

## **GREETING FROM GANI BUKA, PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF DURRES**

**DEAR SIRs,**

The Chamber of Commerce of Durrës welcomes you to our city, venue for the 6<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Forum of Chambers of Commerce of the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

In particular, we would like to thank the Deputies, the representatives of the Central Government as well as the representatives of the accredited Diplomatic Corps in Tirana, who are honouring us with their presence today.

It is a unique pleasure for us to meet today, together with over 90 representatives of local authorities, Chambers of Commerce, scientific institutes and universities from Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Greece and just as many Albanians, representatives of the ministries and national scientific institutes, the Prefect's Office, the Regional and City Councils, as well as businesses in the region of Durrës. With this participation we would like to show our colleagues and friends our great interest in the interregional integration processes as effective ways to accelerate Albania's path towards the great European family.

In actual fact, the Albanians, as in all the other countries of the Adriatic and Ionian basin, are becoming increasingly aware that European integration is the only way to ensure safe and sustainable development of the country and competitiveness in international markets. By now it has been made clear to everyone that the charter of European integration means achieving the standards set up by the EC with regard to completing the legislative and regulatory framework in all sectors of political, social and economic life, and particularly to stabilise and improve the authority of the Rule of Law.

Many facts demonstrate that the Albania has now made its choice for the way into Europe. There are a great number of national and international businesses supporting the standardisation of the Albanian economy at competitive levels. Investments in infrastructure, defined as a priority by the Albanian Government, are considered by private companies as a direct support to free up the potential of businesses. Plans to develop the transport sector, based on the EC's directives and transport policy, include the completion of the Eastern-Western and Northern-Southern Corridors, a segment of the Lushnje- Vlorë road, construction of the Durrës-Pristina motorway, and expansion of the ports of Durrës, Vlorë, Saranda and Shengjin.

The main partner for Albanian imports is the EC, with almost the 70% of the total. Attempts are being made to increase exports. Many companies have recently obtained certifications in order to export products from farming and livestock rearing to EC countries in particular. An upward trend can be seen for some products, such as fish and medicinal herbs. The creation of the Register of Vineyards, which has benefited from financing of almost € 500,000, is an important way to promote Albanian wine.

There are about 370,000 families currently employed in agriculture, in Albania. Albanian farmers have found profit to be made in some activities such as fruit farming, horticulture, wine growing, and livestock farming. These areas have also benefited from the government's policies for agricultural development, especially for greenhouse cultivation. Developments in agriculture and the agro-industry have been accompanied by growth and improvement in the system of control, certification and standardisation of agricultural produce, both to protect the consumer and to reach European standards and objectives.

*Tourism* remains an important economic source for our country, especially in the region of Durrës. Interest in our cultural and environmental heritage is extending the tourist season. Increasing numbers of tourist ships are coming to Durrës. The completion of the Durrës-Morinë road together with other infrastructure developments currently in progress are important for the construction industry. Tourists will then be able to visit other parts of the country, taking advantage not only of the potential for coastal tourism, but also tourism linked to cultural, historic and folk aspects, as well as mountain, environmental and farmhouse tourism.

The public sector and private companies are also focusing their attention on environmental protection and the sustainable use of natural resources. In May 2000, Albania applied for membership of the EEA, which supports the achievement of European standards for the environment.

With regard to the region of Durrës, a proposal has been drafted for the city's future development, with the general approval of political parties, businessmen, representatives of the public and experts. This proposal is based on four strengths, which are the natural and historical legacy of this region:

- ✓ The strategic geographical position, being one of the Balkans' main links from West to East and viceversa.
- ✓ The port, which is a hub along Corridor 8, Corridor 10 and the Durrës-Kosovo artery.
- ✓ The coastal area, with the most hotels in Albania, for both mass and "luxury" tourism.



The cultural and artistic heritage, rich in historic buildings and traces of thousands of years of history.

Starting from these strengths, the government authorities and those directly interested have visualised the Durrës of the future:

*The key for development of maritime, road, national and international rail transport, the hub of the country for foreign trade, the city of banks, insurance and transport companies, the country's main centre for export industries, the largest area in the country for mass and élite tourism, related to its cultural heritage.*

From this perspective, the Chamber of Commerce of Durrës has not only taken part in various projects with partners who are members of this Forum but also on a wider scale. The projects, such as “The Adriatic Secretariat”, “Adriatic Fishing Observatory” and other ongoing projects, together with four projects which have already been completed, are proof of the Chamber of Commerce’s aim to cooperate with the partners in the region in relation to issues regarding the common interest in European integration.

We therefore expect that the Round Tables will lead to projects and ideas for future cooperation, involving local participants as well as our friends and colleagues.

The Chamber of Commerce of Durrës has also been included in the EchoBusiness plan, a project of the City Councils of Durrës and Vienna. Finally, I would like to extend my best wishes for even greater and lasting success of this association in the future.

