

**DIALOGUE MEETING ON THE CREATION OF A NORDIC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN
CASABLANCA
May 20, 2009**

Summary

- There is a substantial interest for creating a Nordic chamber of Commerce in Morocco
- Open issues still to resolve regarding exact juridical status, financing and administration
- Swedish Trade Council will come up with an action plan that should result in a juridical, budget and administrative set-up which the Nordic companies should evaluate and preferably approve

Introduction

This Wednesday (May 20 - 2009), representatives from ten Nordic companies present in Morocco met together with H.E. Mr. Bjørn Blokhus, the ambassador of Norway to Morocco, Mr Bennet Thor Kjeldsen, the head of Scanship and the consul of Norway in Casablanca and Mr. Robert Wentrup, head of the Swedish Trade Council in Casablanca. The latter was also the one who organised the meeting.

The topic of the meeting was the potential creation of a Nordic chamber of commerce in which companies adhering to the four Nordic countries Norway, Denmark, Finland and Sweden would have a common platform for exchange of knowledge and experiences, lobbying, PR and general business oriented promotion. The need for this is evident when considering how companies from these countries individually are competing with for example French or Spanish companies supported by their respective chambers of commerce established in Morocco.

The meeting was opened by Mr. Wentrup who initiated with a brief presentation suggesting a structure for a Nordic chamber of commerce, dominantly based on the organisation of Swedish and Nordic chambers of commerce in other markets such as France, Turkey and India. Included was among other things a budget proposition, examples of both professional and social activities and a framework for administration. The presentation was finished with a few debate questions that opened the following discussion.

Raised issues – financing, activities and juridical form,

A question was immediately raised whether or not embassies could take part in the financing and the administration, instead of solely basing the funding on company membership fees. It soon became clear however, that the chamber is to act in companies' interests only (even if an ambassador is to be included in the administrating board). The ambassador added to this that the Nordic embassies in Morocco are all very small and that they neither have the time nor the ambition for the extra administering that this would entail.

The debate that followed dealt with the model as such. Fear of raising expectations too high from the beginning was heard as many thought that the suggested model was a bit too 'heavy' and demanding to start with from scratch and that an initial more light version is to prefer. Thus a partial cutting of the proposed activity plans and time for administration as well as a reshaping of the budget was considered. Comparisons were made with the French and Spanish chambers of commerce where companies normally pay around a third of the suggested membership fee (~3000-4000 MAD). Important to note here however is that their numbers of member companies are significantly higher.

After this, the idea of slimming the plan down to for example a bimonthly business lunch was discussed. This would be in similarity with the "Belgian Business Lunch", a regular event that so far has not generated much business value, but has growing potential. Many objected to this idea however,

saying that company interest in these kinds of events over time tends to decline. Soon, a common understanding was established that the need to create something formal is essential. The starting form does not need to be very prominent, but formality is key. Included in this discussion was also the idea of calling the chamber something else. In answering this point, Mr. Wentrup emphasized the upsides of calling the organisation a 'Chamber of Commerce' which among other things involve that already tested working frames from earlier mentioned chambers could be used, thus eliminating many judicial and administrative difficulties.

Another issue that was brought up was the different needs from the chamber of commerce that larger and smaller companies would have. It was agreed upon that this is to be accessed with a survey that will allow the STC to match the outline of the chamber of commerce to the diverse needs of potential members. The idea of potentially including Moroccan companies with an interest in the Nordic markets was also mentioned, all in the interest of expanding the membership on a long term basis.

Finally, a general appreciation was extended to the STC partly for the initiative of organising the event and coming up with a very constructive presentation and partly for offering itself as the administrative base for the chamber of commerce suggested. It was commonly understood that this would surely help the chamber to have an effective impact from the very beginning.

Outcome

The consensus was a general positive feeling from all partaking sides. Even though there are still a few issues to solve, the general belief was that the project at hand is feasible. Moving on from here, the STC and Mr. Wentrup is to reassess the working model by contacting the companies with a survey that is to lead to a reshaped framework with an alleviated budget proposition. Finally, a one year initial plan is to take form which companies hopefully will be able to agree on.

For the STC,
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