

FABIO STURANI
The Mayor of Ancona

I would like to give my regards to President Radovanić, with whom I have a special relationship, based on friendship and collaboration. This relationship started during our first meeting in Split a few years back. I would like also to give my regards to Giampaolo Gaimpaoli, all military and civil authorities, the Ambassador of Croatia, the representatives of all countries that are here today in Ancona, in this splendid bay of Portonovo, at the heart of Conero Park. I think this would make a lovely postcard.

It is my pleasure and honour to host the VII event of your Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce. My pleasure is due to the fact that another initiative was started here in 1999 at the same time as this one, only seven years ago: our city together with the national association of the Italian Local Councils, started the permanent Forum of the Cities of the Adriatic and Ionian Sea. As President Giancarli reminded us, your initiative has grown in parallel to ours, because of a strong collaboration at institutional level between economic and public associations in our territory.

I believe that this is one of the main aspects that we share on this path; a process which aim is to construct a network of collaborating enterprises and entrepreneurs. This network can be built with the help of the local authorities and therefore, the Cities Forum and the Chambers of Commerce Forum. I think this is one of our strengths; our added value.

If we look at our local situation, we have managed to establish and develop political and economic relations. Nowadays, if we think of proximity and border widening policies, we all see the European Union as our common reference point. In addition to country members there is also a group of candidate members that are willing to collaborate with us for the construction, widening and consolidation of Europe as a home for everyone. We would like Croatia to be soon part of the European Union as much as we would like to see other countries to follow its path.

After all, during these years the Forum of the Cities has engaged with topics such as "sustainable development" which represents the foundation to a true and competent governance of the basin. This was possible by starting a number of specific projects carried out in accordance with the European Union programs: the city of Ancona and the Forum of the Cities will carry on working on such priority topics. I would like to remind you that the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Cities at this time is representative of 7 nations, 55 cities and one common element: our sea. Here today we note the presence of the 2007 President of the Forum, the local MP for the city of Pescara. We started from the Forum but suddenly moved to a broader collaboration with institutional bodies, with other economic players, with the universities. We worked on common and shared objectives.

This is one of the objectives we are working on. I also think this is the best way to work for a strong European Union: from the basis. We are not only interested in the European markets but also in the European people.

I think this is a political goal we need to work on and build our future upon.

Earlier on, we were reminded of the traditions and history of our city. I think of the connections, trades, economic relations, tourism, cultures, and our intersected histories. All aspects that in a different time and climate, made this part of the world quite vivacious. The same aspects that we need to work on and consolidate today.

I think that this work will have to be done together and I think that this 2 day meeting of the Chambers of Commerce will be definitely important for the prosecution of this project. This exchange of information will be useful to our administrations. There will also probably be some good suggestions and initiatives.

Looking at the experience gathered from these years of working together, I wish a further and more comprehensive collaboration. After all, the birth of the Euroadriatic

region (with Ancona, the capital of Le Marche region as one of the main players) must be seen as an encouragement for a common growth respecting, at the same time, each other's autonomy.

As I said earlier on, I believe that this could help also Ancona to become a "passage to East", because Ancona has always been a reference point in terms of trades with other twin cities of the Adriatic. I go as far as saying that we have stronger relations with some cities on the other side of the Adriatic than with some local councils within the Ancona territory.

I think that this is our right dimension and that the widening of Europe to 27 countries will offer us the possibility to have a bunch of privileged partners in this strategic area. This could be another element of growth and further development of our good relations. I think this is the way forward: starting from the small realities of our cities and our Chambers of Commerce, we should think of Europe not only in terms of geographic borders but also as a common vision, a set of common intents which we so desperately need.

Let me also remind you the distance covered so far. In 1999, when we launched the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Cities, memories of the bloody conflict in the Balkans were still strong. Nevertheless, we all looked ahead of us.

We all share the common goals of peace, cooperation, solidarity, relations amongst different nations and different people. All goals we need to work upon. I believe that we need to open to the Adriatic cities and to the Mediterranean ones in spite of our differences. I think of the Middle East and how it is looking at us. We must continue to collaborate and cooperate to protect what we have created so far.

Our experience tells us that if we will be able to bring our Adriatic dimension in Europe and in the Mediterranean region, we will provide a strong push towards a more united Europe. If we want to grow and be competitive in the global economy, we need to follow this path.

We need to perceive our sea as a connection rather than a division. Bearing this in mind, we need to continue to work together. Thanks and enjoy your work.