



**FORUM**

delle Camere di Commercio dell'Adriatico e dello Ionio  
of the Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce  
Gospodarskih Komora Jadransko-jonskog područja



## **6TH CONGRESS OF THE WOMEN'S ENTERPRISES OF THE ADRIATIC AND IONIAN AREA**

**3RD-4TH NOVEMBER, 2011**

**Split (Croatia)**

The sixth Congress of the Women's enterprises of the Adriatic and Ionian Area under the title "*Networking: a tool for growth and competitiveness*" was held on 3rd and 4th November 2011 at the premises of the School of Economics in Split (Croatia).

### **Organisational secretariat:**

This established initiative was organized by the Chamber of the Economy of Split in collaboration with the Forum of the Chambers of Commerce of the Adriatic and the Ionian Area through the work of its Secretariat and the Secretariat and the Workgroup for Women Entrepreneurship.

The event, which was granted the patronage of the President of the Republic of Croatia Mr. Ivo Josipović, was organised also thanks to the support of the Ministry for the Economy, Employment and Enterprises of Croatia and with the collaboration of the Association of Croatian Women Entrepreneurs Krug.

### **Member States involved:**

**Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Italy, Serbia**

### **Other participating countries:**

Republic of Macedonia

### **Participants:**

Thanks to the topical theme dealt with, the congress was particularly successful, with the participation of over one hundred enterprises run by women from Adriatic Ionian countries.

## **WORKS DEVELOPMENT**

The works started with the contribution by the AIC Forum President, Krug Association President and President of the Split Chamber of the Economy Ms. Jadranka Radović, by the Deputy-Mayor of Split Mr. Jure Šundov, by the President of the Ancona Province Ms. Patrizia Casagrande Esposto, by the Director of the Equal Opportunities Department of the Government of the Republic of Croatia Ms. Helena Štimac Radin, by the representative of the Ministry for the Economy, Employment

and Entrepreneurship Ms. Jasminka Keser and by the Prefect of the County of Split-Dalmatia Mr. Ante Sanader.

In line with the theme of this year's edition of the congress, the President highlighted not only the importance to establish strong networks between women entrepreneurs to improve their activities, but also presented participants with the results of the previous editions of the congress providing them with updated information on currently ongoing initiatives for the establishment of the future Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion.

It was furthermore highlighted that the Government of the Republic of Croatia approved the Strategy for entrepreneurial development and the Action Plan for its implementation for the 2010-2013 period (the document is available on the website of the Ministry for the Economy of Croatia).

The director of the department for Equal Opportunities of the Croatian Government Ms. Helena Štimac Radin, reported on the new Croatian equal opportunities programme for the 2011-2015 period, which includes norms aimed at enhancing equal opportunities, reducing female unemployment by boosting births, developing enterprises run by women and resorting to self-employment.

The representative of the Ministry for the Economy, Employment and Entrepreneurship Ms. Jasminka Keser illustrated the activities of the ministry, providing participants with data and statistics on the funds made available for women enterprises.

In 2011 alone, the Ministry provided no. 1202 support measures/actions worth 11 million Kune.

During the congress central session under the title "*Networking for growth*" professor Daša Draginić from the Split School of Economics interviewed participants on their experience with reference to the use of networking.

(The contribution by the professor is enclosed to this final document).

Ms. Mary Ann Rukavina Cipetic' presented the "Equal Opportunities Regional Centre" GTF and its mission, i.e. eliminating discriminations against women on the workplace and within society at large, promoting women's employment and entrepreneurial consolidation, especially in South-Eastern Europe.

On behalf of the AIC Forum, Ms. Luciana Frontini highlighted the advantages that can be derived from networking as a well organised and aware working method, where interaction and exchange are considered to be added values. Networking is furthermore to be intended as an activity whose main protagonists are people, i.e. those who ultimately manage the fate of enterprises – women, in this case.

She also presented a working hypothesis on the networking contract, which is a new model drafted by the Ancona Chamber of Commerce to promote aggregation of enterprises without making their specificity less important, which aims at integrating resources and projects.

These forms of contracts are in line with the Italian legislation and enable the networking of enterprises from various economic sectors, thereby going beyond the territorial concept typical of clusters, facilitating contact with foreign markets, as well as the innovative and competitive ability of contracting enterprises.

The second day of the Congress was devoted to the presentation of data deriving from the monitoring of the number of Adriatic-Ionian female enterprises, with

updates on the current situation and the presentation of some leading examples of locally active female enterprises.

#### ✓ **Italy**

Luciana Frontini reported that in spite of the ongoing severe structural crisis the number of women enterprises in Italy is increasing, based on data provided by the Observatory on Women's Entrepreneurship of the National Unioncamere: from June 2010 to June 2011 the number of women's enterprises has grown by 9,815 firms, thereby registering an increase rate of 0.7%.

The number of enterprises run by women has particularly grown in the Marche Region, with a growth percentage of 1.3%. In this respect, wholesale and retail trade, agriculture services and restaurants have been the driving sectors. In the same period, individual firms have been the legal form that has been most opted for, although companies, consortia and cooperatives have also been largely established.

#### ✓ **Bosnia-Herzegovina**

According to Ms. Željana Bevanda from the Chamber of the Economy of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Ms. Mirjana Dinek from the Women Initiative Foundation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bosnia-Herzegovina still does not have a database on women enterprises (this is mainly due to the vast majority of businesses that are not yet registered, as well as to the complex registration procedure). Furthermore, the lack of a strategy for the development of women entrepreneurship and of a tangible plan to support businesses run by women was also highlighted.

#### ✓ **Montenegro**

Ms. Mirjana Paunović from the Association of women entrepreneurs of Montenegro presented the recently established association ([www.poslovnazena.com](http://www.poslovnazena.com)), which was set up in 2009 and currently has 50 businesswomen as its members.

#### ✓ **Republic of Macedonia**

The President of the Association of Businesswomen of FYROM/Republic of Macedonia Ms. Valentina Disoska confirmed, for her country too, the lack of a precise strategy for enterprises run by women; laws and credit lines for businesswomen are not enough. Further problems include the so called grey economy and women's insufficient preparation in managing their business.

The need for a strategy and a database on women's enterprises has been stressed also by Ms. Savka Todorovska, i.e. the President of the National Council for Equal Opportunities of FYROM, which comprises 106 women organizations.

#### ✓ **Croatia**

the Association of Croatian Women Entrepreneurs Krug was represented by its Deputy-President Ms. Dragica Jerkov. Krug was established 15 years ago and currently has 7 offices in the country. This widespread distribution on the territory has

led to excellent results and a successful working method. Mentors for several business sectors have been appointed within the association with the aim of supporting the entrepreneurial initiatives run by women. Today Krug includes 200 members. To date, 20,000 companies and 30,000 individual firms run by women are registered in Croatia. Ms. Jerkov furthermore pointed out that Croatia has a strategy, an action plan and a database of women's enterprises, however she also highlighted that a drop in confidence among women has been recently registered. The Vice-President therefore suggests that networking, as well as the stronger involvement of institutions can be useful tools to face this problems.

The following companies were introduced:

**Sonja Perić** "M. & T. doo" - Croatia

**Jany Hansel** "NGO Deša Dubrovnik" – Croatia

**Sonja Šegvić** "Regional Centre for the Development of entrepreneurial skills for South-Eastern European Countries" (SEECCEL) - Croatia

**Vesna Rusić** "Re Crafts" - Serbia

**Adele Pirro** "Future Consulting di Pirro Adele" - Italy

**Violeta Tadin** "Elementa Laborum Standard doo" - Croatia

**Ana Mijan** "Csj – Split Centre for Foreign Languages" - Croatia

## CONCLUSIONS

The comparison of notes and proposals made during the Congress works have strongly confirmed the need, which can now no longer be postponed, for female enterprises to use the new networking means amongst the various different business forms available, as this is a flexible tool, in step with the times and, above all, they must fly to speed up women's growth and development processes. This new alternative working method and combination of working responsibilities with family tasks actually represent a transnational "network" that goes beyond territories and borders, guaranteeing individual skills and specificities.

In this regard, as President Ms. Jadranka Radovanic' stated, the AIC Forum represents the operational arm of the Macroregion, which we all hope will be recognised as soon as possible, on economic matters connected with the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, representing the framework of the European economy.

In this sense, the subject of networking to which the congress was devoted, takes on great meaning when synergy and network become essential practices for a new transnational governance of the Adriatic-Ionian basin.

In this regard, the President of the Ancona Province Ms. Patrizia Casagrande Esposto confirmed that "the driving role played by the Chambers of Commerce and the public bodies member to the Form constitutes the necessary institutional guarantee by which to ensure mutual tools for the women's network. This initiative has the merits of being able to respond to an increasing demand for interaction between businesswomen to increase the specialised skills in the various different production sectors, necessary tools by which to ensure competitive advantage in a European context that is undergoing rapid changes".

The Congress has once again confirmed the need to pursue this working method in order to encourage the identification and exchange of best practices, networking, the need for mutual facilitation and the strengthening of women in the business world.

Participants therefore stressed the need to continue organising future congresses, as times for a comparison of notes and proposal, occasions for the exchange of knowledge, connection and information, as well as socialisation between female entrepreneurs.

The place for the next Congress will be defined according to the proposals sent to the Forum Secretariat. Participants were asked to register on the website of the Workgroup for Women Entrepreneurship of the AIC Forum, on the relevant page <http://womeninbusiness.forumaic.org> and to adopt the Charter of Values.

*Annex: Acknowledgements and Report by Prof. Daša Draginić of the School of Economics of Split.*

**It gives us great pleasure to report some notes of thanks made by the participants:**

- "Thank you for your hospitality, I can only express my great admiration for the organisation and implementation of the Congress. I wish you every success and happiness in future activities". *Neira Delic, Kemal Kapetanovic Metallurgy Institute, University of Zenica*
- "I would like to thank you for the opportunity you have given me to participate in this Congress, which has been a great opportunity of us to network and gain knowledge/information. I hope that our cooperation will be fruitful and to our mutual benefit in strengthening the economics of female and other entrepreneurs, for the whole region". *Valentina Disoska, President of the Macedonia Businesswomen's Association*
- "I am truly grateful for the sincere welcome given me at the 6th Congress of Women's Enterprises of the Adriatic and Ionian Area. Each new encounter motivates and encourages the elimination of obstacles to female entrepreneurship. I was very happy that my words and my country were included in the conclusions of last year's 5th edition held in Medjugorje and I am very happy indeed that the Serbian Chamber of Commerce has become a member of the AIC Forum. Thank you!" *Vesna Rusic', Cluster for the revitalisation of traditional crafts in Serbia*
- "I have so many impressions, which are obviously all wonderful and positive. Therefore, I wish to continue socialising and cooperating well."
- "It was fantastic to learn so much information and meet so many women filled with energy and a desire to help each other. This occasion has made me very happy and I am now impatient for a new experience at which to meet and socialise." *Mirjana Paunovic', the Montenegro Businesswomen's Association and manager of Pamark*
- "Congratulations on the Congress organisation and the subject matter chosen, which was very interesting and useful." *Ana Mijan, Director of the Split Centre for Foreign Languages*

- "I came back from the 6th Congress in Split, filled with enthusiasm for the women's businesses of the Adriatic and Ionian area. I was particularly struck, amongst other aspects, by the impeccable organisation of the meeting, to a very high level indeed".

*Miranda Bralić Pavia, HGK Rijeka*

- "I would like to offer my sincere thanks for the impeccable organisation and the enchanting, cordial atmosphere of the event." *Antonio Cvetkovic, Manager of Alsi Sea doo, Opatija*

### **"Networking experiences - With whom and how? Advantages and obstacles?"**

*Prof. Daša Draginić - Split School of Economics*

In its broader sense, the term "networking" includes the network of acquaintances of an individual - their involvement in formal and informal, personal and professional groups and associations. In the narrower sense, networking in work is a process whereby useful relations are created with other business representatives, potential customers, partners and other individuals or organisations which may help contributed towards development and success. Its very meaning means that networking is a "social capital" of people and organisations that grows and creates new values if successfully managed - the diversity of the network members and the strength of the bonds are more important than their number.

This is why as part of the Congress "Networking: a tool for growth and competitiveness", a debate was proposed on "Networking Experiences - With whom and how? Advantages and obstacles?". The debate was chaired by prof. Daša Draginić from the Split School of Economics. 50% of the participants in the Congress arriving from Croatia, Italy, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the FYROM were businesswomen.

The debate revealed different knowledge but, even more important was the request to reflect on the possibilities of improving networking:

- a) whilst the businesswomen evaluated their networking as good and sufficient, other participants evaluated it as still insufficiently and partially good;
- b) the businesswomen specified the methods by which they network: involvement in the various different women's social and working associations; creation of contacts and relations with state institutes and ministries, with chambers of commerce and professional associations, local authorities and institutions; the formal and informal associations with suppliers, customers and the competition, with local entrepreneurs (men and women); involvement and collaboration with various non-profit/non-governmental/humanitarian associations; maintenance of family relations/ties and friendships;

- c) the need was emphasised to: strengthen ties (formal and otherwise) between female entrepreneurs, a broader, more intense collaboration; more active networking with potential partners; greater mutual opening and more frequent encounters in collaboration of male and female entrepreneurs and research institutes. Additionally, a more active, focussed use was advised of the various different sector and media encounters, particularly the internet, as the most powerful tool of all networking available today.
- d) the main advantages of networking are: accessibility and exchange of information; support in solving legal and professional matters/problems; greater representation of personal/shared interests; improvement in competitiveness (greater customer satisfaction, reduced costs, etc.); acquisition of contacts and new working opportunities in addition to the strengthening/extension of the network; personal enrichment and satisfaction in the acquisition of new knowledge and friendships.
- e) obstacles for networking include: lack of time (family and work commitments); lack/unavailability of databases of economic parties; diffidence and fear with regards to the competition; inaccessibility and underdevelopment of the culture of doing business and the tradition of networking/collaboration.

The knowledge that emerged during the debate, once collected and analysed, should help allow for a self-analysis of internal critical issues and weaknesses (both personal and shared) of potential and limits, opportunities and external threats, in order to, on this basis, address future activities towards better networking of female entrepreneurs.

In this sense, we must always consider the fact that the whole of our life (and work) consists of interaction and an exchange of values that mutually satisfy various different demands (life, private and work, material and otherwise). In order to obtain interaction and satisfactory exchange, for the satisfaction of all, we need to keep the words of Z. Ziglar firmly to mind:

*"The best way to obtain what you want from another person is to help them obtain what they want".*