

BIOPOLITICS INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION

HELLENIC CHAPTER OF THE CLUB OF ROME



HELLENIC CHAPTER



Biopolicy & Development
Free Zones – a Catalyst for International Cooperation
under the auspices of the Embassy of the Republic of Serbia

Money Show, Piraeus Chamber of Commerce and Industry

December 12, 2015

PRESS RELEASE

A meeting on “**Biopolicy & Development: Free Zones – a Catalyst for International Cooperation**” jointly sponsored by the **Biopolitics International Organisation** and the **Hellenic Chapter of the Club of Rome** within the framework of the **Money Show** convened with great success at the **Piraeus Chamber of Commerce and Industry**, on **Saturday, December 12, 2015**, from **12:00 to 14:00**.

The meeting was chaired by **Professor Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis, President and Founder of the Biopolitics International Organisation** and the **Hellenic Chapter of the Club of Rome** and other speakers included: **Dr. Dragan Kostic, CEO of Free Zones Pirot; Nebojsa Bogdanovic, Vice President of the Regional Chamber of Commerce Niš; and, Ioannis Tzen, President of the Hellenic–Serbian Union of Trade and Industry**. The event was held under the **auspices of the Embassy of the Republic of Serbia** in Athens and was attended by Ambassadors, diplomats, entrepreneurs and other people of influence.

Prof. Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis, President and Founder of the Biopolitics International Organisation and the **Hellenic Chapter of the Club of Rome** opened the meeting by pointing out that free zones are essential in the **building of international cooperation** as they help to minimize international trade barriers, **increase employment**, and enable importers and exporters to operate under **improved conditions**. As such, they can also promote a **climate-smart approach to economic development**, inspiring leadership with a vision and moving society towards a future where *bios – all life on our planet – thrives*.

“This is a special day in many ways because it provides the opportunity to come together and search for **dimensions of hope globally**. Humanity needs a message of hope and inspiration in order to think in new ways. Pathways of despair, pathways of

destruction brought on by the economic crisis, the environmental crisis and, above all, by the **crisis in leadership**, are **global in nature and concern us all**.

The **COP21 meeting in Paris** has just been completed. In B.I.O., the ideas addressed at this meeting are being promoted for the last 30 years. Let us hope that the positive **outcome of the Paris talks will lead to prompt and fruitful action**, otherwise we will find ourselves suspended over a cliff.



Dr. Dragan Kostic, Prof. Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis and Nebojsa Bogdanovic

Every moment of life is precious because we possess bios – the most important gift. Despite the enormous progress of technology, we have found no evidence of life anywhere else in the universe. **Technology is a revelation of the truth**, of the evolution of life that has been going on for hundreds of millions of years, and where human presence represents only a very small and recent fragment.

Political leaders have considered it intelligent to **divide and rule** the Earth, this small speck of dust in the universe, and to **create wars and destruction**. The unbelievable **human suffering** inflicted onto many parts of the world bears witness to this **misguided and arrogant strategy**.

One percent of the world's population controls over 55% of the world's wealth and power. We need to approach these groups and inspire them to invest in reversing destructive trends and to contribute to the development of a **world of harmony and cooperation**.

Challenges are now global and leaders need to make different choices to **avoid the mistakes of the past**. **Climate change mitigation** is an enormous task and, as such, offers **unprecedented opportunities** for new strategies and activities that support the environment, help young people fight unemployment and build a better future for all. **The crisis is global so cooperation must also be global**.

Recently, at the **Vienna Economic Forum**, I met **Dr. Dragan Kostic** and heard him speak about free trade zones, **conveying a message of cooperation on all fronts**, to reverse unemployment, spur economic development and protect the environment. It is this message that he will be sharing with us at the present meeting, which aims to bring forward **new paradigms for timely and constructive action to save bios**.

Dr. Dragan Kostic, CEO of Free Zones Pirot took the floor and, after thanking Prof. Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis for the invitation, explained how very glad he was to be in Athens because **biopolicy and free zones share the same basic concepts and ideas**. “Free zones are as old as civilization itself and **25% of all world trade comes from free zones**. Around the globe, there are approximately 11,000 free trade zones: 100 in Europe, 150 in Turkey, 250 in the USA, in Mexico, in other countries in South America, Africa, China, Australia and Oceania. In Asia, Shanghai and Vietnam are major free trade zones.



Ioannis Tzen, H.E. the Ambassador of Vietnam Ms. Tran Thi Ha Phuong, and Prof. Christos Efthymiopoulos

While free zones are defined in many different ways, aside from the proper legal framework of incentives, there is a set of **economic factors that contributes to their success**. Such factors which attract companies to free zones include advanced infrastructure, **flexible regulation to accommodate different sectors, a convenient location for trade, and other tax and non-tax incentives**.

In Serbia, which is a link between East and West, there are **14 free trade zones**. Tourism and trade flourish in Serbia, as the country is situated on corridors 10, 4 and 8 of the Pan European transport route. This makes Serbia a **prime location for foreign investment**, and many multinational companies, such as Michelin, Fiat and others, invested **over 755 million Euros in 2013** alone. In times of crisis, these figures are very important.

Pirot is a small town on the **Serbian–Bulgarian border**, situated on corridor 10, only 400km away from seaports in **Greece and the Black Sea** and on the shortest route from East to West. It features interesting cultural monuments and engages in

traditional economic activities such as carpet weaving, dairy production and meat processing. It is also a prime logistics center with many benefits because of its close **proximity to corridor 10**.

The **Pirot free trade zone covers an area of 116 ha** and offers many advantages including competitive prices, good logistics and tax incentives. Within the borders of the free zone, there is no VAT imposed on raw materials, building materials, coal, gas oil or other fuels. Also, **special incentives such as tax waivers are granted by the Municipality for companies to locate here, while no municipal taxes are imposed on existing commercial facilities**.

The **Pirot free zone** currently hosts 15 production plants, 150 trade companies, 5000 workers and has a **400 million Euro annual turnover**. It is **ranked 53rd** in the world due to its excellent operations and services, but there is always room for improvement. We would like to rank number one!

A **bridge to the future** is what free zones may provide at the end. Flexibility is possible without necessarily changing the rules for entire nations all at once. The platform of free zones provides the most **expeditious and practical way to enhance flexibly in international trade** and to increase the attractiveness of more countries for productive international investments.”

Nebojsa Bogdanovic, Vice President of the Regional Chamber of Commerce Niš, also thanked Prof. Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis for organizing this important event and proceeded to present some information concerning the Chamber of Commerce and doing business in the region of Niš.

“The Regional Chamber of Commerce of Niš operates in the south-eastern part of Serbia, which spans three administrative districts – Nis, Pirot and Toplice – with 590,000 inhabitants and a total area of 7,717 square kilometres, featuring 14 municipalities along with the administrative area of the City of Nis which consists of 5 townships. **Niš is Serbia’s second largest city**, and a very well connected area with an international airport and a rich history and culture. It also boasts **many universities, some of them private**, and is a leader in the educational sector offering expert training in many professional and academic sectors.

The activities of the Regional Chamber of Commerce are dedicated to the **support of the economy of Niš**. Their aim is to develop an economically sustainable and export oriented economy, through **promoting entrepreneurship, supporting new and strengthening already existing companies**. The Chamber also cooperates with the University of Nis, as well as with other universities, the National Employment Service, the Regional Center for Small and Medium Enterprises and Entrepreneurship, the Regional Crafts Chamber, the Association of Entrepreneurs, non-governmental organizations, and other entities.

The Regional Chamber of Commerce of Niš frequently **cooperates with other Serbian and foreign chambers on projects funded by European Union**, and which are of regional, national or international importance. The best example is a fruitful cooperation with Bulgarian Chambers, which led to an **increase of trade between the two countries of up to 44%**. At the same time, more than 400 entrepreneurs and young people participated in the promotion of **cross-border cooperation** between Serbia and Bulgaria. Other countries which the Chamber cooperates with in trade and

business partnerships include Greece, Turkey, Russia, Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic.

I am proud to announce that **Niš has been declared the best place for investment in Serbia** and the role of the Chamber is to guide foreign investors and facilitate investments, which, in **2015, reached 1,135 billion Euros**. We invite everyone to invest in Niš.”

The meeting concluded with a presentation by **Ioannis Tzen, President of the Hellenic–Serbian Union of Trade and Industry**, who expressed what a great pleasure it was to attend the meeting and listen to all the interesting and inspiring speeches concerning free trade zones and investment. “As President of the Hellenic–Serbian Union of Trade and Industry, I am **proud to promote initiatives in favor of cooperation between the two countries**, as it is essential to support economic relations both bilaterally and multilaterally.

Greek exporters have difficulty in promoting their products to Russia because of the trade embargo and sanctions placed upon the European Union. **Greece could benefit from cooperation with Serbian free zones** and capitalize upon the very low tax rates imposed on Serbian products to increase exports to Russia. Greek products could arrive in a semi-processed state in Serbia, and receive a certificate of production from Serbia before being forwarded to other markets. In this way, **Greek products could take advantage of the lower taxation and become more competitive** not only in Russia but other markets as well.

Conversely, as a non-EU member, Serbia’s exports to the European Union have a higher taxation. **Serbia is famous for many agricultural and dairy products**, including beef and cheese, and through a closer cooperation, Greece could help Serbia to **re-export its products to other European or third countries via an EU certificate of production**. This can increase the competitiveness of Serbian products in the European market and provide grounds for reciprocal cooperation.

Furthermore, **Greece could cooperate with Vietnam**, another country featuring free trade zones, in the promotion of Vietnamese products in the European Union. A triangular cooperation scheme involving Vietnam, Greece and Serbia could also be implemented, resulting in more **competitive pricing and higher added value for all the parties** involved.

There has been much controversy surrounding the establishment and use of free trade zones in the **European Union**. However, **Martin Schultz**, President of the European Parliament, **has recently opened new discussions on free zones** because significant profits are being lost throughout the EU from high tariffs and complex regulations.

Today’s meeting has made it obvious that **we can unite the world through trade and protect friendship through biopolitics**. We have been fortunate enough to learn a lot about trade cooperation with Serbia and we have hopefully laid the ground for this cooperation to become permanent.”

A discussion and exchange of views with the audience followed.

The **Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.)** was founded in Athens, in 1985 to promote international cooperation and education in environmental protection and to inspire leadership with a vision. With friends and representatives in 165 countries

around the world, B.I.O. has as its mission to bring the interests of bios – all life on our planet – to the center of policy making through the implementation of “biopolicy” in every academic and professional initiative. To motivate and challenge the next generations of world changing leaders, B.I.O. has launched a series of groundbreaking projects in education, including the Youth Bios Olympiads, as well as an extensive e-learning program (<http://biopolitics.gr/education/b-i-o-s-e-learning-program/>), offered completely free of charge and aiming to accelerate the implementation of new and more effective approaches to climate change mitigation. For more information and to subscribe to the newsletter of the Biopolitics International Organisation, please visit www.biopolitics.gr

The main goal of the **Hellenic Chapter of the Club of Rome** is to act as a catalyst and infuse society with new values. Climate change is becoming a challenge of epic proportions, affecting both the global economy and the global environment. Action to meet this challenge requires an unprecedented level of international cooperation, but it also presents a unique opportunity to rethink our values, adopt new ethics and build a new society, a society of hope, harmony and the preservation of life. For more information please visit www.clubofrome.gr