

6TH FORUM OF THE CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE OF THE ADRIATIC AND IONIAN REGION

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Opening meeting of the Forum

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Good morning to all of you; it is a great pleasure to meet again for the sixth edition of this Forum.

First of all my regards to the Albanian authorities who have welcomed the plenary meeting of the Forum of Chambers of Commerce of the Adriatic and Ionian Region here in Durrës.

Over the past few years, the meetings have taken us from Split to the bay of Portonovo in Ancona, from Igoumenitsa to the beautiful coasts of Bosnia and Montenegro, and now here to Albania. Our annual meeting is not only an opportunity to debate and discuss shared issues, but also a chance to discover and study the various aspects of our charming Adriatic-Ionian region.

I would like to give a special welcome and thank you to the President of the Forum, Jadranka Radovanic, for her passion and commitment in leading the Association.

The Forum of the Chambers of Commerce of the Adriatic and Ionian Region was established with the aim of facing the issues of mutual interest in the cross-border area and jointly promoting inter-Adriatic cooperation projects.

In particular, the process of integrating the Western Balkans into Europe is a convincing and effective incentive to consolidate the stability of relations which the Chamber of Commerce of Ancona began in 2001, with the Chamber of Commerce of Split, and all the Balkan Countries in general. This is proved by the many projects in which the Forum, through its Secretariat, has been involved as a leading partner and privileged entity for the purpose of implementing the activities regarding single initiatives.

Also, in the wake of the EU Expansion of 1 May 2004, the European Neighbourhood Policy aims to establish strong relationships also based on partnerships with non-EU countries: the Forum is already promoting trans-national initiatives in the Balkan area, in collaboration with the EC Planning Department of the Ancona Chamber of Commerce. By adopting a systematic approach to planning, the Chamber intends to operate in an international context in order to promote the aims of both the new Neighbourhood Policy and the Cohesion Policy, as part of the European Commission Financial Prospectus for 2007-2013, continuing to support the Forum along the route towards bringing all the countries in the area into the European Union.

In this respect I would remind you that last month, an institutional mission was organised to **present the Forum at the European Commission in Brussels**. It was an initiative of great strategic interest, if we consider that the Forum, in its role as a trans-national association, has already put itself forward as a candidate, intending to continue its bid as a possible autonomous legal entity for EC programmes (especially for programmes concerning issues dealt with by the round tables that have been set up), by taking part in projects as a lead partner or partner, also involving the associated entities from the regions in question, as necessary.

It will only be possible to cultivate a shared form of planning for high-impact interventions by applying to EU funding programmes.

I am very proud to inform you that the **EC institutions, congratulated the Forum** at the meeting in Belgium, confirming that our programmes have **even anticipated the priorities of the EC cooperation policy 2007-2013**.

These signs confirm that the Forum is working in the right direction.

The Chamber of Commerce of Ancona considers commitment to the Forum as one of the essential and unique elements of its programmes.

For this reason we are ready act as promoters, but also as guarantors for the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy. This will require far-reaching political and economic reforms from our partners, which the European Union intends to support by providing technical and financial assistance, ensuring the opening up of the markets and allowing, where possible, access to EC programmes.

I believe this form of aggregation, which is particularly effective in the Adriatic basin, where coordinating the cooperation initiatives between the various countries in areas of mutual socio-economic and environmental interest, is essential in order to manage the common resources effectively, and to guarantee the conditions necessary for sustainable development.

In my view it is no less important is the consideration that – without well-structured facilities for dispute resolution and institutional and political dialogue – a tool for institutional publicity and policy implementation such as the Secretariat of the Adriatic, may become a significant factor in regional cohesion, also in view of a future expansion of the European Union: the march towards this objective has never stopped and the distance covered is considerable, if we consider that we are in line with the political priorities of the European Union.

I would like the Forum to incentivise trans-Adriatic exchanges with more concrete initiatives for the benefit of our businesses, to develop and consolidate the network of relations among countries in the area by organising opportunities for discussion and further study also among traders and their associations: It will be my responsibility to seek the harmonisation required for the spirit that inspires this legitimate and praiseworthy drive towards cross-border collaboration in the Adriatic area develops within a solid legal framework.

Lastly, I think it is important to remind you of the numerous concrete initiatives launched in the months following last year's Budva-Becici Forum:

In 2006, a project was launched to set up a Tourism Coordination Centre aimed at promoting the Adriatic-Ionian region as a whole. It was also designed to be a centre for gathering tourism-related information from members of the Forum. The **setting up of this centre was** one of the priority **objectives** arising from the **Tourism Round Table** at the last edition of the Forum.

On 13 April, the new Tourism Coordination Centre met for the first time in Ancona, at our Chamber of Commerce. The aim was to gather promotional material and tourist flows for the areas in question, necessary in order to create joint publicity and marketing tools, as well as to indicate some key international trade fairs considered to be most interesting by each country, to assess a joint participation with shared promotional initiatives. The initial observations made during the meeting were channelled into a report that will be the main subject of the Tourism Round Table during the next few days.

Last April, there was the first **Congress on Women in Business in the Adriatic and Ionian Region**, in Croatia, organised **by the Women in Business Round Table and the Forum of the Chambers of Commerce of the Adriatic and Ionian Region**. The meeting in Dubrovnik was a special opportunity to promote the experiences and exchanges of businesses run by women in the area, during an important moment for Europe. Much time was dedicated to the contributions and accounts on the situation of female entrepreneurs in the various countries

In **Dubrovnik** there was also a meeting of the members of the **International Arbitration Court** of the Adriatic and Ionian Region to deal with the development of operational tools (lists of Arbitrators, regulations, tariffs, promotional materials): the implementation of the Court's services will certainly strengthen cooperation between the areas in question.

In the light of the important results achieved I am sure that the debate during this 2006 session will once again lead to the development of concrete new proposals that will lead our Forum, as an autonomous and supranational association, to be a partner of EC projects on the issues discussed.

We hope that the Forum will be an instrument of cooperation and an opportunity for discussion among the countries of the area, setting up more and more promotional and support projects with positive effects for businesses and trade.