



CHAMBER OF AETOLOAKARNANIA



9th FORUM of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce

Agrinio (Greece) 27-29 April 2009



European Economic and Social Committee

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Chamber of Commerce of Ancona
Communication Department

The 9th Edition of the Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers took place at the "Papastrateio Megaro" Congress Centre of Agrinio (GREECE) from the 27th to the 29th of April 2009. For nine years delegations of a number of Chambers of Commerce and Economy that are associated to the AIC Forum have taken part in this event by effectively promoting talks and cooperation.

The schedule of the 2009 Congress was standard: **the first day** (plenary session) was split in two parts – one dedicated to **the impact of the world crisis on the countries of the Adriatic and Ionian area** and the other one to the **opportunities available for the creation of a free-trade Euro-Mediterranean zone**; the **second day** involved **six groups working on different topics** (Agriculture, Environment, Women Entrepreneurship, Fisheries and Aquaculture, Transports and Tourism).

The president of the Forum and of the Split Chamber of Economy, Ms Jadranka Radovanić, and the President of the Chamber of Commerce of Aetoloakarnania, Mr Pa-

nagiotis Tschritzis, who was the host of this year's event, opened the work session.

Many people greeted local and international authorities and institutions. Speeches by the Vice-Minister Mr Ioannis Bougas (Greek Ministry of Development) and by the President of the Adriatic and Ionian initiative, Mr Dimitrios Macrynokolos (Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs) as well as regards from Ms Pasqualina Napoletano on behalf of the European Parliament were particularly relevant moments. MP Catuscia Marini (Member of the European Parliament), Ms Sophia Economacos (Eurochambres), Mr Panagiotis Agniadis (General Secretary of the Greek Unionchambers), Prof. Anastasios Alexandridis, lecturer at the Technological Education Institute of Western Macedonia, and Prof. Grigorios Zarotiadis, lecturer of the University of Ioannina also attended the event. With regards to the Marche Region, there were several representatives of the Marche regional government and the Province of Ancona.

The 9th Edition of the Forum took place prior to the **"European SME Week"** campaign



promoted by the European Commission DG Enterprises and Industry whose aim is to strengthen the entrepreneurial spirit and inform entrepreneurs on initiatives of their interest.

Furthermore, over the years, this event was granted with the **patronage by the EESC**, the European Economic and Social Committee – an advisory body through which the European Institutions provide opinions on proposed European laws.



THE GLOBAL CRISIS

The European scenario

Research carried out by Eurochambres consisted of sending a questionnaire to a sample of 220 European Enterprises from all economic sectors which were chosen among those that had attended the October 2008 edition of the European Parliament of Enterprises.

The research showed that the main obstacles

encountered during this critical period pertain to:

1. a general macro-economic uncertainty;
2. a decline of internal demand;
3. a growing difficulty of accessing credit.

To face up to the financial difficulties enterprises are forced to cut the investments with

possible repercussions on the unemployment rate. Furthermore, there are worries about terms of payment by client, both public and private, which are getting increasingly longer. Delayed payments further amplifies the financial difficulties experienced by enterprises which are caused by limited access to credit and limited cash flow.

Focus: the crisis in the Adriatic-Ionian area

Notwithstanding the difficulties encountered by the experts during the study of the extent of this crisis - making unreliable any forecast even in the short to medium term – it is believed that the costs derived from the crisis amount to about \$4 billions and that, as things stand, the situation will start to settle towards the end of 2009.

The Adriatic-Ionian area is characterised by a population of about 100 million, a low rate of active population (just above 45%) and an economy mainly based on services. Growth rate forecasts say that we should expect an average reduction of the GDP by 3.24% in 2009. This information should be handled

carefully as it tends to level out even non-homogenous data. Within the Adriatic-Ionian area, the situation is different from country to country. From an analysis of the information available for each single country, says Prof. Alexandridis of the "Technological Education Institute of Western Macedonia", Italy seems to have been affected by the crisis quite badly whilst Montenegro seems to have performed better (see table 1 - next page).

However, it must be observed that macro-economic parameters for Italy (GDP, population, work force, import and export) are clearly higher than those for other countries. Furthermore, other countries have scarce relations



with foreign markets (reduced volume of commercial foreign exchange) and high national debts.

The data extrapolated from the Economic Intelligence Unit also shows that the industrial production has been particularly affected by the crisis with a consequent cut in investments for research and innovation as well as a reduction of purchase in the tertiary sector.

In terms of Balance of Payment, the current balance is in the red, especially if we express the data in percentage of GDP. In countries of the Adriatic-Ionian area, there is a high need to draw on public purse. However, most countries cannot cope simply by using internal resources only and have to rely on foreign loans. After all, the fact that countries in this area do not have the same currency and, far worse, are exposed to fluctuations of the exchange rate, has a negative impact on their national debts. According to Prof. Alexandridis, joining the Euro zone provides a protective "shield" to all country members. Such statement seems particularly true for Greece.

Lastly, with regards to the liberalization of the economies, table number 2 suggests that economies of this area are relatively unfree.

In order to reduce the gap among the countries of the Adriatic-Ionian area and strengthen our chances of development, the route suggested includes European integration combined with more free economies. This opinion is shared also by Vice-Minister Ioannis Bougas of the Greek Ministry of Development. A summary of his speech at the Forum is provided as follows.

Table 1

Real GDP growth	2007	2008	2009	2010
Albania	6,0	6,0	2,0	3,0
Bosnia-Herzegovina	5,5	5,0	-1,0	1,0
Croatia	4,9	2,1	-1,8	1,4
Greece	4,0	2,9	-3,4	-0,4
Italy**	1,4	-1,0	-3,6	-0,6
Montenegro*	7,0	6,5	2,0	3,0
Serbia	7,1	5,4	0,0	2,0
Slovenia	6,8	3,5	-1,5	1,0
Adriatic countries average	2,27	0,12	-3,24	-0,32
World GDP growth	3,8	2,1	-1,9	1,2
EU-27 GDP growth	2,8	0,9	-2,9	-0,2
Euro Area	2,6	0,8	-3,4	-0,3

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit

Table 2

2009 Index of economic freedom		
Albania*	62	• Italy: moderately free
Bosnia-Herzegovina**	134	• Montenegro: mostly unfree
Croatia	116	• Serbia: mostly unfree
Greece	81	• Slovenia: moderately free
Italy	76	• Albania: moderately free
Montenegro	94	• Bosnia – Herzegovina: mostly unfree
Serbia	109	• Croatia: mostly unfree
Slovenia	68	• Greece: moderately free

Greece: actions to tackle the crisis

The international community found itself in the middle of an economic crisis never seen before. A crisis that has had negative consequences all over the world, especially on the European continent. All countries have been required to adopt suitable measures to tackle the crisis and reduce the negative impact on their economies. This crisis proves that there is a need for closer collaboration within the EU given that countries' inter-dependence is what determines the single market. We tried to tackle the worst economic crisis since World War II by coordinated measures at international and national level. However, mutual understanding and international cooperation are the only way forward if we want to try to re-establish development, provides new employment opportunities and prevent any abuse by the financial system.

To this end, Europe has already agreed to dedicate 2.5% of its GDP in support to the real economies of more vulnerable countries. Furthermore, it has decided to make 5 million Euros available for energy works - among which there is also the Greek-Italian natural gas pipeline - in order to speed up regulations and control of financial institutes at Euro-

pean level by, and at the same time, protecting public finances.

Thanks to the initiatives taken by the Greek government prior to the beginning of this crisis - such as the new law on investments, the decrease in taxation on companies and individual businesses, the program of road infrastructure and the adoption of new regulations for the financial market following the 1999-2000 crisis - Greece has found itself in a better position than other countries in the EU.

When the crisis begun last autumn, our government gave immediate priority to the real economy by taking some actions aimed at sustaining the economy with cash flow and facilitating business and family access to credit. It also supported those parts of the economy that had been hit hard and were expected to be further affected by the crisis. In this scenario, support for businesses and small and medium enterprises in particular, was at the heart of our national interest as we wanted to prompt development and protect employment. At the same time, green entrepreneurship, which is about sustainable development and respecting the environment, was encouraged. Moreover, some actions

were taken in the tourism sector (taxes were cut on real estates, visa and gross entries), a sector that has been directly hit by the crisis and which is considered a priority for the Greek Presidency of the Adriatic-Ionian initiative.

The actions taken went the opposite way of protectionism as otherwise many of our entrepreneurial activities would have been seriously jeopardised. On the contrary, the European Governments have moved towards inter-dependence which, they hope, may improve relations among countries, help creating new infrastructures and improve commerce and entrepreneurial relations. In this scenario, a collaboration between Europe and other non-European countries must also be strengthened.



Greek presidency of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative

"For Greece, the Mediterranean zone, especially the Adriatic and Ionian area, represents its geographic neighbourhood. This is the arena where we move and have established public relations over the centuries". Tells the Vice-Minister Ioannis Bougas (Greek Ministry of Development) *"We have every reason to contribute positively to overall socio-economic development and to the establishment of welfare conditions which provide special friendships and cooperation with our neighbours. For this reason we consider the Adriatic-Ionian initiative particularly significant as it marks the beginning of a cooperation among countries that are touched by the Adriatic Sea. Governments lay the foundations for this cooperation. However, private citizens as well as the entrepreneurial world – which is well represented in this Forum - can follow up and, at the same time, take part in this process."*

Last December, under the supervision of the Greek Ministry of the Development, the Greek Presidency of this initiative held a meeting for small and medium enterprises with the representatives of the country members. Ideas and opinions regarding tourism, renewable energy, the internet, clusters, innovation and exchange of professional know-how were discussed and further developed. Furthermore, opportunities available in this sector in the Adriatic and Ionian area were outlined. Our countries can and must have a fundamental role in developing inter-state entrepreneurship, creating a European energetic future and promoting professional know-how and innovation. We are asked to coordinate our actions in order to be ready to meet the challenges that lay ahead. This is another key to stability, development and progress. The interest around the growth of our area is growing and expectations are high and the bar is likely to be set higher. Your prompt response to these challenges will be, without a doubt, fundamental for the future prospects of the entire area".

Italy and the economic crisis

The Italian Union of Chambers of Commerce takes stock of the situation

To support the local economic system they are in charge of, the Italian Chambers of Commerce have acted in these directions:

- 1) They have improved access to credit for SMEs;
- 2) They have strengthened the process of internationalization;
- 3) They have provided support to the labour market;
- 4) Energy efficiency.

Access to credit

The entrepreneurial world, especially SMEs, has often pointed out the difficulty they encounter in accessing credit. In order to tackle this critical issue, governments have taken some actions aimed, initially, at

sustaining the banks and then subsequently, at facilitating access to credit for SMEs.

In the Molise region, the Campobasso Chamber of Commerce, together with the Province of Campobasso, has created a development fund for micro-entrepreneurship, self-employment and innovation. A similar thing was done by the Rome Chamber of Commerce (one of the biggest in Italy together with the one of Milan), where a fund of 110 million Euros was created for credit to SMEs.

With regards to the Lombardia Unioncamere, a regional fund of over 35 million Euros called "Confiducia" was created in order to guarantee regular funding from the banking system to all sectors of the Lombardia Region economy.

Internationalization process

The Italian Unioncamere has supported SMEs internationalization process by strengthening their penetration of foreign markets and by continuing to carry out promotional activities of the entrepreneurial system. The instruments adopted have enabled greater support to the network of Italian and international Chambers of Commerce located in 74 countries around the world and a greater efficiency of the initiatives promoted by the Italian Chambers of Commerce. This was done by coordinating initiatives at regional levels through projects that were co-funded and carried out in close collaboration with national and regional authorities.

Labour market

The efforts made by the Italian Unioncamere have been aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the measures to cushion the effects of

unemployment in order to relieve enterprises of the pressure of the wages guarantee fund and support the workers through a number of financial benefits.

Energy efficiency

Unioncamere has recently sealed an agreement with Enea, the Italian national Agency for new technologies, energy and environment whose aim is to reduce environmental impact by promoting the use of renewable energies and by trying to relocate part of the plants and production of this sector abroad. From a constructive point of view, Unioncamere is orientated towards the construction of buildings with an environmental impact that should be much lower than the ones built in the past given that energy efficiency represents 20% of the overall national energy consumption.

The Mediterranean Sea: an area of free trade by 2010

Ms Catiuscia Marini MP speech at the Forum Plenary Session (April 28th)



In her speech, MP Catiuscia Marini confirmed the interest of the European Parliament in an enlarged internal market and the creation of a free trade zone within the Mediterranean area which shouldn't exist for its own sake but, on the contrary, should promote regional cooperation and socio-environmental integration.

The European Union, in particular its Parliament, is trying to provide a new momentum for the Mediterranean area through a number of financial instruments in accordance with its neighbouring and partnership policies. Relations with countries of the Western Balkans are part of this policy. Croatia, for instance, is a country waiting to join the EU and which will probably join with the next European enlargement. In any case, the remaining countries of the Western Balkans are at the centre of the development policy promoted by Italian MPs sitting in the European Parliament.

"Your Forum represents, with originality, a significant experience

regarding how to build economic cooperation on a regional and sub-regional scale" said MP Catiuscia Marini in her speech.

The experience of expanding towards the Western Balkans will be very much part of a broader Euro-Mediterranean policy.

In the Mediterranean area, a key role will be given to neighbouring policies, economic and social policies (Regional Development Fund, Social Fund) and those instruments dedicated to Agriculture, Energy and Sustainable Development.

The European Parliament is also very keen on having an internal market that should represent a favourable context for the enterprises to grow. Therefore, its program includes a number of actions aimed at facilitating the establishment and development of SMEs - such as the definition of a European private company, the review of the regulations for public bids, the framework for research as well as measures regarding credit and credit control.

Results of the Workgroup activities

Workgroup on Agriculture



The discussion during the activities of this Workgroup was mainly focused on the production of oil and wine. The guidelines outlined by this Workgroup were based on the belief that global competition can be won only through a greater awareness regarding the added value of quality products.

Following these guidelines in the oil production sector means taking action promote the enhancement of the production quality as well as raising awareness among consumers regarding high quality olive oil. Over the next months, an international event aimed at giving greater visibility to producers and enhancing oil heritage will be organised. This event will include presentations of typical products, tasting of typical products of the Adriatic and Ionian area and training courses dedicated to quality appreciation.

In the wine sector, the Workgroup focused mainly on the expansion of the territorial marketing project called "European Network of Green shaded Wines" finalised at promoting all territories that produce Verdicchio within the Adriatic-Ionian area.

Workgroup on Environment

The ideas outlined during the activities of this Workgroup were mainly based on the assumption that the Adriatic Sea has specific characteristics: a long shape, little depth and strong current and winds. These factors increase the risk of sea pollution, especially with the presence of busy maritime traffic and the discharging of bilge water by boats in the sea. The sea of the Adriatic-Ionian area must be preserved and protected. Protecting the sea and the coasts means jointly managing the risk of sea pollution.

The risk level can be consistently reduced by tackling the attitudes and actions that cause the discharge of pollutants into the sea. Solutions include ambitious pipelines aimed at reducing the risk of sea pollution and based on the production of renewable energy (biomasses, peculiar winds and currents could be easily exploited), enhanced processes of



differentiated waste collection and recycle, even in residential areas and actions aimed at increasing the safety of the hulls of big ships that transport fuel.

The actions to be taken must be assessed on the basis of a risk assessment and issues that need to be tackled.

To this end, there is a proposal for joining the CRISES (Common Management of Sea Risk and Sea Safety in the Adriatic Euro Region) project for the management of risk and safety of the sea. This project is led by the Puglia Re-

gion as part of the IPA program and will involve all Adriatic and Ionian areas over a period of time of 36 months for a total amount of 5 million Euros.

Further proposals in terms of training for appropriate environmental management were made.

The Workgroup also proposed to organise an annual regatta to be held in the basin of reference which should be aimed at raising awareness of the sea and its resources.

Workgroup on Women Entrepreneurship

The Workgroup on women entrepreneurship of the 9th Forum of the Adriatic and Ionian Chamber of Commerce was characterised by the prestigious presence of Ms Sophia Economacos, President of the Eurochambres Women Network (EWN). The aim of this European network, that was founded in Brussels in 2003, is to enhance women's work potential and promote equal opportunities.

A number of proposed issues resulted from the activities of this Workgroup: the representatives of different countries agreed to the go ahead for the organization of the 4th Congress of Women's Enterprises in addition to carrying on updating the database with new contacts in order to monitor the needs of women entrepreneurs, even in terms of dedicated training. The event will be held in Albania and will mainly focus on "Creativity and Innovation in a time of crisis for women's enterprises".

Another project proposal resulted from the activities of this Workgroup regarding the creation of a deontological code for women's entrepreneurship which should help

enhancing its value and quality.

"Women entrepreneurs contribute to creating job opportunities and improving the entrepreneurial culture and economic development. "Where there is work, there is progress" is what was stressed by the Greek representatives. "Therefore, we need to qualify women's entrepreneurship through an "Ethical Code" that can exploit women's vocations and, at the same time, help each country in raising awareness of the topic of equal opportunities and establish an entrepreneurial culture among women".

Furthermore, the proposition was put forward to take part jointly in EU projects and initiatives in order to strengthen the network of women's enterprises of the Adriatic-Ionian area. The President of the EWN, Ms Sophia Economacos, said she was willing to provide direct support to this Workgroup and ensured she would take part in the 4th Congress to illustrate EU project proposals which could be potentially interesting for women's enterprises.



Women Entrepreneurs at the III Women Entrepreneurship Congress in Montenegro - October 2008

Workgroup on Fisheries and Aquaculture



The activities of this Workgroup were characterised by the will to develop a common policy regarding fisheries and aquaculture in the Adriatic and Ionian Sea.

The fisheries sector is the subject of interest by the EU institutions which are considering the enforcement of new measures aimed at slowing down fishing activities and raising awareness about “fishing businesses” by promoting an economically and environmentally sustainable management of fishing resources.

In addition to preserving the quality of the marine and coastal environment through the application of measures aimed at reducing fishing boats’ fuel consumption, European policy is in favour of a reduction of the catch in Mediterranean waters by focusing particularly on the conservation of young species, as fishing them would compromise the reproduction of many species of fish.

A reduction in fishing will have an impact on the employment situation in this sector - a problem that many countries in the Adriatic-Ionian area are already experiencing. This will be tackled by trying to re-employ former fishermen in new jobs within other parts of this sector such as biological mariculture

and fishing tourism. In Greece, for instance, the aquaculture sector is highly developed. In 2007, this country was the biggest producer of breeding fish in the entire Mediterranean area.

Most attendants also shared the view that providing more opportunities for the development of projects on fishing tourism is fundamental to fisheries. The Marche Region has already done this in the past and will soon propose new EU-funded initiatives. The EFF (European Fisheries Fund), the new EU instrument regulating fisheries in the 2007-2013 period, has introduced new measures for financing strategic plans regarding the local development of coastal areas and for creating CAGs (Coastal Action Groups) which help to:

- maintain economic and social prosperity in fishing areas;
- preserve and sustain employment in fishing areas through the diversification of activities and application of actions finalised for social and economic recovery;
- support the quality of coastal environments;
- promote national and trans-national cooperation among fishing areas.

Workgroup on Tourism



The activities that had started last year carried on this year with the objective of promoting the Adrion trademark – the trademark that was chosen to represent the Adriatic-Ionian area for an overall promotion of the basin. During the activities of the Workgroup, disciplinary regulations for using the trademark by the interested people were presented.

The Ancona Chamber of Commerce in partnership with other Chambers and public bodies, training institutes, associations, local development agencies and tour operators of the Adriatic-Ionian area presented the activities of the project Adrion-TouR through which they intend to promote tourism in the area.

Considering all efforts made to coordinate this project as well

as the activities promoted under the single trademark, the Workgroup on tourism foresaw the Forum’s participation in the “Adrion” project as a partner. This project will be presented for the first grant of the IPA CBC Program for the Adriatic Trans-border Cooperation.

Currently, the “Adrion” project is supported by Italian Union-camere at national level and has been formally granted the support by the Senior Official Committee of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII). It was also submitted to the competent Ministry of Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Greece and Serbia and was formally shared within the Tourism and Culture Commission of the Adriatic EuroRegion.

Workgroup on Transports

The activities of the Workgroup on transports were coordinated by Ms Pano-rea Nikolopoulou, representative of the Achaia Chamber of Commerce. Members of many Greek and Croatian Chambers of Commerce as well as the Duress Port Authority, the Province of Ancona and the Marche Region all took part in this Workgroup. The discussion was mainly focused on data provided by the Sea Traffic Observatory in the Adriatic and Ionian basin as presented by Istao and on the effects triggered by the world economic recession on the area of interest.

During the discussion, the necessity of talking about intermodal transports for the entire basin was pointed out, in the light also of the number of infrastructural works funded so far by the EU. To this end, progress has been made towards the construction of the Egnatia Way - cutting Greece from East to West, as well as being provided with a wide range of intermodal services. Reasoning based on intermodality is absolutely required if we want to make the Adriatic and Ionian ports competitive – which would otherwise risk being marginalised if action were limited to simple transit – and if we want to facilitate complementary, rather than antagonistic, strategies.

In this particularly delicate economic phase even for the Adriatic and Ionian area, it is necessary to assess all the dynamics of the various members and the opportunities offered by the EU funding mechanisms with care.

The Workgroup has committed to work towards the simplification of inter-port check-point procedures in order to develop activities in the ports themselves.



CORTE INTERNAZIONALE
 DELL'ADRIATICO E DELLO IONIO
 INTERNATIONAL COURT
 OF THE ADRIATIC AND IONIAN AREA
 MEĐUNARODNI JADRANSKO-JONSKI SUD

International Court of the Adriatic and Ionian Area

This Court was formed to resolve problems caused by the presence of heterogeneous legal systems within the area that could represent an obstacle to the development of relations and traffics. This body provides qualified services of arbitration, conciliation and contract audit. Over the next months, the Court will deal with the organisation of specific training courses for entrepreneurs and consultants with the objective of promoting arbitration and conciliation procedures within the countries of the Forum area. Italy will be the referent country for Albania and Greece, while Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina will refer to Croatia.



9th FORUM EDITION FINAL DOCUMENTS

27-29 April 2009 - Agrinio (Greece)

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Chamber of Commerce President
Mr Panagiotis Tschritzis

Greeting by the Forum of the Adriatic and
Ionian Chambers of Commerce President
Ms Jadranka Radovanić

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Transports
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International Court of the Adriatic and Ionian Area

Report on the activities of the International Court of
the Adriatic and Ionian Area
Ms Željana Bevanda – Courts' Vice president



Full edition soon available at www.forumaic.org

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HOW TO JOIN THE ASSOCIATION



JOINED BY THE SEA
Adriatic and Ionian Chambers Forum

Bodies and Organizations can join the Association as fixed in art. 2, par.3 of the Charter, by forwarding the Application Form through post, fax or e-mail, accompanied by the relevant decision of the competent body.