

Wrap up Report

Round table discussion "Engaging the private sector in regional economic integration"

Mission Name: High-level dialogue regional round table between Commissioner J. Hahn and private sector representatives in the region: "Engaging the private sector in regional economic integration".

Mission Location: JORDAN/Dead Sea

Mission Date: 2nd June, 2016

Objective: To co-moderate a side event to the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Ministerial on Regional Cooperation and Planning; to have a high-level dialogue with representatives from the private sector on regional cooperation issues.

Participants: Around 30 participants from selected Business Support Organisations (BSOs), business representatives, European financial institutions, local banks and other relevant regional actors (such as the Agadir Secretariat) in 7 countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Egypt) alongside the European Commission, the Jordanian co-presidency and the Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat (UfMS). (Annex 1: list of participants)

Phases of the Mission:

- Pre-roundtable tasks:
 - Literature review
 - Preparation of a list of questions to structure the roundtable dialogue around how to engage the private sector in regional cooperation issues. (Annex 2: List of questions)
- Co-moderating the roundtable discussion with Dr Michael A. Kohler
- Wrap-up report to summarize major points of discussions, conclusions and recommendations.

Major Points of Discussions, Conclusions & Recommendations:

- Participants were encouraged by the high level dialogue, particularly given that this is the first time they experienced such a dialogue at the regional level. They recommended to have more of this kind of consultation with the private sector emphasizing that direct support from the EC to the private sector would encourage a productive involvement from the public sector as well.
- The private sector representatives felt that priority should be given to the manufacturing sector with specific emphasis on quality, standards, and differentiations of products to enhance its competitiveness at the regional and at the international levels. Nevertheless, more attention should be given as well to trade in services across regional countries, especially in the logistics and transportation sectors among others.
- Political stability is a key factor for regional private sector cooperation. Some private sector representatives suggested that a scheme to minimise political risks is needed!
- Infrastructure is also another key factor to enhance regional economic cooperation especially when it comes to maritime transportation routes.

- There is a critical need for regional networks to encourage cooperation and exchange knowledge and expertise as well as enhance business ties between the various countries in the region. Regional activities were suggested with this regard such as Regional Economic Forum, Regional Investment Forum, and Youth Entrepreneurship Forum among others.
- Regional cooperation at the business organisations level was recommended, such as establishing a regional council from Chambers of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Women and Youth business organisations among others.
- Coordinate with and build on regional successful initiatives such as the UNIDO's work at the regional level.
- Encourage more initiatives to finance investments and expansion of business at the regional level such as regional investment banks.
- Encourage more initiatives to guarantee investments and exports at the regional levels such as export guarantee funds/banks.
- Further work is needed to unify technical specifications, standards and procedures, simplify rules of origin and facilitate regulations to create a harmonised enabling business environment and minimise bureaucracy across the regional countries.
- Promote investments in common projects across regional countries.
- Focus on vocational training and at the various education levels to create skilled labour that matches employers' demands.
- Create a regional unemployment fund to encourage youth to start up their own businesses through a tailored financing facility scheme.
- Encourage regional business networks to create bridges across the private sector in the various regional countries to exchange knowledge, expertise and business cooperation.
- There is a need to unify the definition of 'SME' across the region's countries as well as encourage the collection and dissemination of common defined business and economic related data (build on the recent initiative that was launched by the UNDP).
- There is a great need to create an enabling business environment for SMEs at regional countries' level.
- There is a critical need to have an effective dialogue between the private and public sectors at country level and across countries in the region. The EC can encourage such a dialogue.
- There is a need to have an on-line up to date timely directory platform which would introduce different types of businesses within the region.