



WORKGROUP ON WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP FINAL DOCUMENT

Brindisi, 7th June 2012

Introduction

The AIC Forum Workgroup on Women Entrepreneurship, coordinated by the President Jadranka Radovanić met on Thursday 7th June in Brindisi (Italy), on the occasion of the 12th edition of the Forum of the Chambers of Commerce of the Adriatic and the Ionian Area.

The meeting saw the participation of more than 60 people representing chambers of commerce, institutions and female associations from all the countries of the Adriatic and Ionian area.

The President Ms Radovanić began works presenting the route undertaken over these last twelve years of activity of the Workgroup on women entrepreneurship, reporting on the main initiatives developed including the "Contest for the concession of prizes to innovative women enterprises of the Adriatic and Ionian Area", which rewarded the three most virtuous female businesses and assigned four special mentions to women businesses worthy of note for the originality of their business, the optimisation of human resources and the implementation of good environmental policy practices.

The awarding ceremony took place during the previous Edition of the Forum of the Chambers of Commerce of the Adriatic and Ionian Area in May 2011 in Montenegro (Budva).

The year, the Workgroup discussed the following subject:

"Restoral of balance in gender representation: the need to promote equal opportunities in institutions, the economy and politics. A comparison of experiences".

Gender equality in institutions, in the economy and in politics unfortunately remains an important challenge for all EU Member States and beyond.

Women, their skills and female businesses are a potential that as yet is very much under-used in helping encourage sustainable development.

Empowering women to take on leadership positions is important, amongst other aspects, for economic growth. This helps improve company performance and the quality in decision-making processes, governance and ethics.

The glass ceiling that prevents women from being assigned decision-making powers often discourages them from fully developing their potential and professionalism.

In this regard, through the "Europe 2020" strategy (*A strategy for intelligent, sustainable, inclusive growth, Brussels 03.03.2010 COM (2010) 2020*), the European Commission and the various Member States have stressed that one of the ways by which to improve Europe's competitiveness is precisely through a more balanced representation of women in decision-making positions that can help increase work productivity, ensure a more innovative environment and a generalised improvement in business performance.

Examining initiatives aimed at improving gender equality in decision-making processes, monitoring progress towards the objective of 40% members of a single sex in committees and groups of experts instituted by the Commission and supporting efforts to promote greater participation by women in the European Parliament elections, also as candidates, are the priorities set by the Commission for achievement by 2020.

In the strategy, in particular, the European Commission and the various Member States have stressed the importance of quickly improving representation of women in business leadership with a series of voluntary and compulsory initiatives, codes of conduct, training, mentoring and network programmes, databases, sensitisation actions in favour of social parties and businesses and through the promotion of women entrepreneurship.

Strategic outlines

The Adriatic and Ionian Area is a crossways of cultural, natural, human richness, of entrepreneurial experience and training paths that make their sharing essential in striving for a shared future development. We need to outline and consolidate new economic cooperation scenarios and the consolidation of commercial and institutional relations between neighbouring communities and countries, not only in geographic terms, but also which are linked by the same needs for growth and cultural and other knowledge.

This is what has been stressed by the Chair of the Committee for the Promotion of Women entrepreneurship of the Chamber of Commerce of Brindisi, Maria Concetta Malorzo, who participated in the works.



Women's entrepreneurship of the Adriatic and Ionian Area

The world economic context needs to operate through effective synergies and it is for this reason that it is essential to strengthen the knowledge of production fabrics and the implementation of network mechanisms on several levels, involving all territorial players.

Creating a network of knowledge and information as a key factor for the growth and development of winning, virtuous, solidarity-recognised territorial systems has been very much stressed by all participants in the Workgroup.

Moreover, all speakers have agreed on the need to promote concrete action in order that all obstacles placed between a gender representation on both an institutional level and economic level and in civil society.

During the meeting, President Radovanic then handed over to the representatives of the female associations of Croatia (KRUG), Albania (SHGPAZ), Serbia and the Committees for the Promotion of Women entrepreneurship of the Chambers of Commerce of Italy (Ancona, Foggia, Taranto, Brindisi and Ravenna) and the female associations of Apulia, which have illustrated the statistical economic data of the female businesses and considered the initiatives and projects developed, precisely in terms of the emancipation and recognition of the merits-based criteria for accessing the world of work by women and management positions in the boards of directors of public and private companies and chamber panels and in public entities.

Those attended pointed out that despite the continued major crisis experienced by all countries of the Adriatic and Ionian, the dynamics expressed by the female entrepreneurial fabric shows that it is able to drive growth combined with respect and environmental protection.

Participants have also pointed out that where there is strong female representation, this presence also helps overcome the divide between men and women.

The experiences signalled by the female associations in the territory of Apulia have been significant, who, with their choices and strategies have managed to affect the restoration of balance of gender representation.

The challenges and opportunities that can be offered by the future Macro Region of the Adriatic and Ionian were also presented, including to female businesses, thereby encouraging a territorial cohesion strategy and the comparison of ideas on projects to be involved in 2014-2020 European programming.

Finally, upon conclusion of the meeting, the Chair of the Committee for the Promotion of Women entrepreneurship of the Chamber of Commerce of Brindisi presented the book on stories of businesswomen in the territory of Brindisi entitled "*FATTORE DONNA: storie di imprenditrici nel territorio di Brindisi*" and dedicated to Melissa Bassi: the book brings together 20 stories of women and female entrepreneurs in the territory.

The common thread linking the human and professional events described in the book is, unfortunately, represented by the difficulties for women in doing business and acquiring credibility: as though talent, commitment, skill, and abilities of the women are never enough and never sufficient to be able to compete in equal terms.

The term "*fattore*", i.e. factor, taken from the book title, comes from its usage in economic research prepared by the Chamber of Commerce of Ravenna entitled "*Fattore D*" (i.e. Women as a Factor), aimed at measuring how far and in what way presence and skills of women affects business economic performance and therefore help ensure the territory's economic development; the research was presented at the workgroup by the General Secretariat of Ravenna Chamber of Commerce, Paola Morigi.

The survey was carried out on a sample of 120 businesses (60 female businesses, 60 non-female businesses) of the province, through the analysis of structured interviews and financial statements. Result: female businesses perform best.

Conclusions

More and more network must be created amongst female businesses, so that women can represent, as mentioned on several occasions during the meeting, a real "FATTORE" (the Italian use of the word "*fattore*" (factor) dates to the late 1200s and also means "administrator of an agricultural business, a farm". The *fattore* is more generally connected with the product, with what is produced when the *fattore* is joined to the work of a woman, their influence over the product takes on an additional variable, a characteristic of uniqueness and creativity, a distinctive element because that product is created by a woman; this is what has been declared to the President of the Committee of Female Entrepreneurs of Brindisi Chamber of Commerce).

Synergy must therefore be created on several levels: it is only thus that women will no longer represent a marginal subject, but rather a resource.



Action agreed

- 1) The 7th Congress of Female Businesses of the Adriatic and Ionian Area will be held in Albania this coming autumn;
- 2) Proposed themes: gender balance; update of mapping of female businesses of the Adriatic and the Ionian; relations to be developed and/or strengthened between professional associations and Committees for the Promotion of female entrepreneurs/female associations to create a network of competences and experiences;
- 3) Promotion and dissemination for the collection of adhesions to the Charter of Values of Female Businesses and related update in the dedicated section on the website of the Workgroup on Women entrepreneurship www.womeninbusiness.forum.gov.it;
- 4) Collaboration with the Equal Opportunities Commissions of professional rolls to offer assistance to female businesses of the Adriatic and Ionian during start-up;
- 5) Through its coordinator, each country must then notify the Workgroup Secretariat of the best female business in order to create a network of excellences under the scope of the Adriatic and Ionian area for the exchange of knowledge and skills, as best practices and mentors.