

Bernard THIRY's conclusions

Ladies, Gentlemen,

Tradition holds that the President and I should present to you, at the closing session of the Congress, the conclusions of our coming together. These are personal conclusions, as we are not voting on a motion. And when I say "personal", it is an incorrect use of language, since I must thank the four workshop leaders for their contributions to the formation of these conclusions.

This type of meeting allows us all to exchange ideas, to dialogue, to discover new experiences, to draw up a balance-sheet of trends and developments.

This time nearly forty speakers gave us the benefit of their reflections and experience. Two years ago, during our Sevilla Congress, many speakers - including Joseph Stiglitz - drew our attention to a rebirth of public action, a renewal of interest in the organisations of the Social Economy. The general mood was a relative optimism in sharp relief with a financial crisis that otherwise thickened and surrounded.

Where are we two years later?

The end result is chequered. The financial crisis became an economic crisis which in its turn spawned a public finance crisis. As pointed out in the workshops, this public debt included bad private debts, and the measures taken to counter the public finance crisis risk estranging us from growth.

The rebirth of public action is a reality.

I would mention, in reverse order: the rehabilitation of Keynesian economic policy - almost all the governments, given the order of magnitude and urgent nature of the crisis, have undertaken budgetary and fiscal measures to support economic activity; the undeniable development in certain countries of local-authority economy and public involvement in the infrastructure sector; the good results presented by certain speakers concerning the many public enterprises or enterprises entrusted with services of general (economic) interest; the explicit inclusion in the equation of the importance of the employment pool that is the Public Economy, especially in Europe.

But can this resurgence stay the course?

- The public finances crisis might cast doubt on the financing of public services. It might cause an increase in the financial claims by the public authorities on their enterprises, making them less robust, snatching from them the means for their own development;
- the nationalisations in the financial sector in particular will, perhaps, be only temporary;
- many are calling for more regulation, in particular for the capital markets and for the financial sector, but the content of this tighter regulation remains unclear and, quite apart from anything else, progress in the matter is painfully slow;
- the construction of an economic governance worthy of the name, and at supranational level, is not going to happen overnight.

The organisations of the Social and Cooperative Economy are also affected by the crisis.

Interest in the Social and Cooperative Economy may well continue to increase in a period of crisis, needs may well continue to increase considering the needs, but the wherewithal unfortunately decreases.

This is more particularly the case for financial supplies coming from public budgets and, for certain of our speakers, this conveys a tone of relative pessimism.

The Social Economy sector, the contours of which are shifting with the changes in the conditions of the market, should not be instrumentalised at the expense of its specificities - and the same is equally true for the Public Economy.

The Social Economy is particularly resilient - spectacular in periods of upswing / resistant to crisis. It even offers shelter to abandoned enterprises and is actively engaged in local development.

One reason to remain optimistic as regards the prospects for the development of the Public, Social and Cooperative Economy is the wealth of observed specific innovations, especially in environmental affairs, the capacity to meet the demographic challenges of, for instance, education and training programmes, the capacity to take account of and to involve the various stakeholders. The Social- and Public-Economy initiatives in the matter of education and training are many and various and are in line with a general vision that allows for all the different dimensions of the individual and aims for a best-possible social insertion on a lifelong basis.

Local development and regional development are other main concerns where the Social Economy and the Public Economy join forces. In this field too, we have noted many initiatives originating from all corners of the world.

To put it simply, if we return to the general theme of our Congress, it is probably an overstatement of our case to claim that the Public Economy or the Social Economy is the way out of the crisis. And yet, the Public Economy and the Social Economy are, even now, upholders of sustainable development.

Mr. President, Ladies, Gentlemen,

There is another tradition that we make a point of respecting. It is the tradition of offering our thanks to all who have taken time out from an important function within our organisation. Such is not the case for you, Mr. President, since you were already reelected for a new term of office of two years during yesterday's General Assembly.

Such is, however, the case for another President, namely the President of the International Scientific Council, the moving force propelling our international scientific network, none other - as it so happens - than Benoît Lévesque.

Dear Benoît,

As we bring this final meeting to a close we wish to reassure you of our gratitude for your unstinting commitment to our organisation as President of the Scientific Council. You have left your mark, with your intelligence, efficiency, consideration of others, your authority and modesty, in a new dynamism not only in our scientific network, but also throughout the whole of our organisation. All the proof I need would be the strategic planning operation that you started up 6 years ago and, more recently, the Strategic Watch of our fields of research that you steered over these past two years. For which our unreserved thanks, in the sure and certain knowledge that you will continue to be involved in our activities.