

## EU-Central America Association Agreement seeks momentum

Speaking at the opening of the III EU-Central America Private Sector Forum in Brussels today, EUROCHAMBRES' Secretary General Arnaldo Abruzzini urged political leaders not to miss the favourable momentum to conclude the Association Agreement between the EU and Central America, to the benefit of businesses in both regions.

*"We recognise the significant progress made over the last months by both parties in terms of market access and liberalisation. A final effort is now needed to bring this Agreement to a positive conclusion: we encourage negotiators to focus primarily on the following fields – services, sanitary and phytosanitary rules, sustainable development, sugar and banana's sectors – and to conclude negotiations within the first semester of 2009, as planned. Almost all the conditions are matched to reach an agreement, so it's the right moment!"* said Mr Abruzzini.

Both EU and Central American businesses show a positive attitude towards the conclusion of an Association Agreement (AA) between the two regions: almost 80% of Central American businesses believe the AA will enhance investment flows between the two regions, increase trade (58%) and simplify customs procedures (56%). This view is shared by EU companies as well.

A successful conclusion of this AA would also show Europe's capacity to present itself as a united political entity, able to establish solid commercial and political links with other large regions of the world. Furthermore, this Agreement would provide the right framework to deepen EU-Central America relations to their mutual benefits. This agreement would represent the first region-to-region AA successfully concluded.

As part of this event, EUROCHAMBRES and its Central American counterparts agreed to enhance the private sector's involvement in the current negotiations and, at a later stage, in the implementation of the AA.

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