

Good morning everybody, thank you so much to the ones who invited me today joining this meeting, but also to both business and all other kinds of women, whose presence here proves that being a woman is a resource for international cooperation.

I am Stefania Laciola, President of the Committee of female entrepreneurship of the Chamber of Commerce in Bari. I received this assignment in 2007, which was really a hard year for all Committees, due to the subjection to the Ministry of Equal Chances (Ministero delle Pari Opportunità), which has no portfolio. This changing caused the end of all appropriations previewed for the creation of enterprises as per L.215/1992, that the Ministry for Productive Business (Ministero delle Attività produttive) had provided for several years, under form of grants related to assets.

Anyway, thanks to the Chamber of Commerce of Bari sensitiveness and to the perseverance that has always characterized women, many initiatives have taken place in order to support and promote female entrepreneurship.

Among these events, the first one was: “Donnacreaimpresa” (Woman creating enterprise), by the Fiera del Levante in Bari. In a 450 square meters space, we created a meeting point for business women operating into any kind of market sectors, who demonstrated the singularity of their products and, above all, of their being women, through the organization of some thematic meetings, but also exhibitions, artisan labs and gastronomic performances.

For this reason, this was an event destined not only to women with an individual self-related plan wishing to realize it, but also to all women already active in enterprises, who looked for some areas to promote their companies.

Women have been involved into debates-meetings about the enterprise culture, trainings, new technologies and Internet, new ways of funding system, different from the Public ones, access to credits and conciliation between work and family time, through various different initiatives and activities deeply insisting on Territorial Developing Economy.

Among other events, in November 2007, the Committee I preside, has realized: “San Martino e le donne del vino” (Saint Martin and the women of wine) with the purpose to remark the growth of women role in wine productive chain and the always growing women’s care and attention about wine as a product, which is currently an actual phenomenon. After a round table which has introduced the complete female wine productive chain (researchers, producers, oenologists, wine stewards, restaurant managers, wine expert, until marketing specialists) in a striking tasting itinerary, in which the wine stewards revealed the secrets and history of tendril, giving the opportunity to taste the best and most representative production of the oenological world from Apulia.

At the same time, this year, in occasion of 8th March, the CIF organized a convention named: “L’impresa di essere donna – 100 anni di conquiste per una nuova dimensione sociale” (THE UNDERTAKING OF BEING WOMEN- 100 years conquests for a new social dimension), which had the purpose to share the results of a social goal of female conquests.

Thanks to this initiative, a higher visibility has been given to associations and some groups of women who, in many different countries, were deeply engaged into local sustainable development and we invited to this event Miss Wafa’a Dikah Hamzè, ex Minister of Lebanese government and president of the “National Committee for Lebanese Women” (Icw), in order to make women’s contribution to Economics more visible. This conference has been a meeting point for women coming from many different countries who faced together and shared everyday difficulties that they all have in common: lack of services, unemployment or underemployment, illegal work, invisibility of women’s knowledge and abilities, social and cultural exclusion. Everything is done with the desire to go over welfare and welfarist politics of everyone’s own country and to state everyone’s own resources and competencies, looking towards the internationalization and new technologies.

If we analyse all data provided by Unioncamere, it appears that in 2007, the companies leaded by women, in Apulia, have been more than 8.000 more than last year, and Southern Italy has been characterized by the highest concentration of women leaded enterprises, being the 26,6% of the total amount.

The district of Bari, has particularly been the fifth in Italy, with 30.530 enterprises.

These records crash towards with a relevant death rate, due to local services which do not satisfy specific needs: for this reason, we need actual initiatives in order to fulfil the lack of appropriate services.

Our Committee has always worked to offer services to women who want to operate into the business field (in fact women consider this activity as a gratifying job from a cultural and personal point of view) and it now offers an implementation and training lab, in order for the town of Bari, to have a meeting space where finding information about women businesses. For these reasons and due to the awareness of the past lack of information that leaded to the end of a great number of companies managed by women, we constantly invite young women attending last year of High Schools to various conventions by the Chamber of Commerce, in order to stimulate the enterprise culture through the explanation of financial tools which help into companies' creation, the Chamber of Commerce and the Committees role, the business plan, the professional training. At the same time, our Committee also organizes training courses about accounting, internal audit, the essential tools for professional businessman and the public speaking, for all women who have to face everyday the hard journey they chose.

Anyway, we also constantly need to recall local administrations to their responsibilities, to involve them in the projects definition, instituting a dialogue in order to face economical and social matters, joining together economical and employment politics with social ones. Regarding this matter, Apulia, which already promoted the law of 7/2007 in favour of life and work conciliation services, has, for the first time, promoted the creation of a code of accomplishment, inviting in a meeting the female delegations of all associations and the equal opportunities local entities, in order to establish a plan of intervention on three levels: on the region, the district and the municipality.

The first focus group concerned topics of primary relevance for the conciliation of life and work such as: the times and timetables plan and the guidelines for brands. This law, inspired to the principles of equal rights and dignity between men and women and of equity of resources, has the purpose to affirm a mutual support between people, respecting sex differences and creating new chances to women, enhancing their involvement into politics, social and cultural life and economy in Apulia. In 2008 plan, the Region of Apulia has allocated 3 millions Euro for entrepreneurship and other funding ways destined to small and medium-sized businesses for the redevelopment of the distribution system. We also have to underline the institution of a Public Register of associations of women movements and of gender no-profit cooperatives and the agreement taken with the ANCI Apulia, with the purpose of enhancing educational services for children from zero to thirtysix months by the Public and Private system. By its side, our Committee will propose again "San Martino e le donne del vino" (Saint Martin and the women of wine), weaving an invisible thread linking past and future and creating a television network, during which the three most representative districts of Italian wine production will virtually meet in order to show and compare their products and experiences; in October we have also scheduled the re-release of "Donnacreaimpresa" (Woman creating enterprise), which will show and demonstrate how being woman is a resource, involving directly business women coming from the most different market sectors.

Moreover, the Committee, always being careful about women's actual organizational exigencies in order to provide them the most appropriate legal tools helping them understanding reality, will organize in June some conventions on enterprises' social responsibilities from the gender point of view and about safety in women's working places.

Before coming to a conclusion, I would like to let you know about the recent constitution of the Mediterranean SMEs Community, which took place some days ago.

It is an entity which was born from an initiative of the Confartigianato of Bari, seated in Rome, with the adhesion of the Chamber of Commerce in Bari, the Fiera del Levante, the organisation of the SMEs in France, Romania, Turkey, Tunisia and Libya.

Also Malta, Montenegro and Slovenia showed their interest to participate.

This initiative comes out from the exigency of intensification of cooperation and integration among small and medium enterprises in the Mediterranean area for which it is very difficult to cooperate in an organised way, also because of the comparison with the Far East strong weaving factory.

This exigency is strengthened by the difficulty to realize an area of free exchange wished by the European Union before the end of 2010. The euro-Mediterranean community of small enterprises, will be, for this purpose, an important interlocutor which is actually representative in the relations with Community Institutions.

In the end, here, I wish that also Croatia will be able to adhere to the SMEs community and give its contribution for the economic and social development of smallest enterprises which are the actual wealth of each nation, being Croatia a dynamic country in the Mediterranean area, even more important because on the border with Apulia, which will be the operational seat of the new constituted entity.