



2ND CONGRESS OF WOMEN'S ENTERPRISES OF THE ADRIATIC AND IONIAN AREA

ANCONA, MAY 30 – 31, 2007

On the occasion of the 2nd Congress of Women Entrepreneurship in the Adriatic and Ionian Area held in Portonovo (Ancona) on May 30 and 31, 2007, women entrepreneurs and representatives of women's associations and regional and provincial bodies met their colleagues and authorities of the various countries in the area following the aware-raising actions of the Chambers of Commerce of the Adriatic and Ionian coasts. The climate of participation and the several contributions given at various levels during the days of work in Portonovo definitely widened the working scenario for all enterprises in the Adriatic area.

The event was organized by the AIC Forum Workgroup on Women Entrepreneurship and the Committee for the Promotion of Women's Enterprises of the Chamber of Commerce of Ancona, who succeeded in ensuring the participation of institutions, bodies and associations of various fields.

List of participating countries: Italy, Croatia, Albania, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Greece.

Coordination: Ms. Jadranka Radovanić, President of the AIC Forum, President of the Chamber of the Economy of Split, Ms. Cristina Gorajski, President of the Committee for the Promotion of Women's Enterprises of the Chamber of Commerce of Ancona and Regional Coordinator of Women's Committees.

Participants in the meeting: 120 delegates representing the Italian Chambers of Commerce of Padua, Campobasso, Turin; Women's Committees of the Chambers of Commerce of Ancona, Pesaro-Urbino and Macerata; Unioncamere/Retecamere; representatives of the European Parliament, the Italian Trade Commission ICE (Rome), the Marche Region, the Committee for Equal Opportunities of the Marche Region, the Italian Ministries for International Trade and Equal Opportunities, the Albanian Ministry for Economics; Afaemme (Association of Organizations of Mediterranean Businesswomen); Fidapa (Federazione Donne, Arti, Professioni Affari, i.e. the Federation of Women in Arts, Professions, Business); Moica (Movimento Italiano Casalinghe, i.e. the Italian Movement of Housewives); the Penelope Association of Women working in Fisheries; the Association of Women working in the Wine sector; the Women's Forum of the City of Ancona; the Association of Albanian Women Entrepreneurs (SHGPA); the Association of Croatian Women Entrepreneurs (KRUG); the Chambers of Commerce of Montenegro, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; the Chamber of Commerce of Preveza (Greece); the Chambers of Commerce of Split and Dubrovnik (Croatia); representatives of professional associations and businesswomen active in various economic sectors.

PROCEEDINGS

The congress proceedings opened in the early afternoon of May 30 with the greetings of representatives of the Italian and European institutions and the Forum President, followed by presentations of the situation in the various participating countries.



May 31, i.e. the second day of the congress, was devoted to the presentation of the AIC women's businesses web portal "Shop Show" by the Committee of the Chamber of Commerce of Ancona, and to a number of contributions by women's enterprises and associations of the Adriatic and Ionian area, which offered the possibility of an interesting exchange of experiences from various countries and sectors.

The Congress opened with the greetings of the MEP *Luciana Sbarbati*, who stressed the importance of promoting equal opportunities in the European Year for Equal Opportunities for all through a number of priority actions for the European Commission:

- ✓ equality in economic independence for women and men;
- ✓ combination between private and professional life;
- ✓ equal representation in decision-making;
- ✓ elimination of any form of gender-based violence;
- ✓ elimination of gender-based stereotypes and promotion of equality between women and men in external and development policies.

The MEP has reported on the commitment taken on by the Commission to work in favour of the integration of the gender dimension in all of its policies; this is done by carefully reviewing the norms and implementing awareness-raising actions, as well as strengthening the dialogue between citizens (Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate) through the new European programmes, such as Progress (Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity), and the new financial endowments for the Structural Funds of the new programming period, such as FEP (Fisheries Ecosystems Plans within the Common Fisheries Policy) and FEADER/EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development).

After the MEP's initial greetings the *President del Forum* has taken up the conclusions drawn the day before by the Workgroup on Women Entrepreneurship and presented some statistics regarding the Croatian women's enterprises data base, according to which the number of women's businesses registered in the various sectors is as follows: 260 women's businesses with 2,600 employees in agriculture, 1,891 women's businesses with 29,701 employees in the manufacturing sector, 7,085 women's businesses with 28,000 employees in trade and 29 women's businesses in fisheries.

As for Italy, the *Chamber of Commerce of Ancona* has highlighted the importance of carrying out a detailed analysis of the universe of women's businesses in the Adriatic and Ionian area, as a natural follow-up of the Forum work. The contribution given by women entrepreneurs in the economic development of their respective territory is of fundamental importance thanks to these women's great ability to look for innovative solutions, establish relations and communicate. Women are able to get organized and manage several emergency situations at the same time and this female peculiarity can bring about huge advantages and added value, if it is transferred to an economic activity.

The President of the Committee for the Promotion of Women's Enterprises of the Chamber of Commerce of Ancona has greeted all participants and coined a new phrase "Women in business living in the Adriatic". Acting in her capacity as coordinator of the Committees for the Promotion of Women's Enterprises of the Chambers of Commerce of the Marche region, which are all united by joint initiatives, the President has focussed on the community project Equal: Women's resources for Business Creation in the Marche region – and launched "The Network of Women in Business: Shop Show" portal, which has been conceived and realised by the Ancona Committee as a platform for the exchange of contacts, information and knowledge between businesswomen and women's association working in the crossborder area concerned.



As for the *Marche Region*, the Regional Councillorship for Equal Opportunities has highlighted the efforts made to support projects for the development of the Balkan area. The occasion of the congress was seized to mention some of the already implemented initiatives, i.e. the Women's Network, linking women administrators, equal opportunities councillors, representatives of women's associations and professional associations in the region, or the call for proposals for the *Informa-donna* women information counters within the framework of the Interreg project, which led to the setting up of a women's counter in Albania with the task of providing information and training to women. The gender budget and the financing of the Equal project are also supported by the Region.

Unioncamere/Retecamere have given a strong contribution to the congress – their representative has highlighted the importance of the Network, which should be reinforced and act as a powerful lobby in the settings where important decisions are made. At a governmental level much work has been done to assure adequate access to credit, in order to improve the relation between banks and women's enterprises. This can be done by working on public guarantee funds and establishing real positive actions.

The *Italian Ministry for International Trade* has stressed the efforts made so far for the promotion of the Italian economic system abroad, which have mainly consisted in the diffusion of the image and competitive presence of *Made in Italy* abroad through a number of partnership initiatives (programme agreements with the Regions, agreements with professional associations and Unioncamere).

The First Forum of Women in Business, i.e. the initiative promoted last March and devoted to businesswomen coming from the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Gulf was an important occasion to establish contacts and do business for companies run by women and oriented towards international markets. The second edition of the Forum will be held in Bari on 13th September next: this time it will be addressed to businesswomen coming from South-Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Caspian Sea area and Caucasus.

The Congress has also profited by the contribution of a representative of *Eurochambres* who has illustrated the network of the European Chambers of Commerce at the service of women's enterprises and women's work in general (EWN). The objective of the network is to support the growth of women's work by promoting equal opportunities and providing specific solutions for women workers. The network of European women's businesses has promoted a number of projects aimed at reducing gender stereotypes in those professions, which can have a strong impact on the participation of women and men to the labour market (CHASE), as well as projects contributing to the integration of women in the world of business and economy, thereby increasing their role in decision-making processes (Women in business and in decision making).

The floor has then gone to the representatives of the various countries. The first of them has spoken on behalf of *Italy* and is a representative of the Ministry for Rights and Equal Opportunities.

The delegate of the Italian Deputy Minister has reported that besides various policies to support companies promoting projects for the combination of family and professional life and cooperation activities with the Regions on the new structural funds, the Italian Ministry is currently defining a National Plan for the development of women's work, with the aim of increasing the female employment rate by at least 20% in a few years and starting a new implementation phase for the Italian law no. 215 on women entrepreneurship.



As for Croatia, the deputy president of KRUG has briefly illustrated the objectives of the association of Croatian businesswomen, which was set up to promote and try to improve better living conditions in the country; the association works in close collaboration with the Office for Equal Opportunities of the Croatian Government.

25% of the 17,815 Croatian companies are women's businesses (the corresponding percentage in 2002 was 17%). The Croatian Government has allocated funds for women's enterprises for a number of years now.

As for Albania, the President of the Association of Albanian Businesswomen (SGHPA) has reported about the increase in the number of its members, as well as about important congresses that have been organized during the year for the promotion of women's enterprises. A number of problems still exist regarding training and the dissemination of information; the creation of a network is thus of fundamental importance, both to reduce the obstacles hampering the development of women's enterprises and to achieve common goals.

As for Montenegro, the delegate has confirmed the commitment of the Chamber of the Economy in favour of women's enterprises and announces the setting up of the Committee for the promotion of women entrepreneurship, which is composed of businesswomen, representatives of governmental equal opportunities offices and women's associations. The data base shows a total of 16,910 registered companies, 2,711 of which are run by women, which make up for 16% of the total and are active in trade in 66 % of the cases, services in 20% of the cases and production in 12% of the cases. Montenegro has put forward its application to host the next Congress on Women Entrepreneurship.

As for the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the delegate refers that only 12% of companies are run by women and that female businesses are mainly active in the trade and services sectors. In spite of some laws financing equal opportunities activities, there is still little institutional support given to women's businesses, in terms of both funds allocation and ministerial competences, because there is no ministry specifically devoted to equal opportunities. The delegate has asked for a larger support from the credit system, which has up to now paid little attention to women's problems. The data base of women's businesses has been accomplished, yet many firms are only formally women's enterprises.

On the occasion of the opening of the second congress day on May 31 *AFAEMME*, i.e. the Association of the Federations and Associations of Mediterranean Businesswomen, was officially presented. Its aim is to improve the conditions of women in the economic, technical and professional field and eliminate discriminations.

In particular, the Association aims at promoting projects, which intend to reinforce women's participation in the economic life, thereby raising the awareness of national authorities and various bodies alike.

The experiences of outstanding women entrepreneurs coming from both Italy and the participating countries have been coordinated by Ms. *Letizia Dini*, coach of the University of Urbino, in a very interesting series of contributions on topics ranging from agriculture to holiday farms, to women's professions at the service of businesses and art creations.

Ms. Serenella Moroder, of Moroder Agricultural Firm, has highlighted the importance of female work in agriculture, which has always replaced men's work and has been a major



driver for change in latest years. Businesses run by women pay more attention to innovation, promotion of the environment and service development; holiday farms, which well suit women, are often the cradle of learning farms, agricultural nurseries and places for horse therapy.

According to the professional *Maria Pia Pirro of Future Consulting*, women can spend their knowledge of doing and being especially in the tertiary sector, which counts about 23% of the businesses active in the region, as this sector offers women the possibility of deploying a strategic mixture of sensibility, passion, determination and creative thinking.

Ms Margherita Maculan Carretta is the coordinator of the committees of the Veneto Region Chambers of Commerce. She has presented her twenty-year long experience in the family-run business, to then move on to illustrate a typical production for Veneto, i.e. the goldsmith's production, and compare it to Marche region silverware cluster, which is one of the most important production poles in Italy and the whole world and is characterized by the presence of many women's businesses.

Ms Marisa Rodriguez Carotti has presented *Workgate International*, i.e. a counselling firm in the field of human resources and the right to work offering services to Italian and foreign private subjects and SMEs.

Her contribution has been followed by the presentation of examples of foreign women's businesses, made by their corresponding company owners supported by IT tools in their presentation (CDs and slides are already available within the proceedings).

Croatia

Neda Makjanić Kunić – Textile sector entrepreneur (Mad Modna Kuća – Split)

Jasminka Biliškov – Real estate entrepreneur (Biliškov Nekretnine d.o.o.- Split)

Sofija Šmitran – Environmental sector entrepreneur (IND-eko d.o.o- Rijeka)

Jany Hansal – Social sector entrepreneur (DESA - Dubrovnik)

Albania

Albana Laknori – Laywer – (Intellectual Property Law - Tirana)

Karolina Vasa – Environmental sector entrepreneur (Luis- Scutari)

Eleni Numani – Trades entrepreneur (Numani- Vlores)

Myzejen Konduri – Tourist sector entrepreneur (GKE- Durres)

Montenegro

Jasmina Fetahović – Textile sector engineer (Dubrava d.o.o).

The congress has ended with the analysis of the Forum final document and the commitment to organize the next meeting in Budva (Montenegro) in the third quarter of **2008** to discuss issues related to **resources, tools and bank system to support women entrepreneurship**.

By the end of the year each reference person will have to send the Forum Secretariat a report on funds, easements and possible norms in favour of women's enterprises in their respective country.