



Welcome Speech of Vít Vaníček

**CECODHAS HOUSING EUROPE SEMINAR
Committee of the Regions**

Brussels 26th April 2012

Dear Colleagues, Cooperators, Friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to open our seminar today.

This is a significant year for the international co-operative movement. Declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Co-operatives 2012, we have a unique opportunity to show the public various benefit of co-operatives as successful business enterprises that are socially responsible and care about people and the planet.

CECODHAS Housing Europe is the Federation of Public, Cooperative & Social Housing, a network gathering 45 members in 19 EU member States plus Norway and Switzerland. Altogether our members represent about 12% of existing dwellings in the EU. Within our membership there are almost 35 thousand housing cooperatives with a total of about 10 and a half million dwellings.

Although cooperative housing has a long history, with an impact on the quality of life of millions of people, our housing sector is still relatively little-known. There are different cooperative housing models in member countries, but what characterises housing cooperatives compared to other housing providers is that they are jointly owned and democratically controlled by their members, according to the principle of “one person, one vote”. This has clear implications for the way they operate compared to other actors on the housing market. Co-operatives benefit not only their members but also the wider public interest.

In some countries, cooperative housing has been historically an important part of the housing market. In Poland, housing cooperatives manage over 2.5 million dwellings, approximately 20% of the total housing stock. In the Czech Republic they represent 17%, in Sweden 17% and in Norway 15% of the housing stock.

Housing cooperatives often manage to provide housing at lower costs than the open housing market does. Also, real estate owned by a housing coop is less subject to speculation and represents a long-term investment. Housing cooperatives are also committed to sustainable development. In some countries of Central and Eastern Europe where the conditions of the housing stock call for extensive renovation work, housing co-operatives are strongly committed to reducing greenhouse emissions by increasing energy efficiency in their buildings.

The capacity of cooperatives to cope with a number of today’s challenges is proved by their resilience to the crisis; the examples that you will hear about today will show how co-ops are exploring new ways of continuing to provide affordable, sustainable solutions to the housing needs of the citizens of Europe.

Before to give the floor to speakers, I would like to thank the Committee of the regions, and in particular Alain Hutchinson for hosting this event and for his constant support to design policies aiming at housing all citizens. But also I would like to welcome participants, specially coming from outside the current EU borders. The housing cooperative models, which is not only one, but diverse, is present on all continent and many of its representative are present today, which I hope will allow a very lively and positive debate.