

Report

Ninth Ministerial Meeting on Euro-Mediterranean Industrial Cooperation, Brussels, 19 February 2014

Industry Ministers from 37 Euro-Mediterranean countries declared they planned to boost networking among businesses in their region at a meeting in Brussels on 19 February that was seen as an important milestone in reinforced industrial cooperation.

The meeting, held in Brussels, was attended by 37 countries. About half of them were represented at ministerial level. In addition, over 10 international and professional organisations (among them the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) sent high level representatives.

European Commission Vice President Antonio Tajani and Jordan's Minister for Industry and Trade, Hatem Hafez Al-Halawani Al-Tamimi co-chaired the meeting. This was the ninth Union for Mediterranean (UfM) ministerial meeting on industrial cooperation since the launch of the Barcelona Process in 1995.

Strengthening integration

Tajani, who is Commissioner for Industry and Entrepreneurship, said work in 2014-2015 needed to:

- continue to improve the business climate; promote entrepreneurship, innovation and SMEs, based on the 'Small Business Act' for Europe.

Other aims included:

- encouraging SMEs to innovate, export, network and internationalise;
- building a large pan-Euro-Mediterranean market for industrial products;
- conducting dialogues and exchanging good practice in sectors of common interest such as textiles and clothing and creative industries.

He pledged to cooperate fully with the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the ETF, the agencies of the EU member states, the OECD and all stakeholders in Mediterranean neighbour countries to further strengthen Euro-Mediterranean economic integration.

The results of an assessment of the business climate in Mediterranean neighbour countries, carried out jointly by the European Commission, the OECD, the ETF and the EIB, with reference to the 'Small Business Act' for Europe, were presented and discussed.

Ministers endorsed the findings of the assessment, which will guide future reforms.

Support for reforms

Stefan Füle, Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy and European Investment Bank Vice President Philippe de Fontaine Vive outlined the support that the EU can provide to facilitate reforms. Tajani explained that neighbouring countries could take part in EU programmes such as COSME and Horizon 2020 under certain conditions.

Minister Al Halawany and representatives of the public and private sectors in the Southern Mediterranean region spoke on strategic directions for future industrial cooperation.

Ministers agreed on the crucial role that young people, women and small and medium enterprises play in fighting youth unemployment in the Euro-Mediterranean area. They also agreed on the need to facilitate access to finance, to simplify administrative procedures, develop skills, promote innovation and internationalisation and build infrastructure to achieve inclusive growth. Italy said it would give priority to Euro-Mediterranean cooperation during its Presidency of the Council from July-December 2014.

Declaration on boosting cooperation

At the end of the meeting, Industry Ministers approved a declaration to:

- Continue the implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Enterprise and reconciliation with the 'Small Business Act' for Europe;
- Intensify networking of businesses and business support services between the EU and Mediterranean neighbour countries;
- Continue to build a large Euro-Mediterranean market, including the preparation and negotiation of the agreements on conformity assessment and acceptance of industrial products;
- Conduct dialogues in areas of common interest, such as the dialogue on the future of the textile/clothing sector (which will mark its 10th anniversary with a conference on innovation on 24-25 March 2014), and exchange best practice, such as forming clusters in creative industries sectors.