

Panel discussion:

“Importance of business incubators, clusters, industrial zones and parks for local economic development

- Are we keeping pace with the EU countries and countries in the region?”

April 18, 2012, 11:00h

Belgrade Chamber of Commerce
Kneza Miloša 12 (hall on the 6th floor)

Organised by:

Serbian Chamber of Commerce,
National Agency for Regional Development (NARD),
Institute for Territorial Economic Development (InTER), and
the Association “KLUB PRVIH ŽENA”

On April 18, 2012, the Belgrade Chamber of Commerce, National Agency for Regional Development (NARD), Institute for Territorial Economic Development (InTER) and the Women’s Association “Klub prvih žena” organised the round table on “Importance of business incubators, clusters, industrial zones and parks for local economic development“ - Are we keeping pace with the EU countries and countries in the region?.

The panelists of the round table were:

- Dr Milan Janković, President – Belgrade Chamber of Commerce
- Ivica Eždenci, Director – National Agency for Regional Development
- Dragiša Mijačić, Director - Institute for Territorial Economic Development InTER
- Simon Zečević, Director – Flower Producers Cluster “Šumadijski Cvet” Kragujevac
- Mr Milan Randelović, Head of the Local Economic Development Office of the City of Niš and the Director of Free Zone “Jug”

The event was attended by around 150 representatives from companies, state institutions, universities, agencies and LED offices, local self-governments, as well as the existing business support infrastructure in Serbia.

The opening word was given by the director of the Belgrade Chamber of Commerce, Mr Milan Jankovic, who spoke about results in the previous ten years in the field of business infrastructure development, as well as the steps needed in order to ensure progress both for the economy and the citizens of Serbia.



After Mr Janković, the word was given to Ms Ivana Zeljković, President of the association “Klub prvih žena” and the General Secretary of the Belgrade Chamber of Commerce. She said that promotion of female entrepreneurship is the association’s goal, and that this event is one of the ways to support women to start their own business, to develop and find their place in Serbian economy.

Mr Dragiša Mijačić, Director of the Institute for Territorial Economic Development (InTER) and the author of the study “Analysis of Business Support Infrastructure in the Republic of Serbia” developed by InTER in cooperation with the National Agency for Regional Development, presented the results of the analysis. The analysis identified 23 business incubators, 85 cluster initiatives, 92 industrial zones, 2 existing and 4 planned industrial and technology parks, 4 existing and 4 planned free zones and 66 brownfield locations in Serbia. As one of the problems during the development of the analysis Mr Mijačić mentioned the fact that there are not registers and very few available data, and that it was difficult to obtain the necessary information. General conclusions are that business support infrastructure in Serbia developed mostly based on available donor funds or national

programmes, and very rarely based on analysis of justification of investments, especially in case of business incubators. As a result, sustainability of incubators and clusters is questioned, and it mostly depends on further donations and subsidies. Mr Mijačić underlined that it is necessary to create stronger links between clusters, incubators, industrial parks, local self-governments, universities and other institutions in order to create the optimal synergy to improve competitiveness on local and regional level.

Panel discussion started after Mr Mijačić's presentation, where panellists answered the questions asked by the facilitator, Ms Sandra Milenković.



Director of the National Agency for Regional Development, Mr Ivica Eždenci, spoke about the Analysis and said that the Agency initiated its development considering the importance of business support infrastructure development. He thanked InTER and said that Serbia needed such an analysis because it will be the foundation for planning documents in the field of business support infrastructure development and economic development. Mr considers that the state has to invest continuously in business support infrastructure, and that thanks to the previous support from the state it is now possible to see some very good examples among cluster, incubators and industrial zones/parks.

Mr Milan Randelović, Director of the Local Economic Development Office of the City of Niš said that there are many initiatives to establish clusters and incubators in the region of Southern and Eastern Serbia, but that the southeast of Serbia and the City of Niš are still underdeveloped parts of Serbia with a high unemployment rate. Establishing incubators with the goal to develop entrepreneurship, clusters to raise competitiveness of companies, as well as industrial zones and parks to attract new investments are more than needed in this part of Serbia.

Asked to give a comment about the unbalanced geographical distribution of business support infrastructure in Serbia, Mr Ivica Eždenci said that it is closely linked to the implementation of the National Investment Plan, and a result of very strict conditions set within the plan requiring complex documentation, which could not be met by many municipalities due to a lack of capacities for development of infrastructural projects. He also said that the intention of the state was not to create a misbalance, but the funds were given to those who were faster and more skilled.

The statement that the analysis showed that “Šumadijski Cvet” is one of the most successful clusters in Serbia was commented by the cluster director, Mr Simon Zečević, who said that cluster should be financially independent, and that in spite of continuous decrease in financial support, this cluster managed to increase the number of members from 5 to 200. Mr Zečević said that they cannot wait for perfect conditions, because if they existed, there would be no need for these types of organisation. Even though weak links between R&D institutions and companies was mentioned as one of the basic problems, Mr Zečević said that their cluster established cooperation with some universities and that without that cooperation they would not be able to achieve such results. Thanks to that cooperation, this cluster contributed to decreasing imports in this industry, said Mr Zečević and concluded that without links with these institutions clusters are going to fail.

Dragiša Mijačić underlined that the data collected when preparing the publication are extremely important for the development of strategic and planning documents and that they can be useful to the Government, academic community, professionals and donors. There is a great interest among businesses in getting the data about achievements through investments, changes in business support infrastructure and what they should do next, said Mr Mijačić.

As a conclusion to the discussion, estimating the position of Serbia compared to EU countries, Dragiša Mijačić said that we are only at the beginning and that some elements of business support infrastructure are moving in a good direction, because there are more and more successful clusters and business incubators, but there is still a lot of work to be done. Mr Mijačić emphasized that the goal of business support infrastructure development is raising competitiveness, and in order to achieve that, it is necessary to raise innovation capacities, which can be achieved through specialisation of business activities. That is why it is important to have an integrated approach to local and regional development that requires close cooperation between all elements of business support infrastructure.

