

**Annual meeting in Sharjah, UAE, 20<sup>th</sup> of  
November 2013**  
**In connection with the MENA-EU Business Salon 19-20th of  
November 2013**

**Participating delegations**

**Algeria**

Forum des Chef d'Enterprise

**Denmark**

Confederation of Danish Industry

**Egypt**

Chamber of Food Industries, FEI

**GCC**

Sharjah Chamber of Industry & Industry

Federation of GCC Chambers

**Jordan**

Jordan Chamber of Industry

**Libya**

Libyan Businessmen Council

**Morocco**

Confédération des Entreprises du Maroc

**Syria**

Damascus Chamber of Industry

**Tunisia**

UTICA

**Summary**

*In connection with the MENA-EU Business Salon the AE-network conducted its Annual Meeting the 20<sup>th</sup> of November. Following topics were presented and discussed:*

- *The Maghreb Employers' Forum to be held in Marrakech, Morocco 17-18<sup>th</sup> of February 2014, and in connection with this the 1<sup>st</sup> working group meeting of the AE-Network*
- *The "Chambers, Business Associations: Drivers of Change" SME regional conference to be held in Amman, Jordan 28-29<sup>th</sup> of April 2014, and in connection with this the 2<sup>nd</sup> working group meeting of the AE-Network*
- *The creation of an online B2B platform*
- *The current means of communication of the network*
- *The future formalization of the network*

After a warm welcome by Mr. Niels Tanderup Kristensen from DI the agenda unfolded following discussions:

## **“The Maghreb Employers’ Forum”, Marrakech, Morocco, 17-18<sup>th</sup> of February 2014**

*Ms. Sophia El Idrissi presented the Maghreb Employers’ Forum to be held in Marrakech, Morocco on the 17-18<sup>th</sup> of February. The First Working group meeting of the AE-network will be held on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February in connection with this conference.*

25 years after the creation of the Union du Maghreb Arab (UMA) between the five Maghreb countries (Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya) the objectives of an integrated economic zone with common policy in areas that support industrial, agricultural, and social development are far from being achieved. 66% of the region’s foreign trade is with the EU while trade between the Maghreb Countries represent only 3%. The market consists of 90 million people and the scope for improvement is thus wide.

As a consequence, CGEM will organize the third edition of the Maghreb Employer’s Forum with the idea to restart the UMA through a private sector initiative. This aims at creating the Maghreb Union for Trade and Investment (UMCI). The program includes both plenary as well as thematic sessions covering topics such as “How to succeed a regional integration?”, “Logistics integration: the necessary mesh to succeed in trade”, and “How to complete the customs and regulatory convergence?”.

Any inquiries related to the conference should be directed to Ms. Sophia El Idrissi on [elidrissi@cgem.ma](mailto:elidrissi@cgem.ma)

## **“Chambers, Business Associations: Drivers of Change” SME regional conference, Amman, Jordan 28-29<sup>th</sup> of April 2014**

*On behalf of Dr. Al-Mahrouq Ms. Hiba Abu Taleb presented the regional SME conference to be held in Amman, Jordan, on 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> of April 2014. With the overall topic of “Chambers, Business Associations: Drivers of Change” the conference aims at gathering relevant stakeholders from Jordan as well as from the region to discuss ways and means to best support and empower SMEs in the respective countries.*

*The second working group meeting of the AE-network will be held in connection with the conference.*

SMEs accounts for more than 90% of all firms in the MENA region and thereby contribute to both employment creation and GDP, but they remain poorly supported to reach their maximum growth potential. Through the conference, JCI aspires to open a much needed dialogue about the strong role that has to be played by chambers and business associations to support the engine of growth – the SMEs – in the MENA region. The conference will amongst other things cover subjects such as non-financial services to SMEs, the financial challenge of SMEs, and discover new path for a prosperous future.

Any questions regarding the conference are to be directed to Ms. Hiba Abu Taleb on [hiba.abutaleb@jci.org.jo](mailto:hiba.abutaleb@jci.org.jo)

## **The creation of an online B2B platform**

*Mr. Kais Sellami presented the idea of a creation of a dedicated web platform/portal for enterprises from MENA and the EU. The B2B platform will encompass businesses from both regions with the purpose of qualified matchmaking and thereby increased trade between the two regions. Through a selection process involving membership criteria and fees, only relevant and reliable businesses will become members and thus the platform will constitute*

*a viable solution to the current challenges in terms of finding reliable business partners from either region.*

The B2B platform will not be B2C or C2C, and will be an open and dynamic platform easy to use as the companies will be divided into sector and/or country of origin. Leveraging on new technologies and the internet will furthermore entail flexibility. The platform will amongst other things provide buyer & seller opportunities per sector, requests for proposals, and a trade exchange forum. It was suggested that the platform will first and foremost include members companies of the AE-network members who will therefore promote the platform to their member companies. The platform might also entail a creation of an Arab-EU help desk which will help users from both regions using the platform.

UTICA has opted to take the responsibility for the development as well as the hosting and management of the B2B platform and the subject will be further discussed on the working group meeting in Marrakesh, Morocco in February 2014. After this the platform will be developed.

Any questions or comments related to the B2B platform should be directed to Mr. Kais Sellami on [kais.sellami@discovery.com.tn](mailto:kais.sellami@discovery.com.tn).

## **Current means of communication of the AE-network**

*Ms. Karen Panum from DI outlined the current means of communication of the network: the webpage, [www.ae-network.com](http://www.ae-network.com), and the quarterly newsletter (available on the webpage) and received feedback in terms of content and forms of communication.*

While the means of communication are working satisfactory they should be subject to continuous improvement and the network therefore discussed the possibilities for increasing the communication between the members. A LinkedIn working group was suggested which is currently being established. In regards to the newsletter, most members have already contributed with interesting articles and best practice examples and any feedback regarding content was encouraged.

Comments and suggestions regarding the communication of the network as well as the themes and the content of the newsletter should be directed to Karen Panum on [kapt@di.dk](mailto:kapt@di.dk)

## **The future formalization of the network**

*Mr. Niels Tanderup Kristensen from DI outlined the status quo of the AE-network and the tasks in 2014. The vision is to build an umbrella organisation from the AE-network in order to meet future needs.*

### **Background**

The Arab-EU Network is three years old. There is still commitment among members for continuing the network as no other business network brings together the whole MENA region and EU stakeholders. In fact, no other BMO network in the MENA region covers North Africa, the Levant and the Gulf Countries at the same time.

The AE-network has made several recommendations on an overall business reform and trade policy and there is still a large, unexploited potential in trade between EU and MENA, as well as within the MENA region. The members benefit from the network by gaining access to EU and other MENA markets, by knowledge sharing, and by service and policy advocacy

inspiration. As a consequence there is interest from both European and MENA BMO's for a network to facilitate cooperation on issues of relevance for all the BMO's.

## Formalization

Due to the unique composition of the network members and due to the vast scope for enhanced intra-and inter-regional trade and economic integration, there is a need for a formalization of the AE-network.

The scope of the network is to remain a network for BMOs and not individual businesses. It will support national BMOs in gaining access to EU and other MENA markets. It will focus on business promotion (matchmaking, best practice sharing and funding opportunities and trade policy (policy harmonization, legislative intelligence and public affairs) in helping to promote the vision of national BMOs.

Hitherto, the network has been coordinated by DI, but in the future it is desirable to have a small, independent secretariat hosted by one of the participating member organizations, governed by an executive committee, and run by an executive director appointed by the committee. The cost for participating in the network will be gradually reduced by DI and partnership fees need to be implemented at some point to cover cost related to project activities, such as travel expenses.

The activities of the network in 2014 can be outlined in following table:

Functional areas	Service lines	Business processes	Outputs
Business Promotion	1 Match-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify potential partner companies in key markets (EU, MENA)</li> <li>Disseminate information to BMOs &amp; create contacts through online portal</li> <li>Conduct annual business seminars</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online B2B portal with company information</li> </ul>
	2 Best practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gather best-practices from BMOs on key issues for members (SMEs, entrepreneurship, etc.)</li> <li>Facilitate working group to draft best-practice report on key issues</li> <li>Facilitate peer-to-peer training on best-practices</li> <li>Online portal with peer-to-peer training materials and reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online portal with reports</li> <li>Contact info</li> <li>On-line learning lab</li> </ul>
	3 Access to funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify investment and funding opportunities in key markets (EU, MENA)</li> <li>Disseminate investment and funding opportunities to BMOs</li> </ul>	
Trade policy	1 Policy harmonization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify key focus sectors (e.g. agriculture, textile)</li> <li>Identify trade barriers (tariff and non-tariff) in key markets</li> <li>Facilitate BMO working groups on key issues</li> <li>Develop common policy positions on how to reduce trade barriers in focus sectors in key markets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Position papers</li> <li>Advocacy activities</li> <li>Conferences</li> </ul>
	2 Legislative intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct research on legislation, procedures (visa, import) and standards relevant for key sectors (e.g. agriculture, textile) in key markets</li> <li>Disseminate knowledge and trainings materials to BMOs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arab- EU Trade Help Desk (Legislation database)</li> </ul>
	3 Public affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify relevant multilateral policy forums (EU)</li> <li>Conduct regular meetings with key actors in relevant multilateral policy forums to influence legislation</li> <li>Meeting with national governments</li> </ul>	

The members were asked to opt for the responsibility of further qualifying the above suggestion for a local formalization of the network. JCI and FEI opted for this and as a consequence, until the next working group meeting, they will elaborate on the future structure of the network, based on the foundation presented by DI. This leads to the next steps.

## Next steps

**Towards the next working group meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> of February 2014, following was decided:**

- UTICA will work towards the creation of the B2B platform and will outline a detailed concept note on this (including an Arab-EU help desk) on the next working group meeting.
- Mr. Maher Al-Mahrouq from JCI and Mr. Yousri Tinawy from FEI will work on the formalization of the AE-network. Based on the foundation presented by DI, they will develop a suggestion for a governance structure, placement of the HQ as well as a funding structure (including membership fees). This will be presented on the next working group meeting.
- Based on the recommendations from the MENA-EU Business Salon (please see the report below) two policy issues will be chosen at the next working group meeting. These will form the focus of the working group meetings in 2014.

**All presentations from the networking meeting was well as present report can be found on [www.ae-network.com](http://www.ae-network.com)**

Invitation and program for the next working group meeting will be distributed shortly.

Yours sincerely,



Niels Tanderup Kristensen  
Manager, DI





## MENA-EU Business Salon

*The Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) in collaboration with the Confederation of Danish Industry, the Federation of UAE Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Arab-EU Business Facilitation Network, and the Federation of GCC Chambers successfully organized the MENA-EU Business Salon, which took place from the 19th-20th of November, 2013 at the SCCI's main building and hosted more than 140 participants from the MENA and EU region.*

*Besides creating network and building network at institutional as well as individual level, the purpose of the two day event was to further increase the level of expertise for senior chamber officials from the European nations towards the MENA and vice-versa. The aim of the Salon was furthermore to act as a catalyst for further mutually-beneficial cooperation projects between chambers in the two regions in the future.*



**The official report along with all information about the Salon can be found [here](#).**

The welcome session opened the stage to the potential for trade between the EU and MENA. Prominent speakers from both regions expressed strong wish to strengthen the commercial as well as diplomatic ties between the two regions.

In Session 1, speakers delineated the trends and developments in the MENA-EU trade and the areas of visa, SMEs, vocational training, women participation in the workforce, and cultural issues, and political issues such as neighbour policy were touched upon in the discussions. As a contrast, Session 2 was a dynamic discussion of challenges and opportunities seen with the eyes of foreign companies in the MENA region, but the debate also involved challenges faced by Arab businesses in the EU. Session 3 presented different angles on the current trends and developments in the region, e.g. the increasing scope of social media and the importance of promoting entrepreneurship. The session also included practical examples of various stakeholders' efforts – UNIDO presented its industrial development efforts in the region, a private Danish company presented its products, and the British Chamber was outlining challenges for the trade between the two regions.

On the second day, the first session dealt with the role of chambers. Mr. Anthony Parkes from the World Chambers Federation explained about the coordinating role of ICC and about a

new regional office in Doha. He urged the audience to make use of ICC and coordinate and collaborate amongst themselves. While Mr. Atiq Juma Nasib from the Dubai Chamber elaborated on its highly developed services to its members, Mrs. Pernille Grenaae from DI outlined how BMOs might engage in social dialogue and thereby help their members. Lastly, Dr. Jasem M. Bashara outlined the challenges faced by the Kuwait Chamber in its transition towards becoming a knowledge centre. The speakers of session 2 further elaborated on the topics from Session 1, by covering topics such as recruitment and retention of members (Mr. Ulrik Damm from DI), empowering SMEs (Ms. Hiba Abu Taleb on behalf of Dr. Maher Al-Mahrouq) and other services to members (Mr. Hussain Al Mahmoudi, Sharjah Chamber).

As the final section on the second day, participants were asked to develop recommendations based on the two day program. These were presented in the closing section and a summary of those are included below.

In the final session, participants were asked to develop recommendations based on the two day program. The participants agreed to contribute their continued efforts and work to raise the level of the Arab-European cooperation based on common interests and activating the concept of economic integration through follow-up and implementation of a number of recommendations that were highlighted in the MENA-EU Business Salon, which included the following:

1. The importance of strengthening multilateral and bilateral business relations between MENA and EU countries should be acknowledged
2. Similar meetings, events, and forums as a means of communication between the MENA and EU region to exchange economic and business related views, opinions, and experiences should be continued
3. There should be dedicated efforts to multiply and increase the volume of trade exchanged between Europe and the Arab world, with an emphasis on the importance of agreeing on an effective mechanism to deal with trade disputes and the removal of obstacles in trade, and the application of quality systems and standards specifications.
4. The establishment of additional free trade zones in Europe and the Arab nations should be encouraged as this would benefit both regions.
5. When negotiating FTAs, both sides should pay specific attention to Rules Of Origin and secure that local production with imported raw materials are not hindered
6. Support should be given to increase the interregional MENA trade and cooperation that only amounts to 1 percent of total trade today
7. Both MENA and EU have issues and action to remedy these issues should be encouraged. These issues include high unemployment rate especially among the youth as well as lack of women as board members and in high positions.
8. Political instability in the region affects economic development and foreign investment and the MENA region in particular should strive to reach political stability.
9. Arab Businessmen and Investors should encourage that no visa should be required to visit Europe as this may lead to greater business relations and trade between the regions.
10. More coordination should take place between chambers and chamber federations to produce more fruitful events and stronger private sector cooperation.
11. MENA business organizations should have a stronger voice towards regional integration and should push for a more active “General Union of Arab Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Agriculture”
12. A greater use of common and generic ICC tools for chamber development as well as for policy advocacy towards the WTO, G8 etc. is encouraged.

Elite speakers who took part of the program included: His Excellency Hussain Al-Mahmoudi, the Director General of SCCI; His Excellency Abdullah Ahmed Al-Saleh, Undersecretary for the Ministry of Economy; His Excellency Remy Rowhani, Director

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General of Qatar Chamber of Commerce; His Excellency Poul O. G. Hoiness, Danish Ambassador to the UAE & Qatar; His Excellency Marek Kloczko, Board member of Euro Chambers; Mr. Anthony Parkes, Executive Director of ICC World Chamber Federation; and His Excellency Aziz Al Rabah, Moroccan Minister of Equipment and Transportation whom was invited as a Guest of Honor in the event.