



WORKGROUP ON WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP FINAL DOCUMENT

Ancona, 27th May 2010

Foreword

The AIC Forum President Jadranka Radovanić opened the works by thanking the numerous participants coming from all the countries of the Adriatic-Ionian area and recalled that the Workgroup on Women's Entrepreneurship has over the years carried out several projects and initiatives to support the development of women enterprises. The Forum has given gender difference the merit of contributing to the social and economic development of the entire area.

The engagement of the Workgroup on Women's Entrepreneurship has been further strengthened with well four specific congresses on the most important and common issues faced by women enterprises, such as access to credit, innovation for competitiveness, environmental sustainability, training and the combination of work life with family life.

In this particular moment of structural economic and social crisis cooperation between subjects and territories has turned out to be the winning strategy to relaunch a number of productive sectors.

Therefore the challenge we are faced with today can be won only if we resort to the same values uniting us, i.e. the ability of doing things, equity, the desire to learn and solidarity.

It is therefore increasingly necessary to create a strong network between women enterprises to ensure the competitiveness and relaunch of SMEs, facilitating generational transfer and rewarding/stimulating entrepreneurial spirit and talent especially among young people and women, as stated by the "Small Business Act".

The President started the discussion in this way and gave the floor to participants, recalling them the agenda of the Workgroup:

- ✓ *The synergy of EU and international initiatives to support women's entrepreneurship as joint action for economic development;*
- ✓ *The Charter of Values: a model of sustainable development for the women enterprises of the Adriatic and Ionian area;*
- ✓ *Favouring recovery and stimulating entrepreneurial spirit among women: publication of the competition call for women enterprises in the Adriatic-Ionian area.*

The representative of the Ancona Chamber of Commerce Ms. Luciana Frontini took the floor and reported on the activities carried out by the Workgroup on Women's Entrepreneurship in 2009, as agreed upon on the occasion of the last edition of the Forum of the Chambers of Commerce of the Adriatic and Ionian Area held in Agrinion (Greece) in April 2009.

These activities mainly focussed on the organisation and running of the 4th Congress of the Women's Enterprises of the Adriatic and Ionian Area held in Durres in October 2009, specifically on the drafting of the Charter of Values and its related forms and in the presentation of international cooperation project proposals, such as "*WE-SEE: Woman Entrepreneurship Empowerment in South East Europe*" (South East Territorial Cooperation Programme), "*Genie Network dell'Imprenditoria Femminile*" (i.e. *Genie Network of Women Enterprises*, Interreg IVC Programme); and the other major initiative "*Women's Entrepreneurship – a job creation engine for South East Europe*", proposed by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

Ms. Frontini also illustrated the various initiatives that saw the participation of the Workgroup on Women's Entrepreneurship: the second *Giro d'Italia* of women entrepreneurs, which took place in several Italian places and was promoted by the Union of Italian Chambers of Commerce *Unioncamere*; the committees for the promotion of women's enterprises and the work carried out by the same chambers of commerce with the support of *Retecamere*; the Workshop on Enhancing Women's Entrepreneurship in SEE organized by the RCC (Regional Cooperation Council) in Sarajevo; the AII Round Table on SMEs cooperation the decided to add the issue of women's entrepreneurship in their final document; and finally several meetings held in Brussels.



She furthermore informed that the Workgroup secretariat prepared the draft regulation and the forms related to the competition call aimed at innovative women enterprises of the Adriatic and Ionian Area and updated the website and database of the women enterprises of the area.

Strategic guidelines

The proceedings went on with a very interesting discussion on access to credit in the various countries, on the issue of gender equality that still appears difficult to be implemented, as well as on the institutional and political representation of women, which is still scarcely widespread.

Interesting hints for reflection came from the presentation by Ms. Anna Danti of the DG Enterprise and Industry of the European Commission in Brussels on the possible project proposals to put forward to Brussels and the need to use the web portal to promote the visibility of enterprises, the network and above all of the possibility for women entrepreneurs from various EU Member States to cooperate, with the possibility for this cooperation to be extended also to countries in their accession stage to the EU.

The speaker made reference to the *Small Business Act* and highlighted the following three very important actions for the support of women's entrepreneurship:

- 1) the European network of women ambassadors;
- 2) the mentoring activity for business start-ups, which requires being more diffused and supported;
- 3) the need to promote talents and encourage entrepreneurship among women graduates.

These actions need to be increasingly reinforced, as to date only 8.3% of the patents issued by the European Patent Office are granted to women, 20.3% of enterprises started with venture capitals are run by women and 15% of high-tech enterprises in Europe are owned by women. In comparison to men women face more difficulties are assigned a lower score in the evaluation of the level of innovation of their business (for instance, with reference to process innovation: 4.1% for women and 7.8% for men; with reference to marketing innovation: 9.1% for women and 10.45% for men).

Women enterprises should therefore be supported with adequate financing and above all providing women entrepreneurs with more business opportunities and the creation of a favourable business environment that makes it possible for them to reach their potential success, ensure the possibility to combine family times with work times, fight against stereotypes, change the perception and roles of women, and finally change access to information with tailor-made facilities and their networking.

A very interesting contribution was offered by the representative of the Cestas Ngo, who illustrated the CO.DI.BA. project under the title "*Costruire la differenza: programma di promozione economica delle donne.*" (i.e. *Building difference: programme for the economic promotion of women*), which was launched on 1st February 2010 and has the Ancona Chamber of Commerce among its technical partners. Its main objective is to contribute to reinforce the skills of Latin-American women entrepreneurs in a number of innovative economic sectors from the point of view of sustainability, accessibility and development of gender potential.

According to Valeria Bochi of Cestas NGO women can and must hold leading positions within organizations and institutions, in the working field and within the family because development processes today in an extremely complex global context need people able to "*look beyond all appearances*" to conceive and plan a really tangible and sustainable economic and territorial development. Women know how to do it because they are able to favour relationships, exchange and the democratic nature of action.

The importance of values that guarantee for women enterprises the possibility to improve and be better organized as competitive factors was stressed also by the Secretary General of Impronta Etica, who illustrated the principles of the Charter of Equal Opportunities.

Only a few months after its official launch in October 2009 the Charter, which sees Impronta Etica as a member of the promoting committee, has already been voluntarily signed by 51 enterprises employing 430,000 workers. These are firms representing any sector and of any size. By signing the Charter they have declared their commitment to implement a working environment based on the guarantee of equal opportunities for everybody and the acknowledgement of individual potential and skills and which promotes inclusive human resources policies that are free from discrimination and prejudices and able to promote talents in all their diversity.

By way of conclusion, the common thread of the proceedings of the Workgroup was *sustainability* and its projection towards new forms of development that can enhance the potential of women, as well as *inclusive growth*; investing in skills makes it possible to reinforce economic, social and especially territorial cohesion.



Women are precious resources, they have great capacities and ideas but must learn how to promote and capitalize them, become more aware and above all be able to network.

After a long and detailed discussion participants agreed on some lines of intervention to be implemented in 2010.

Conclusions (concerted actions)

a) Reinforcing the network of Adriatic and Ionian women enterprises.

Today more than ever it is necessary to support/develop the network for the promotion and diffusion of women enterprises; test specific strategies in favour of women entrepreneurs and at the same time methodologies/good practices that have proven to be successful; stimulate entrepreneurial culture in education (i.e. in schools and universities); support the creation and growth of networks of women entrepreneurs; and raise the awareness of and inform political and economic "*decision makers*" on the specific needs of women entrepreneurs. It is furthermore necessary to evaluate the tools supporting women's entrepreneurship.



Basically, it is necessary to reward/encourage the entrepreneurial spirit of Adriatic and Ionian women and create a better environment for the establishment of cooperation networks. In order to obtain good results it is however necessary to adopt strategies that make it possible to overcome the current economic downturn and implement an intelligent, inclusive and sustainable economy.

b) Participation in EU projects.

Participants once again stressed the importance and need to start EU and international projects/initiatives to reduce gender differences, especially in entrepreneurial activities, and develop mainstreaming actions at the same time. An analysis of services already available to start from existing services to then create additional ones and at the same time the organization of training and information days for women enterprises might turn out to be a strategic tool for women and help them become more aware, which can in turn contribute to improve their quality of life and help them emerge women's subjectivity, knowledge, experiences and collective needs.

c) Sustainability and the Charter of Values of women enterprises.

Acknowledging the strength of gender difference; promoting women's entrepreneurship; promoting the added value represented by the "women's way of doing business" are only some of the objectives that the Workgroup on Women's Entrepreneurship intends to achieve with the Charter of Values of women enterprises, i.e. a document approved during the 4th Congress of the Women's Enterprises of the Adriatic and Ionian Area held in Durrës in October 2009.

This is a voluntary tool available for the female enterprises of the Adriatic and Ionian Area that reinforces and integrates the principles of the laws in force. Also those chambers of commerce willing to enhance their initiatives and good practices in favour of enterprises can sign the Charter of Values.

The registration form for enterprises and chambers of commerce can be downloaded from the website of the Workgroup on Women's Entrepreneurship <http://womeninbusiness.forumaic.org>.

The Charter of Values aims at achieving unity, growth and social cohesion. Above all it considers the enterprise as a community of people united for the achievement of a common goal, i.e. long-term sustainable development.

Doing business in an ethical and responsible way equals therefore signing a pact for a different kind of growth and for the development of the territory with all its specific and peculiar characters.

d) Contest for the concession of prizes to innovative women enterprises of the Adriatic and Ionian Area Regulation and forms.

It should be highlighted that the contest presented during the meeting proved to be extremely successful and was given the patronage of both the Province of Ancona and the Union of Italian Chambers of Commerce *Unioncamere*. The Province of Ancona declared its willingness to collaborate and grant winners a prize in the form of a grant (linked to ESF resources).

e) 5th Congress of the Women's Enterprises of the Adriatic and Ionian Area.

All participants accepted the candidature by Bosnia-Herzegovina to host the event, which will take place next autumn under the title "*Innovate to compete*"; the congress will be the occasion to launch the contest for women enterprises of the Adriatic and Ionian area.