

## General Assembly of the Association of Balkan Chambers in Nicosia, Cyprus - REDUCTION OF THE PUBLIC CONSUMPTION AND CREATION OF AMBIENT FOR OPENING JOBS

General Assembly of the Association of Balkan Chambers, the 35<sup>th</sup> one, was held in Nicosia, Cyprus on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The host was the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry that this year is the Chairman of ABC. The Assembly was attended by representatives of Chambers from Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria and Romania.

Participants of the Assembly were welcomed by the President of the ABC, Mr. Phidias Pilides, President of the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry, who pointed out that his country is facing a great challenge and commitments to the fact that in the second half of 2012 will chair the EU. The emphasis were put on:

- engaging with important EU issues;
- presentation to the citizens of Cyprus and wider public about the advantages of EU accession and the benefits arising from it;
- solidarity and efficiency, and issues related to budget, entrepreneurship and competitiveness;
- fiscal policy and fiscal discipline;
- the energy sector, renewable energy sources, invention of hydro-carbonate in the area of Cyprus.

Also, were included and other fields of importance for the development of Cyprus and the international cooperation:

- external borders, illegal immigrations (Syria and Iran);
- intra-neighboring policy: promotion of the EU`s Mediterranean policy and the EU single policy for marine development;
- bringing closer the Western Balkan countries towards the EU.



Regarding the commitments of the Chamber, the intensive activities are directed towards:

- Promotion of the EU 2020;
- single market, competitiveness and entrepreneurship;
- access to capital, especially for small and medium sized companies;
- micro-crediting;
- reduction of administrative procedures.

Mr. Andreas Mavroyaianis, Deputy Minister for European Affairs, has pointed out to the attendees that for a small country like Cyprus in conditions of economic crisis to chair the EU Presidency are a very responsible task. The EU considers that fiscal discipline is a prerequisite for sustainable development and reduction of public spending and creating an environment for opening new jobs, especially for young educated staff. In Cyprus it is very pronounced because the unemployment rate reached 25%. Efforts are focused on Project "Better Europe - closer to the EU`s neighbors. It is essential, especially for the Western Balkan and Middle East countries, who can count on full support of Cyprus, by promoting of their interests, exchange of experiences and advices from their practice.

Highlighted were the reforms in progress in public procurement sector and promotion cooperation in the areas which didn`t exist until now. The intention is not only to deal with these issues, but to find solutions for them.



2012 is the year when the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the single market is celebrating, for the application of Cyprus is fully committed, as well as for Digital Single Market. The intention is present Cyprus as trusted partner who will contribute to bringing closer the Balkan and Middle East to the EU.

Mr. Sorin Peter Dimitriu, Vice-President of Romanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, spoke about the necessary sector and regional connection in the EU. He put the emphasis on metal industry which in his country remained vital, not any company is extinguished in the phase of EU accession, so on the basis of that, all their experiences are very important for the other candidate countries. According to him, a very important is the fast and simply access to European funds in the sector cooperation. He stated the problem for complicated and inefficient cooperation for Danube strategy.

In the Romanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the course is the realization of 32 European projects, in total amount of about € 18 million. On the event Mr. Dimitriu present official invitations to delegates to participate at the Investment Forum on Danube, that will be held in Bucharest in July 2012. He ended his speech with the information that the Romanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry plans to open representative offices in the Balkans (Serbia or Macedonia), which will be engaged primarily in promoting cooperation in the field of investments.

At the 5<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly of ABC, furthermore, were reviewed issues for improvement of the business environment through improving regulations, reduction of administrative procedures, the EU accession and the role of the Chambers in that process, investment opportunities in the Balkans. Reports were submitted regarding the creation of the web page for women`s entrepreneurship, the proposal for cooperation with ICC, proposal for cooperation with the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium -Sized Enterprises.

The next Assembly of the ABC will be held in Nicosia, Cyprus in November 2012, together with the Conference “Act for small and medium enterprises-EU”.

#### Women Entrepreneurs Council

Just before the General Assembly of the ABC, on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012 was held the meeting of the Women Entrepreneurs Council. There was debate not only for women entrepreneurship, but also for gender equality and how it will be promoted in the world of business.

Mr. Phidias Pilides explained the strong ties and cooperation between the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Cyprus Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Cyprus). The Federation made a presentation on their activities, with emphasis how they promote women`s entrepreneurship, and their undertaken initiatives and activities. There were ample information on the findings of numerous studies that were conducted to identify the areas of inequality in the workplaces and how this association works in order to achieve gender equality in the business sector.

Ms. Maro Varnavidou, Head of Gender Equality Unit in the Ministry of Justice and Public Order of Cyprus, spoke about the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2007-2013) and how are advancing the changes in different areas in terms of politics, education, social rights and other relevant issues. In her presentation she emphasized the need for increased awareness of gender inequalities, as the gap in wages etc., and especially stressed the important role of NGOs in the achieving women`s rights.

She, also, mentioned the contribution of the Gender Equality Unit in their upcoming EU Presidency, in which the priority will be family violence against women, social problem for which Cyprus has obviously developed good practices and share them with the other countries of EU, on a Conference that will be held in November 2012. Mrs. Maro Varnavidou, also, informed that during their EU Presidency, there will be a Conference on equal wages.

Mr. Yanis Kontos, Director in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism has presented the “Scheme for Strengthening of Women`s Entrepreneurship”. Furthermore were reviewed aspects of its operation and results. The number is really impressive: 380 women participated in this programme since 2008, 134 new businesses are established and 450 new jobs were created, and they are sustainable - they still exist.

Mr. Leonidas Paschalides, spoke about: “Breaking Gender Stereotypes” With passion and conviction he underlined that “women are neglected resources of business”, defining gender models and giving examples of deeply rooted stereotypes in business, he promoted a plan of action to overcome the situation in terms of jobs.

The Women Entrepreneurs Council meeting opened a number of issues related to the topic of gender equality and women's entrepreneurship, in productive and informative discussion. During the meeting were exchange views and shared rich experiences in practice, with hope that this significant cooperation will continue, in order to improve further the women's entrepreneurship and exploit the real potential of women-entrepreneurs in the ABC member countries.

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