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“The European Chamber of Commerce manifesto and the cooperation in the Western Balkans”

First of all, I would like to thank the organisers of this event – an event that I consider very important.

Eurochambres has always supported active cooperation amongst Chambers of Commerce not only in terms of promoting activities but also in terms of spontaneous initiatives aimed at promoting economic integration of candidate and potentially candidate countries in the European market.

This is why we believe that no initiatives can be successful without an economic system integration.

Eurochambres is the Association of European Chambers of Commerce. It comprises 45 national Chambers of Commerce and one Chambers of Commerce association – Insuleur. Together they represent about 1,800 Chambers of Commerce at all levels and a network of about 20 millions enterprises – the vast majority of which are of small scale.

This slide shows you the geographic representation of Eurochambres, together with the list of our national and transnational members. I would like to remind you that Insuleur is a Chamber of Commerce association of islands located within the European Union. Thus, it comprises Chambers of Commerce from Spain, France, Greece, Italy, Malta and United Kingdom.

Within the European Union and its 27 state members, we represent more than 1,000 Chambers of Commerce. We have our own statute.

Of the 20 millions enterprises that we represent, the great majority are of small and medium size – mainly small.

When we say that we are an example of how economic European network works, we say the truth.

Eurochambres was constituted just after the birth of the European Union. This year we celebrate the anniversary of the Rome Treaties. Next year we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of Eurochambres.

The Eurochambres internal structure is made by a President, a Secretary and a team of about 30 staff members. The staff is divided amongst European Affairs, International Affairs and direct services to our members.

The Eurochambres mission, drafted in 1958, is to represent, serve and promote the interests of the European Chambers of Commerce and of the EU institutions.

Right from the beginning, the objectives of our great mission have been to become the vocal part of the European Chambers of Commerce in Brussels so that we could have a say in terms of EU policies which matter to all Chambers of Commerce. At the same time, we have been taking part to important European projects. We also work as a network, in synergy with all the European Chambers of Commerce.

All these objectives and all the services provided by the Chambers of Commerce at European, national, regional and local level have been signed and sealed in our Manifesto that was drafted in Salonica in October 2006. The Manifesto has four main goals: creation and development of entrepreneurship; education and training; internationalisation; and innovation. T

Eurochambres has been working on these four big priorities creating a synergy between European institutions and proposed projects.

We receive inputs from our members and, at the same time, promote new initiatives with them by using a fair and transparent system.

In the second part of my presentation – i.e. the projects completed in the Balkan region – I would like to briefly talk about the project for the assistance to the development of regional commerce that is aimed to promote economic growth and stability in this region. It was a project funded by Cards (2003 regional funds) and that involved the then 5 countries of the Western Balkans. It lasted two years, cost 2 millions Euros and was entirely managed by Eurochambres, with the help and cooperation of its Balkan members. Over 700 representatives of the Balkan Chambers of Commerce were trained on the European and regional commerce and on the internationalisation services provided by the Chambers of Commerce. Two studies on the competitiveness of the Balkans were carried out; 15 partnerships amongst EU and Balkans Chambers of Commerce took place; 25 scholarships to participate to our training courses were granted. The project was very successful and very popular. The commissary for the widening of Europe joined us for the final meeting.

I would like to show you which Chambers of Commerce were directly involved with these partnerships. Italy played an important role amongst the 15 country members.

As for the short-term future, a second project will be launched which aim is to promote investments in the Eastern Balkans. This project will involve the same regional and local Chambers of Commerce and should be launched at the end of this year.

A second initiative will involve mainly South-East Europe and will mainly look at promoting European interventions.

As for our members, those that are involved in the Balkans are mainly from South and East Europe. The others, at the moment, do not have great contacts but would be interested in getting more involved.

So far, the promoted activities have been mainly in sectors such commerce, trade, bilateral relations, creation of bilateral offices, inter-regional cooperation and cooperation amongst the Balkan Chambers.

Thanks for your attention.