

Opening

Frank Spengler

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, I would like to welcome you to the opening session of the International Workshop on the Development of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in the Black Sea Region. I am glad to see that so many representatives from the economic and the political sectors have accepted our invitation to participate in today's opening session. I would especially like to welcome our guest speaker this afternoon the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Republic of Turkey, Assoc. Prof. Adem Şahin.

I would also like to extend a heartfelt "Hoşgeldiniz" to the participants who have come to Istanbul from abroad to represent the public sector and the SME of the 12 BSEC countries. It is a pleasure to have you here,

and we hope that you will spend some interesting and stimulating days on the shores of the Bosphorus.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation has been working with the "Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation" for ten years now. This is our 33rd meeting aiming at the support of small and medium sized enterprises in the region. The project is coordinated by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftungs Office in Turkey. However, we are always supported in our work by our colleagues in the respective regional offices in the member states. Our aims are the strengthening of the political dialogues between the actors and decision-makers for SME-policies in the different BSEC countries, the exchange of experiences and information between the SME themselves and the fostering of a better understanding between entrepreneurs and state institutions.

In the coming days, we would like to examine the development and the reality of the SMEs in the Black Sea region in the context of a workshop. However, we also want to take a look at the prospects for the future of the SMEs, their potential and their vision, and compare this to the development of SMEs in Europe and especially in Germany. We will also look into best practice models in Turkey and will visit a technology center for SMEs at the Technical University of Istanbul.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in front of this audience I do not need to emphasize the importance of SMEs for economic transformation processes and the development of a sustainable competitive economy. Concerning the fostering of SME in the BSEC countries, however, two specific aspects play a decisive role.

Firstly, the significance of the SME sector of the economy varies considerably between the different BSEC countries. The second aspect

concerns the differences in the structure of the SME sector of the economy. It includes a broad spectrum of SME that extends from informal individual economic units and one-man businesses, practically without technical equipment, to medium-sized businesses using advanced technical procedures to generate modern products.

In Germany, SMEs are the backbone of the economy. Nearly 70% of the workforce is employed in SMEs. Furthermore, SMEs provide 80% of the apprentices places, and 50% of all investments are made by them. In the European Union there are about 23 million SMEs. They provide nearly 75 million jobs and represent 99% of the totality of enterprises. In order to improve the standing of SME in the Black Sea region to levels comparable to the EU, we need to be proactive and Politicians will have to play a decisive role in this.

To conclude, I would like to extend my thanks to the president of KOSGEB, Mr Erkan Gürkan, and the president of TOSYÖV, Mr Hilmi Develi for supporting our workshop. In this context I would like to inform you, that both have accepted the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftungs invitation to visit Germany at the end of March to consolidate and expand the existing good relations with the German SME sector.

At this point I would also like to thank Finansbank for the support of today's meeting.

My particular thanks however go to our year-long partner, the Permanent International Secretariat of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, with which we have been cooperating closely and successfully over the past 10 years. Here I would like to pay special tribute to the First Deputy Secretary General of the BSEC, Ambassador Tugay Uluçevik. Mr Ambassador, I know that this is our last jointly organized event, since you are going to take on a new posi-

tion. I would like to thank you once again for many years of excellent cooperation and convey to you my best wishes for the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I hope that today's forum, dedicated to the SME-sector of the economy, will promote the exchange of ideas between politics and the economy on a regional level.

Thank you for your attention.