

TOURISM WORKGROUP

Opening speech by Mr Giampaolo Giampaoli, vice-president of the Forum of the Chambers of Commerce of the Adriatic and Ionian area

I would like to start by expressing my sincere and warm gratitude to all those who worked so hard to complete the works that will be presented here today. I would also like to thank all of you for your participation and for the contributions you will make to improve and broaden the activities carried out by the Tourism Workgroup this year.

The countries which belong to Old Europe have undertaken a path that leads to the construction of the European Union and, from the original Community of founding members, today we managed to bring together 27 countries. Many steps, some of them not traditional or conventional, have come one after the other in the process that leads to integration and enlargement towards East.

The relationships with the Countries of the Western Adriatic have always been a priority, given the strong links existing between the peoples of the two sides of the Adriatic sea. This is also testified by the fact that the Chamber of Commerce of Ancona has been active in carrying out cooperation projects with the Balkans since the 1970s.

Since 2001, the Forum of the Chambers of Commerce of the Adriatic and Ionian area has anticipated the lines of the European proximity policy, becoming a useful tool to the service of Community institutions in the cooperation for the creation of the "European neighbourhood policy" and encouraging integration of the Balkans to the European Union. The Forum, by connecting the Chambers of Commerce of the countries around the two seas, contributes to this policy's definition and implementation process, offering the regions of the Adriatic-Ionian area the optimisation of the cooperation with the various existing inter-Adriatic networks and the needs of the local communities in a wider International context.

Therefore, a close coordination with the European institutions appears to be unavoidable. For this reason in September 2007, the association has participated, at the European Parliament, in the meeting "*The Euro-Adriatic Dimension. A case of best practise: the Forum of the Chambers of Commerce of the Adriatic and Ionian area*". The presentation in Brussels has been one of the main steps of the accreditation process for the juridical recognition of the association. This represents a strategic prerequisite to sustain the solid foundations that the EU and the Western Balkans countries are trying to lay together.

The regions around the two seas have since long understood that their strength is increased if the integration process is intensified and if the construction of Europe is deeper. If once, "Europe" only meant more funds, today "Europe" also points at the possibility of the regions to obtain the ideas and tools to address and win the challenge of globalisation.

I also believe that, in order to go along this way, the links between local and regional administrations in the different countries should be strengthened. This can be done by exchanging ideas and resources (including human resources), by designing together successful local public policies and by imitating excellencies.

The work of the Tourism Workgroup reflects this vision and is a tool that aims at bringing the countries closer to one another through economic cooperation. This cooperation should lead to increase the value of natural, historical, cultural and environmental resources.

The aim of the Tourism Workgroup is to lay the foundations for the creation and the promotion of a single tourism system which is able to present itself and compete at an International level with a strong and articulated offer made up of lands, cultures and services. This offer should also be able to underline, in an organic framework, the differences, the traditions and the different historical and environmental contexts.

Another primary aim is to encourage the aggregation of local actors (entrepreneurs, administrators, sector's operators) with the aim to build operative promotion and communication networks on the basis of the natural, cultural, eno-gastronomic and artisanal resources in order to innovate and start new models of tourism and create the preconditions for an evolution of the area.

In order to carry out this ambitious programme, it is fundamental never to lose sight of the vision of the project as a whole: a project for cooperation and integration among different realities that want and must act to promote and show, in the best possible way, the value of the territories of the countries of our common area.

All of our territories have an extraordinary wealth of natural, landscape, historical and cultural beauties that, if put together in a single and varied tourist offer, can really become a focal point of attraction of International tourist fluxes.

This year we have implemented all the planned actions and activities (operational meetings among the partners, research on integrated tourist packages of the area, launch of the umbrella logo "Adrion", creation of promotional material, design and launch of the portal website www.adrion.forumaic.org) showing that it is actually possible to be together and work in an integrated way towards a common goal.

Since the creation of the Tourism Workgroup we have made one small step at a time, patiently and humbly, and the project that seven years ago seemed so ambitious is becoming reality. We are identifying and creating common and shared tools and strategies.

What we are going to present today is already a first success obtained thanks to the synergies between Chambers of Commerce and private operators, and has created the prerequisites for further action and for an even more convinced focus on the aim we want to reach: the Chamber of Commerce of Ancona is ready for the challenge.