

The General Assembly of the Association of Balkan Chambers ended in Nicosia

The priorities of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU were presented

The General Assembly of the Association of Balkan Chambers (ABC) ended last week in Nicosia, Cyprus. In a final position-paper the Association's tasks for this year were outlined, the most important of which include:

- Active participation of the chambers of commerce and industry in the region to improve the business climate by bettering the conditions and legislation;
- Promoting investment opportunities in the region;
- BCCI to continue its work in support of the initiatives of the ABC Women Entrepreneurs Council and for improvement and updating of the website of the Council;
- The President of the Chamber of Commerce of Bosnia and Herzegovina was authorized to coordinate the execution of the Cooperation Agreement with the Regional Cooperation Council (Sarajevo);
- Chambers of Commerce and Industry from the EU member states to provide support to the Chambers of Commerce and Industry from the pre-accession states.

During the meeting in Nicosia the priorities of the upcoming Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU were presented. "Assuming the Presidency is co-substantial to membership", said Andreas Mavroyiannis, Deputy Minister to the President of Cyprus for European Affairs. Cyprus is called for the first time ever to assume the obligation and duty of Presiding the Council of the EU during the second half of 2012. For a new and small member state such as Cyprus, diving into this highly demanding ocean of responsibility is a huge challenge, especially amid times of global economic downturn, Mr. Mavroyiannis noted.

The President of BCCI Tsvetan Simeonov expressed his support for the upcoming demanding mission and the idea of Cyprus to prepare a modest agenda focused on solutions. He underlined that he expects our country to be able to learn from the experience of Cyprus later on, when our country assumes the Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2017.

According to the President of BCCI the priorities of the Cyprus Presidency may be divided in three main groups:

First, continuing and upgrading the achievements of the previous presidencies – the full implementation of the Single Market and the Digital Single Market, reform of legislation on public procurement and support of the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs Programme (COSME).

The second group of priorities includes highlighting the importance of resource efficiency, development of economy based on a low carbon and green economy. The TEN-E infrastructure will be promoted within the Connecting Europe Facility Initiative.

The third group of priorities is targeted at re-launching market integration, overcoming protectionism and removing all remaining barriers to trade. Last but not least, re-launching of the Integrated Maritime Policy, which is of utmost importance to Bulgaria as well. This position was also supported by the Romanian delegation in view of the Danube strategy. The upcoming specialized forum on maritime policy, which will take place in Nicosia in October will also be devoted to this topic.

At the end of the ABC General Assembly in Nicosia the representatives of each national chamber of commerce and industry from the EU member states had the opportunity to provide advice to their colleagues, whose countries are in pre-accession stage. Mr. Simeonov stressed that a lot of attention in the negotiation process is required. The ties with companies must be "shortened" and a timely reaction must be prepared to respond to the difficult agreements in the EU accession process. Last but not least, preparedness of the organizations is needed for the new conditions in the European Union.

According to the President of BCCI, it is extremely important that any business organization has the capacity needed to develop and implement projects especially focused on participating in European information and innovation centers.