OFFICIAL STATEMENT ON THE EVOLUTION OF CORONAVIRUS COVID-19

Barcelona, 30th of March 2020 - Taking into consideration the current situation in all countries of the Mediterranean region and worldwide with regard to the coronavirus epidemic (Covid-19) and the rapid spread of new cases, the Association of Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASCAME), on behalf of the Chambers of Commerce and companies from the 23 affected Mediterranean countries in the three continents that the Association represents, calls for the unity of the international community to give a common, strong and decisive response to the challenges posed by the spread of the virus.

At a time when Europe and some Mediterranean countries have become the epicentre of the pandemic, the European Union, built on the principle of solidarity, cannot stand aside at such crucial juncture. A solidarity response from all European member estates that rises to the occasion, is needed more than ever.

The continuity of the pro-European sentiment, widely spread until now across the European Mediterranean region, is at stake. The request for urgent help from Italy, Spain, Greece and other affected countries in an unprecedented crisis situation, must be answered immediately in order to alleviate as soon as possible the human and economic tragedy. A challenge of such magnitude clearly calls for more than today's existing insufficient measures. For this reason, a new European policy is needed, a new "Marshall Plan" that offers a realistic solution to health and economic problems, while boosting trade and investment.

Europe cannot ignore the Mediterranean, but must be fully involved since its future is closely related to the development capacity of this region due to the strong interdependence and multiple transmission channels. The cost of not doing so would be very high.
The battle against this pandemic must be fought on several fronts. In the first place, it is urgent that all medical supplies reach the most affected areas as quickly as possible, avoiding any customs restrictions or limits to the free flow of medical supplies. Secondly, relaxing budgetary orthodoxy and country deficits is essential for European economies to survive. Finally, it is time to provide direct help to both companies and workers, while preserving jobs and offering a wide range of social benefits.

The micro, small and medium-sized companies, which constitute the backbone of the world economy, and their workers, who represent more than 80% of employment in many countries, will be the most affected by the economic impacts of Covid-19. That is why governments must commit to taking urgent stimulus and safeguard measures to maintain their viability and avoid rampant unemployment.

ASCAME wants to highlight the involvement of many Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce, members of the Association, such as those of Barcelona, Beirut, Piraeus or Alexandria among others, in the search for effective and creative solutions to a situation of enormous difficulty.