



**Bulgarian Chamber of
Commerce and Industry**



Association of Balkan Chambers

DECLARATION

by

The Association of Balkan Chambers

(A B C)

Adopted in Sofia, 23 November 2011

The Chambers of Commerce and Industry, members of the Association of Balkan Chambers, gathered in Sofia on 23 November 2011, on the occasion of the General Assembly, having discussed the current economic and financial situation declare as follows:

Considering the priorities of the ABC – regional and cross-border cooperation, Improving business environment, cooperation with similar organizations, encouraging women entrepreneurship and facilitation of foreign investments in the region

Recognizing the impact on the business circles of the global economic and financial crises as well as the economic difficulties in Europe and around the globe

Committing ourselves to the accomplishment of free trade network in the region and taking into account the possibilities presented by the Danube strategy

Recollecting the necessity of further encouraging of women entrepreneurship and creation of closer relations and active networking

Envisaging the significance of the governance principles for business associations and chambers of commerce, elaborated by the International

Chamber of Commerce World Chamber Federation ICC WCF and the Center for International Private Enterprise CIPE for the functioning of independent and mission-driven organizations,

1. We recognize that the economic crisis exposing the difficulties in the global economic and financial system has highlighted the interdependence among the economies on world – wide, European and regional level. We resolve to give new momentum to the cooperation between the business communities in South East Europe and with other neighboring regions.

2. We stress that in order to ensure strong, sustainable and balanced growth in European economies, all ABC partners have to play a part in addressing economic distortions and weaknesses in policy responses. With this objective in mind, we pledge to cooperate with the respective governments and partnering organizations to strengthen the sources of growth, to improve the economic environment and to help companies in resolving their administrative problems.

3. We agree that priority should be given to restoring market confidence and preserving recovery momentum. We welcome the measures taken by European member states to ensure a proper functioning of the market for public debt and their readiness to go further if warranted, that is essential for the European future of all ABC member countries.

4. We reaffirm our readiness to use European funds with the aim to support companies in obtaining highest quality services and better market access as well as for implementation of innovations.

5. We support the Small Business Act for Europe that recognizes the central role of SMEs in the EU economy and consider it applicable for the Balkan region.

6. We call specifically for actions that encourage more sustainable models of development, including such focused on women entrepreneurship and increase of employment. We believe that these should include market access, cross-border investments, international assistance, actions on debts and technology transfers. We support the liberalization of trade in the region in accordance with the CEFTA agreement 2006.

7. We emphasize on the importance of women entrepreneurship in the region. Gender equality is central to economic and social development. Equal opportunity for women and men supports economic growth and helps to reduce poverty. The ABC members therefore express their will to work together to improve women's access to finance, education, training, employment and

technology by promoting entrepreneurship and greater leadership for women in business and local development.

8. **We reiterate** our readiness to apply consistently the corporate governance principles of ICC WCF to the ABC and maintain a framework that focuses on members, their rights and responsibilities, putting democratic mechanisms, ensuring transparency and responsibility in decision-making.

9. **We consider** the EU Danube Region Strategy as one of the tools for sustainable development of the Danube macro-region as well as the protection of its natural areas, landscapes and cultural heritage. The ABC will foster its member chambers from the countries, included in the Danube region to utilize the opportunities provided by the strategy and its action plan. The ABC is pledging for efficient implementation of the Danube Strategy, tighter links and exchange of information through the contact offices and bilateral and multilateral contacts of the members in order to create good and quality projects, faster project implementation procedures primarily in the area of granting necessary funds by the EU institutions.

10. **We restate** the importance of simplification of visa procedures to develop regional cooperation and increase trade volume among Balkan countries, which will contribute to overcoming the current economic crisis.

On behalf of:

..... Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of
Albania

..... Foreign Trade Chamber of Bosnia and
Herzegovina

..... Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

..... Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry

..... Union of Hellenic Chambers of Commerce and
Industry

- Economic Chamber of FYROM
- Chamber of Economy of Montenegro
- Romanian National Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Serbian Chamber of Commerce
- TOBB (Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey)
- Project Implementation of CEFTA in order to improve the internationalization of the SEE Economy