

7th International Research Conference on the Social Economy

Intervention by Alain ARNAUD

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Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Friends,

It is with great pleasure that, as President of CIRIEC-International, I am addressing this inaugural session of the 7th International Conference on Research in the Social Economy.

On behalf of the International Secretariat team, I would like to extend our warmest thanks to our Romanian friends for organizing this important event. It is always a difficult challenge to organize an international conference, but the challenge has been met! Considering the quality of the speakers and the number of participants present today (250 registered - 20 international speakers - 34 workshops to discuss 140 contributions), it is already a success. The scientific programme is substantial and I would like to thank the Scientific Committee on the Social and Cooperative Economy and its President for organising it.

First, if I am here, present at the opening of this international conference, it is because the person who was supposed to chair it is no longer from this world. Our friend, Jorge de Sá, died suddenly on April 4th, victim of a cardiac arrest. He was for me, as for many of us, a dear friend, and his joviality, erudition, perfect knowledge of the social economy and ardent activism will be missed. I will not forget personally all the excellent moments spent together, in particular this memorable excursion to the watershed of the Rio Negro and the majestic Amazon River with our Brazilian friends, in the sidelines of the 6th International Conference in Manaus in 2017. In a few moments, Professor José-Luis Monzón Campos will evoke his memory and pay him the tribute he deserves.

But since the death of our current President was not enough to feed our grief, we have also just lost our treasurer, Jean-Pierre Grafé, who died on 16 May. A Statesman, Mr Jean-Pierre Grafé was a historical and emblematic political figure in Belgium. He has been a Deputy and Minister in various national, federal, regional and community governments on several occasions. As a loyal supporter of CIRIEC, Jean-Pierre Grafé always had the general interest at heart, and we will also miss him.

Dear friends, the pages of life are turning, and we must resume our work with even more vigour and determination.

Before officially opening the proceedings of this conference, I would like to introduce you CIRIEC, one of the oldest organizations concerned with cooperative economic models and the consideration of the human dimension in the economy, after the International Cooperative Alliance.

- For those who are unfamiliar with its history, the International Research and Information Centre on the Public, Social and Cooperative Economy is a scientific organisation that was created in 1947 by a French professor of political economy, Edgard Milhaud. But it originated in 1908 when Edgard Milhaud, then a collaborator of Jean Jaurès, created an international scientific journal, *The Annals*, which collected work on economic models that serve the collective interest, mainly the public economy, but also cooperative economy.
- After the world wars, this great peace activist, Edgard Milhaud, wanted to give a future to his journal *The Annals*, and to provoke a new impetus in research on the collective economy, convinced that maintaining peace in the world required economic and social progress and a fair redistribution of the wealth created.

- That is why CIRIEC established itself in Geneva, Switzerland, on 12 February 1947, on the sidelines of the ILO General Assembly, with the support of the leading political and trade union figures of the time, particularly Swiss, Belgian and French. Its headquarter is now in Liege, Belgium.

Over the past decades, CIRIEC has grown worldwide, and today it has 20 members, 13 effective national sections and 7 collective members - in Europe, South America, Canada and Japan. Currently, we have positive prospects for the accession of CIRIEC-Mexico, which has just been established, and the creation of a national section in Tunisia, which would be the first section on the African continent. And we are confident that the Italian section, which had to cease its activity due to lack of resources, will be revived. It is important that we have as many national sections as possible to ensure CIRIEC's international reputation, but also and above all, to promote the work of its scientific network, which today represents some 750 academics and expert practitioners in 60 countries around the world. This is a considerable asset. Part of this network is gathered here today in Bucharest, and I would like to thank you in particular for your presence and commitment.

If I make this brief review of the history of CIRIEC, it is on the one hand to recall the memory of this great peace activist, Edgard Milhaud, who was well known and appreciated at the time, but forgotten in social history. But it is also to indicate that the economic theories developed by this great visionary, nearly a century ago, are particularly modern and topical in this tormented and unequal world as we live it. As you will have understood, the vocation of CIRIEC today is to continue along the path traced by Edgard Milhaud, to develop more than ever scientific research and information on economic models that serve the general interest, create collective value, and put people at the heart of their purpose and governance.

This is a necessity because in today's world and even more so in tomorrow's, a world dominated by the digital revolution that is profoundly changing our societies, we must be aware that a better future depends on economic models that organize sharing, solidarity, and not the individual for himself, that respect human and social rights, and that preserve the common good and the environment.

To achieve this, in the face of the excesses of this poorly controlled globalization and the inequalities they generate, the social economy is a major opportunity to move the global economic system and make it evolve towards less inequality, more democracy, and finally to be the model of an economic system geared towards satisfying real needs, and not the artificial needs created by the digital giants.

For us at CIRIEC, the social and solidarity economy is not a separate sector, nor is it marginal. It is a form of economic model that has been in place for a long time. It cannot be considered as an economy of reparation, nor as a charitable economy, as too often the proponents of neoliberalism want to consider it. In many countries, it contributes significantly to GDP, it has a proven social utility, and it has created and still creates many jobs in the production of goods and services, in banking, in insurance, in medicine and health, in the support of vulnerable people.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, the contemporary world is in the grip of great uncertainty, and great dangers are looming on the horizon. This requires mobilizing all of us together to restore a more humane, social and solidarity-based sense to our societies, based on the universal values of democracy, solidarity and responsibility, which guarantee a better life together. I have no doubt that the work of this 7th Conference will highlight not only the role of the Social and Solidarity Economy in the advent of a new economic system that we all want, but also its contribution to the general economy of countries, to social innovation and to the reduction of inequality. In this regard, I welcome the important work of Professors Monzón and Chaves in Europe, and the publication of the excellent book by Marie Bouchard and Damien Rousselière on the weight of the Social Economy, translated into Korean, which can only demonstrate, if necessary, the international dimension of CIRIEC, which I mentioned earlier.

I therefore wish you excellent work, and I wish you every success at the 7th International Conference on Research in the Social Economy of CIRIEC.