

The British Hellenic Chamber of Commerce opens a public debate on Brexit

A highly successful conference, including a business and education stakeholders round table on the risks and opportunities of BREXIT for Greek companies, workers and students, both during the negotiations between the UK and the EU and after their completion, was organised by the British Hellenic Chamber of Commerce on Wednesday 5 April at the Eurobank "Bodossakis Building". (<http://www.bhcc.gr/latest-news/99-latest-news/262-brexite-5-2017>).

The conference, which was hosted by **EUROBANK**, was organised with the support of **INTEREL** (www.interelgroup.com), a multinational company specialised in public affairs, in cooperation with the British Council, the European Public Law Organisation, the Panhellenic Exporters Association, the Hellenic Bank Association, the Athens Chamber of Tradesmen and the Hellenic Alumni Association of the London School of Economics and Political Science. This was the first event of a strategic action plan aimed at studying, discussing and presenting proposals concerning Brexit, which is coordinated by the British Hellenic Chamber of Commerce.

Participants were greeted by the event's hosts, Ms **Eugenia Chandris**, British President of the British Hellenic Chamber of Commerce, and the Chairman of the Boards of Eurobank and the Hellenic Bank Association, Mr **Nikolaos Karamouzis**.

Mr Karamouzis expressed the hope that the EU and the United Kingdom will reach an amicable agreement, without rivalry and confrontation, an agreement that will be based on cooperation and common values, will safeguard the free market (on equal terms) and the interests of citizens, and will maintain close ties in all sectors.

The political part of the discussion was introduced by the Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Greece, Ms **Kate Smith CMG**, who stated that: "*The United Kingdom is pursuing a deep and special partnership that will include security and economic cooperation in the interests of Britain and all of its European partners. Britain is the seventh largest export market for Greek products, while the leading Greek shipping sector is one of the top recipients of financial and other specialised services provided by the City. Consequently, a bold and ambitious free trade agreement makes sense for Greece and Britain. Moreover, we would like to provide assurances as regards the status of Greeks investing in the UK and also the status of Greeks working in Britain, so as to proceed with a deepening of our economic ties. It is our top priority to ensure the support of Greece and Greek citizens in order to conclude a mutual agreement as regards the rights of citizens*".

The Minister of Finance and Development, Mr **Dimitris Papadimitriou**, then presented the views of the government; this was followed by a presentation by the Vice-President of Nea Dimokratia, Mr Kostis **Chatzidakis**, MP.

The political part of the discussion was closed by the Director General of International Economic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Mr Alkiviadis-Louis Abatis, who conveyed the greetings of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prof **Giorgos Katrougalos**.

Mr **George McGregor**, Managing Partner, Interel UK, (http://www.bhcc.gr/images/BREXIT_2017/presentations/Brexit%20Presentation%20-%20Athens.pptx) and Mr **Kieran O'Keeffe**, Deputy Managing Partner, Interel EU, detailed the hidden aspects and the background of the ongoing negotiation, from the perspectives of both London and Brussels. They discussed scenarios in relation to future developments and the potential impact on Greek businesses.

Finally, **Dr Platon Monokrousos**, Head Economist of the Eurobank Group and Chairman of the Scientific Council of the Hellenic Bank Association, referred to the macroeconomic effects and consequences of Brexit on the market, the global economy, the Euro and the region (http://www.bhcc.gr/images/BREXIT_2017/presentations/PMonokrousos_BREXIT%20Present_5%20April%202017.pdf).

The conference closed with a Davos-style debate, which was coordinated by the Greek President of the British Hellenic Chamber of Commerce, Mr **Haris Ikonomopoulos**. The panel included:

- **Prof. Spiros Flogaitis**, Chairman of the European Public Law Organisation (www.eplo.eu)
- **Mr Konstantinos Bitsios**, Vice-president of SEV-Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (www.sev.org.gr)
- **Prof. Nikos Vettas**, Professor of Economics at the University of Athens and Director of IOBE (www.iobe.gr)
- **Mr Sotiris Leontaris**, Head of Commercial Department, British Embassy to Greece.
- **Ms Christina Sakellaridi**, Chairwoman of the Panhellenic Exporters Association (www.pse.gr)
- **Mr Yiannis Chatzitheodorou**, Chairman of the Athens Chamber of Tradesmen (www.eea.gr)
- **Ms Georgia Stamatelou**, Fiscal Issues Partner, KPMG
- **Ms Maria Tsakali**, Director of Studies, British Council
- **Mr Nikos Sofianos**, Chairman of the Hellenic Alumni Association of LSE
- **Mr George McGregor**, Chief Partner, Interel UK

The Chairman of the Athens Chamber of Tradesmen, the largest Greek Chamber with more than two hundred thousand members, Mr. **Yiannis Chatzitheodossiou**,

stated the following as regards the effects of Brexit: "*We are living in historic times; I believe that the consequences of Brexit will influence the global economy and of course the Greek one. However, it is perhaps the start of a change in the policy mix exercised within the EU, which has led to extreme viewpoints and secession trends even in large European countries.*"

The event was sponsored by PWC, KPMG, Watson, Farley & Williamson, Ikonomopoulos & Partners Law Firm. Huffington Post Greece was the communication sponsor.

At the end of the conference, the Greek President of the British Hellenic Chamber of Commerce, Mr **Haris Ikonomopoulos** made the following statement:

"The United Kingdom is not simply a member of the EU that has decided to leave an economic union. It is a historic custodian of European security and peace. The negotiations concerning the terms of departure may be carried out by politicians and bureaucrats but they concern millions of European citizens, students, workers and businesses. Whether opportunities will arise and risks will be confronted should not depend solely on the political maturity and historic memory of the European Commission, the British government and European partners. The needs, the daily life, the well-being and the future of all the people of Europe can and should be taken into account. We should look not only to local or national elections, but to our common future, with a vision at least towards 2050."