



**REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Press Release

**Macedonian CEI Presidency Hosts CEI Business Forum in Skopje on Advancing
Regional Cooperation and Market Competitiveness in Agribusiness and Food
Processing Industry**

In cooperation with the CEI Secretariat, the Chamber of Commerce for Central Europe (ACCOA) and USAID, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy of the Republic of Macedonia hosted in Skopje on 25 and 26 November 2015 a Business Forum under the incumbent Macedonian CEI Presidency dedicated to the advancement of regional cooperation and competitiveness in agribusiness and the food processing industry. Being attended by representatives of the government sectors of the CEI member states and various business associations, as well as by a large number of entrepreneurs and diplomats, the Forum provided all of them with a platform for sharing experiences and best practices in that area, offering them both an opportunity and an occasion to establish valuable new and direct business contacts between them while there.

Opening the CEI Business Forum, the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy of the Republic of Macedonia, Mihail Cvetkov, pointed out that the event provided an excellent avenue for expanding the economic cooperation between the countries from the CEI area, which, as Minister Cvetkov underlined, encompasses a diverse group of countries ranging from EU member states, EU candidate countries to countries belonging to the EU's immediate neighbourhood. The presence of representatives of various companies from the CEI area, as Mr. Cvetkov stressed, provided them, moreover, with an opportunity to establish business connections and share experiences from their fields and methods of operation.

In his address to the forum participants, Mr. Mauro di Veroli from the Delegation of the EU to the Republic of Macedonia emphasized that the expectation for the extent to which the IPARD II instrument of the EU for the 2014-2020 period was to be utilized were high, taking into consideration the wider scope and simplified grant application procedures than the ones under the IPARD I instrument for the preceding period.

In an address on behalf of the Italian Minister of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies, Maurizio Martina, the forum participants were also welcomed to the event by Dr. Pietro Gaspari, who delivered on that occasion a presentation on the current status and potentials of Italian agriculture, as well as on Italy's agricultural policy as a whole and the level and manner in which the sector and relating industries have been receiving support from the Italian government.

The CEI Deputy Secretary General, Erik Csernowitz, was also at hand to provide an overview of the Initiative's activities in his own welcoming address to the forum participants, outlining on that occasion the major events under the on-going Macedonian Presidency with the Initiative, as well. In that context, Mr. Csernowitz voiced his particular satisfaction with the fact that such a forum has been organized, stressing that by choosing to host such an

event, Macedonia had been successful in returning the CEI business component back on the Initiative's agenda.

Moreover, the President of the Chamber of Commerce for Central Europe (ACCOA), Gian Carlo Damir Murkovic, underlined the importance that business holds in general, pointing out that, even in times such as these when other significant developments are troubling both Europe and the world such as the on-going refugee crisis, the global fight against terrorism and the like, it is vital to not relent and continue stimulating both economic activity and business in parallel to those developments.

Over the course of the Forum, interested business associations and companies also had an opportunity to deliver presentations on their operations to the other participants at the event, with the Forum providing an opportunity for holding a number of B2B meetings, as well.

In their concluding remarks, the participants agreed that future activities should be focusing on making upgrades on the knowledge and experience they were provided an opportunity to share at the Forum, while doing their utmost to foster and strengthen the business contacts they were all able to establish on that occasion in the Macedonian capital, too.

Skopje, 30 November 2015