

**JADRANKA RADOVANIĆ**  
**President of the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce**

Good morning. Welcome to the VII event of the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce. It is a pleasure to note that all Forum associated countries are present here today. I will not go on mentioning each one of them because I think you are all equally important – WE are all equally important. I would like to thank you for being so many here today.

Given that I am Croatian, I would like to give a special thanks to the Ambassador of the Republic of Croatia, Mr Tomislav Vidošević, who is here today. I would like to thank him for having found the time to come to this event. The fact that the Republic of Croatia sent one of his representatives here gives you an indication of how important this event has become. Thank you again.

During the seven years of its existence, the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce Association has become an important institution at international level. When in 2001 I launched the idea of organising a meeting amongst all Presidents of the Chambers of Commerce in the Adriatic and Ionian region, the first president who accepted the invitation was the President of the Ancona Chamber of Commerce.

Our goal was to improve the collaboration amongst all regions and proactively plan the future development of this area. At the time we had encountered many problems: from problems of communication to the one of transportation and other economic issues. A total of seven people attended the first meeting held in Split. Look at how many of us are here today, seven years later! In this period we have dealt with many challenges and questions. We went so far in engaging with different issues that sometimes even the Presidents themselves were busy in solving requests made by single enterprises.

I would like to give you some data about trade and exchange between Croatia and other associated countries.

In 2001, the trade was equivalent to \$4.724.414. Today this amount exceeds \$11 billions. 50% of all Croatian exports are aimed at countries of the Adriatic-Ionian area. Italy is the first one of the list given that over 55% of our trade is with this country. When I talk about trade, I don't include the provision of services because if we add that then the percentages are greater.

From 2001 to 2007 the Split-Dalmatian County exported 13.7% of its production to Italy. This datum is sufficient to show you how trade and export have increased.

I would like to stress that our collaboration, the relationships built during these events and the quality of our products have all contributed to trade and exchange in some specific sectors.

Seven years ago, we started working together to solve a number of issues that, back then, were really important to us. However, today we have increased the threshold of our regional organisation to a much higher level. Every country is responsible of the management of a topic table; no country is excluded from this task. I think this is a way of working that will bring very good results.

Six workshops (topic tables) will be held this afternoon: Agriculture. Environment, Women's Entrepreneurship, Fishery/Aquaculture, Transport and Tourism. Their suggestions and conclusions will be discussed tomorrow during the plenary session of the Forum.

My opinion is that we have achieved a lot in just a few years. The work of the Forum is giving practical results. Projects such as the tourism "common brand", women's entrepreneurship, access to EU funds and training courses have been successfully completed.

The richness of this Forum consists of knowing in person more than half of the people here today. Today you are sharing this richness with me. When I was asked why I was working so hard for the construction of a strong Association of the Adriatic and Ionian

Chambers of Commerce, I replied that the greatest achievement was to get to know personally so many people, establish business relations. These business relations often help to solve many of the problems we encounter in selling our products and services; they help us to achieve our goals.

Last year this Forum was presented to EU members of Parliament, in Brussels. They were told of our work and our activities of these past years. Our goal was to receive some rewards for the work done but also to obtain some guidelines regarding how to move forward. In all meetings we were told that we were on the right track and the results so far achieved were satisfying. On why we are so successful, I said that we are committed and we believe in each other. We play our games with fairness because this is the only key to success. What goes around, comes around.

I would like to thank once again all participants. I especially thank the EU representatives under whose auspice we are working for the first time this year.