crisis.
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- Ladies and gentlemen, the Milan 2015 Expo will look at the concept of 'quality of life' and how to provide sustainable and healthy food;
  - Sustainability and quality and the two key words here, subjects that the Various Interests Group will address in two conferences to be organised in the next few months;
  - The first event will take place in Brussels next month and will examine how to measure things that really matter, like our environment, education, health, social equality and happiness;
  - The aim is to seize the opportunity to advance social progress as 'progress' does not concern GDP alone.
  - Indeed in recent years there has been an explosion of activity, with multiple organisations developing new measures of progress and calling for indicators that look beyond economic growth and which measure wellbeing;
  - The idea is to bring business, civil society, legislators and all relevant stakeholders together;
  - Measuring better lives has become even more important today, as many of our economies and societies have been stricken by the global financial crisis;
  - As new forms of solidarity and engagement have emerged, well-being indicators offer new opportunities for policy making;
  - But steps must be taken to ensure that these new indicators are really taken into account and I hope that we will contribute to this debate during our conference in June;
  - The second crucial event to be organised by our Group will take place here in Italy, in Milan in October, during the Italian Presidency;

- Here we will look at social innovation and in particular the new welfare state, tackling some of the items that I mentioned earlier in my speech;
- But do not think that we have neglected the voluntary sector – in 2011 we organised a high level conference in Warsaw on volunteering, an event which concentrated on how to measure the economic contribution of volunteering...
- Might I also remind those who do not know, that the EESC was the first body to recommend making 2011 the European Year of Volunteering;
- Ladies and gentlemen, I will not take up more of your time. Simply to say that the Milan Expo 2015 which will address sustainability and the legacy that we leave to future generations needs the support, passion and creativity of all of us!
- Thank you for your attention.