

الندوة المتخصصة

لتطوير العلاقات الاقتصادية بين لبنان وتشيكيا وسلوفاكيا

2008-10-30

بناءً للحرص على إنجاز برنامجها السنوي بكل شفافية أقامت الجمعية ندوتها المتخصصة حول سبل تطوير العلاقات الاقتصادية والتجارية بين لبنان وتشيكيا و سلوفاكيا، فكانت الندوة خميرة التعاون والنوايا الحسنة بين الجمعية والسفارتين المعنيتين من ناحية، والمؤسسات الرسمية اللبنانية خاصة وزارتي الثقافة والتجارة من ناحية ثانية، والمؤسسات اللبنانية غير الحكومية خاصة غرف الصناعة والتجارة وجمعية الصناعيين وبعض أصحاب الأعمال اللبنانيين من ناحية ثالثة. وعليه أقيمت الندوة في فندق روتانا الحازمية برعاية معالي وزير الثقافة الاستاذ تمام سلام.

أدار الندوة الدكتور جعفر عبد الخالق و شارك في حفل الإفتتاح رئيس الجمعية والسفيرين التشيكي يان تشييك والسلوفاكي اولدريخ هلافاتشك وممثل صاحب الرعاية الأستاذ حنا العميل، وفي تقديم أوراق الندوة شارك ممثلي الأقسام التجارية في السفارتين التشيكية زدينك فورمانك والسلوفاكية يان تيرالا، وممثل غرف الصناعة والتجارة والصناعة في لبنان الاستاذ منير التيني وممثل جمعية الصناعيين الاستاذ محمد الرفاعي. وتخلل الندوة فقرة حوار مفتوح تطرق للعراقيل المؤثرة على النهوض بتطوير العلاقات بين البلدان المعنية. وبعد الندوة شارك الجميع بحفل كوكتيل تم خلاله التعارف المباشر وتبادل المعلومات الشخصية وفيما يلي نورد وقائع الإفتتاح و أوراق الندوة المقدمة من المشاركين.



ممثل معالي الوزير تمام سلام الاستاذ حنا العميل



السفير التشيكي يان تشييك يلقي كلمته في الافتتاح



رئيس الجمعية د. كامل مرقص يلقي كلمة الإفتتاح



والسفير السلوفاكي اولدريخ هلافاتشك



بعض رجال الأعمال المشاركون في الندوة



منسق الندوة د. جعفر عبد الخالق



جانب من حضور الندوة المتخصصة



مقدم الحضور في قاعة الروتانا - الحازمية



منصة المشاركين في أبحاث الندوة من اليمين الأستاذ محمد الرفاعي، المهندس يان تيرالا، د. جعفر عبد الخالق، المهندس زدينك فورمانك، والأستاذ منير التيني.

INTRODUCTION

DR. JAAFAR ABDULKHALEK

Vice president CSGA



For the name of our association we welcome you all & thank you for participation.

The idea of this Symposium Evolutes from the fact, that our CSGA has been founded since 1991, and had a key roll, as a nongovernmental organization, to keep in contact with both republics Czech & Slovak, in order to fulfill our interests of appreciation, respect, Knowledge exchange & to further develop all kinks of social, humanitarian, political & economic relations between our nations.

For this purpose we are actualizing this specialized Symposium to orient on three targets:

First: To put some Lebanese business bodies in direct dialogue with the governmental & nongovernmental organizations of our states, to determine common ideas of how to develop & establish links of information & databases.

Second: Since the Balance of Trade between those countries (especially Czech Republic) & Lebanon is unequal for the ratio of 30 – 1, so the interest of both parties is to influence the global growth on one side, & to increase the Lebanese Export in order to minimize the Gap of trade Balance from the other side.

Third: Because Lebanon is a developing country, and has a lot of business opportunities in this region, so one of the possible solutions to minimize trade Gap, is to develop the initiatives of direct medium & large investments in Lebanon, from the side of public & private business bodies of both Czech & Slovak Republics.

To conclude, we hope that, the participants of this Symposium will be satisfied out of our events, actions, speeches, and lectures & informative databases.

And now we call the representatives to provide their speeches.

WELCOME SPEECH

DR. KAMEL MORKOS

President CSGA



Your Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives of Governments and the Private Sector,
Distinguished Representatives of Civil Society, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, a special thank you to this event's contributors, namely the Minister of Culture Mr. Tammam Salam, the Czech ambassador to Lebanon Mr. Cizek and the Slovak ambassador to Lebanon Mr. Hlavacek - the main supporters of our Association. I would also like to thank the representatives from the Lebanese Industrialists Association and Chamber of Commerce.

Thank you to all attendees for having taken time out of your busy schedules to attend and contribute to this collaborative event. We appreciate your presence and salute you!

Nation-building "starts and ends with people."

This is what our Association is about: it was founded by the graduates of the former Czechoslovakia, today the Czech and Slovak Republics, on 1st September 1993 in order to strengthen the ties between the graduates and to bridge between the people of Lebanon and the people of both republics.

We are gathered today to discuss ways to enhance strategic, economic and trade cooperation between our respective countries.

The Slovak and the Czech Republics are both members of the European Union and benefit from the partnership agreement that was signed between Lebanon and the EU in June 2002

Furthermore, many agreements were signed with the Czech republic on the promotion and protection of Investments (19/9/1997), on Air transport (22/9/2003), on cooperation in the Field of Culture Education and Science (3/5/2004) and finally on Cooperation in the Field of Tourism in 2006.

I would like to commend the efforts of the late Minister of Economy and Trade Basil Fuleihan who played an active role in strengthening ties between Lebanon and the Czech Republic. Back in 2003, he visited Prague and participated in the joint trade committee which resulted in the signing of two MOUs, one between the Lebanese Industrialists and the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic and another between Czechinvest and IDAL. At that time, both countries "expressed their desire to further develop economic and commercial relations on the basis of equality and mutual benefit" and they emphasized the importance of private sector initiatives. They even discussed the possibility of establishing a Czech-Lebanese Business Council between the Lebanese Economic Forum and the respective Czech counterpart.

We are gathered today to build on those efforts. There is little trade today between Lebanon and Czech and Slovak republics. I don't dare looking at the Lebanese statistics of imports and exports with both the Czech and Slovak republics, which set them at the end of our trade partner's list (see Annexes enclosed). This tells us, there is so much work to do on all sides and we must look closely at the impediments that hold us back from progress.

As a member of the Lebanese Business Council in Dubai I was impressed to see the position the Czech Republic –an ex-communist country- has reached in the UAE trade ladder. Last March, the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic signed an agreement of cooperation with Dubai to foster a spirit of better cooperation between the business communities from both sides. Dubai has become the Czech's biggest trading partner in the region with \$590 million turnover.

As a member of the European Union since 2004, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have benefited significantly from the internationalization of enterprises. Strategic partnership in areas such as infrastructure and renewable energy will be of mutual benefit.

On a different note, I wish to pay tribute to the spirit of cooperation and assistance that helped us to cope with the pitfalls. May I take this opportunity to shed light on the special endeavors of the Czech Republic regarding the humanitarian aid provided to Lebanon during the past few years namely the de-mining machines as well as participating in the UN "Trees Instead of Mines" project with the object to reforest in the de-mined areas in southern Lebanon?

Moreover, in March 2007, Ambassador Jan Cizek took part in the inauguration ceremony of generator donated within the post conflict humanitarian aid by the Czech Government through NGO ADRA to the village of Deirmimas in South Lebanon of which I am the Mayor. The generators together with the well and submersible pump aimed at securing access to drinking water.

It is this kind of partnership that we have which we are proud of and which we count on to carry Lebanon forward. This Symposium aims at providing us with an opportunity to make an assessment with our counterparts and Lebanese stakeholders of where we are now in our trade relations and economic progress and put forward recommendations to maximize opportunities, encourage exchanges, and push events down a positive path.

KEYNOTE SPEECH

H.E. MR. JAN CIZEK
The Czech Ambassador to Lebanon



Honorable Mr. Hana Al Amil, Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen, Dear Menus

It's my pleasure and great honor to attend and address this Symposium organized by the Association of former Lebanese students of Czech & Slovak Universities. This symposium and its title fully fit in our aim to foster and further develop our bilateral economic and trade relations and also to encourage direct investments.

The presence of both Czech and Slovak representatives in this event reflects the fact that both countries are again together, this time in the family of EU member countries. It means the conditions for cooperation are similar.

In my view there is a solid basis for our economic cooperation represented both by bilateral agreements and by Association Agreement concluded between Lebanon and EU.

Let me conclude by provocative question "What is the reason for not using all the existing potential of trade exchange between our two countries, speaking on behalf of the Czech – Lebanese relations?"

I believe that we can find some answers as well as suggestions for possible improvement during today's discussion.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you a productive meeting

KEYNOTE SPEECH
H.E. MR. OLDRICH HLAVACEK
The Slovak Ambassador to Syria, Lebanon & Jordan



Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear guests,

It is of great honor for me to represent the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia historically for the first time ever at this joint trilateral Lebanese - Czech – Slovak economic and trade conference. I am very pleased to have the privilege to add my personal contribution to the work yet done by our Governments and the People of our Friendly countries.

I would like to express my sincere appreciations and to congratulate to our Lebanese brothers for organizing such an important seminar, which I find a foundation stone for the future cooperation in all the modern and attractive fields of economy, trade and investment.

I will be proud if the foundations of this Beirut Seminar will become a tradition and will help to boost and enhance the economic mutually advantageous cooperation.

It is necessary to regard our mutual relations and their future development from the global perspective influenced by dramatic geopolitical changes and present global financial and economic crisis. These changes and developments also greatly influence the new character of Diplomacy, in which trade, business and finance stands in the centre of attention. Despite the key foreign policy priorities of the Slovak Republic, represented by the full membership in EU and NATO, we do not forget at all our partners all over the world. Our membership in these most important euro-Atlantic organizations does underline the great challenge and commitment to engage much more deeply in global co-operation, where Middle East and Lebanon keeps its irreplaceable position. The promotion of the economic co-operation with partners all over the world dominates in the Government Programme, proving there is a great necessary political support in these efforts.

We are dedicated to deepening and broadening the mutually advantageous co-operation with Lebanon and we realize that there is an enormous potential on part of both countries. A very important prerequisite for development of our economic and trade relations is a steady overcoming of an information deficit about business opportunities in both countries. I am convinced that this forum is a strong instrument in these endeavors. We continue to motivate the direct contacts on business level as well as initiate further trade missions including organizing of similar seminars, which would, on both sides, increase the interest about economic and trade opportunities, existing on both parts.

We also believe that Slovakia is a very attractive place for investment. The integration process into the global policy and economy co-operation, underscored from the achievement of OECD membership in 2000 to Euro zone membership on January 1, 2009, highlights its attractiveness.

The unique geographical location of Slovakia in the very heart of Europe, combined with strong political links all over Europe, followed closely by the economic and trade co-operation development, adding even the traditional interlink ages with countries of the so-

called Eastern bloc, could create a very efficient primary production base to capture a huge European market space.

Besides the mostly preferred green field investments, there is a great room for creation of joint ventures or long-term business partnerships. I especially underline the electronics and particularly the IT sector as the most challenging area of possible future activities in our region initiated from and established in Slovakia. Slovakia is known for its highly qualified workforce (93% of Slovak citizens have high school or university degree), low labor and production costs and effective access to the world economy. A central aspect of Slovak state administration is to ensure a stable economic environment for our partners abroad, taking into account the rules of OECD and WTO.

Slovakia offers a wide scale of support schemes for foreign direct investment into various economic sectors and regions of our country. Except fiscal incentives and grants for the creation of new jobs, which are nowadays getting into line with the EU legislative rules, Slovakia offers to the potential foreign investors also a wide support in terms of indirect service of SARIO called „one stop shop“.

Ladies and gentlemen,

we have all the important and relevant means at our disposal to continue in our endeavors to enhance our economic and trade co-operation to the extent mutually satisfactory and beneficially level. I am firmly convinced that we are on the right path and this event is not by far the peak of the warm partnership we have succeeded to establish and develop. I would like to assure you of the full support of the Government of the Slovak Republic in these efforts.

Thank you very much for your attention.



كلمة صاحب الرعاية الاستاذ تمام سلام صاحب الرعاية ممثلاً بالاستاذ حنا العميل رئيس مصلحة الشؤون الثقافية

أصحاب السعادة، أيها السيدات والسادة

أولاني معالي وزير الثقافة تمام سلام، شرف تمثيله في هذه المناسبة، وقد حملني إليكم أطيب تحياته و أصدق أمنياته بنجاح هذه الندوة في تحقيق غاياتها في تطوير العلاقات التجارية والاقتصادية بين لبنان والجمهوريتين التشيكية والسلوفاكية.

نلتقي و إياكم هذه الليلة للبحث في سبل تطوير العلاقات التجارية والاقتصادية بين لبنان والجمهوريتين التشيكية والسلوفاكية، إذ إن تعزيز التعاون الاقتصادي، من شأنه، بالإضافة إلى انعكاساته الإيجابية على اقتصاديات الدول الثلاث، تعزيز الروابط والعلاقات الثقافية والاجتماعية بين شعوب هذه الدول و إتاحة المجال لتعريف كل شعب بحضارة وثقافة الشعب الأخر.

إلا أنه من اللافت في هذا المجال، أن العلاقات بين لبنان والدولتين التشيكية والسلوفاكية قد بدأت تربوياً وثقافياً من خلال توجه العديد من الطلاب اللبنانيين لتلقي العلم والمعرفة في جامعات ومعاهد هاتين الدولتين، لتترسخ اجتماعياً من خلال العلاقات التي نسجها هؤلاء الطلاب مع زملائهم في الجامعات التي إحتضنتهم، ومع الشعب الذي أحسن استقبالهم ورعايتهم ليبادر هؤلاء الطلاب بعد تخرجهم، وانطلاقاً من حبهم لوطنهم من جهة، وفانهم للدولتين اللتين نهلوا العلم من جامعاتهما من جهة ثانية، إلى العمل على تعزيز العلاقات التجارية والاقتصادية بين لبنان والجمهوريتين التشيكية والسلوفاكية وذلك إيماناً منهم، ليس فقط بالمحافظة على العلاقات التي نسجوها خلال إقامتهم في كلتا الدولتين، إنما بأهمية تطويرها وتعزيزها لتشمل كافة المجالات الاقتصادية، الاجتماعية، التربوية والثقافية وذلك لما فيه خير لشعوب الدول الثلاث.

ولا بد من الإشارة في هذا المجال إلى أن لبنان قد أيرم إتفاقية التعاون في مجالات الثقافة والتربية والعلوم مع الجمهورية التشيكية، وذلك في العام 2004، ونتطلع إلى إبرام إتفاقية مماثلة مع الجمهورية السلوفاكية، والإنتقال من ثم إلى المرحلة التنفيذية، من خلال تبادل النشاطات والفعاليات الثقافية بين الدول الثلاث، وذلك بالتعاون طبعاً مع جمعية خريجي جامعات ومعاهد الجمهوريتين التشيكية والسلوفاكية في لبنان والهيئات الاقتصادية أيضاً، وذلك إيماناً منا بأن تطوير العلاقات بين الدول والشعوب لا تكتمل إلا بتضافر جهود المجتمع الأهلي والقطاع الخاص، مع جهود القطاع العام.

وفي هذه المناسبة إسمحو لي بالتوجه بالتحية والتقدير للجهود التي تبذلها جمعية خريجي جامعات ومعاهد الجمهوريتين التشيكية والسلوفاكية في لبنان، وبالأخص رئيسها الدكتور كامل مرقص ونائب الرئيس الدكتور جعفر عبد الخالق للجهود التي بذلها و يبذلونها في سبيل تطوير العلاقات بين لبنان والدولتين التشيكية والسلوفاكية.

والتحية والتقدير أيضاً للهيئات الاقتصادية، من صناعية وزراعية وتجارية لمساهماتها الفعالة في تطوير العلاقات بين لبنان والجمهوريتين التشيكية والسلوفاكية.

وبالنهاية نتمنى لهذه الندوة النجاح وتحقيق الأهداف المرجوة

THE SYMPOSIUM PAPERS

MR. MOHAMAD RIFAI

Association of Lebanese Industrialists

Distinguished Guests and Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Association of Lebanese Industrialists, I would like to thank the The Czech & Slovak Graduates' Association in Lebanon for organizing this symposium To further Develop Trade & Economic Relations between Lebanon and the Czech & Slovak Republics.

We are firm believers in the idea that “national prosperity is created, not inherited” and, that a “nation’s competitiveness depends on the capacity of its industry to innovate and upgrade”.

In this regard, and in the context of always seeking to improve and grow, it is important to study the possibilities of cooperation with Czech and Slovak industrialists and businessmen, and to put a new strategy for cooperation between our countries with a futuristic vision.

Lebanon has been traditionally a free market economy and well known for being open to the outside world. We have integrated our economy into the world market system through economic and legal reforms and by promoting foreign direct investment.

Trade figures between Lebanon and the CZECH & SLOVAK Republics show minimal trade transactions and the balance of trade is currently in favor of Czech & Slovak republics. We must find ways to increase trade between Lebanon and these countries.

As you all know a new phase of the relationship between the European Union and the Mediterranean countries has begun. Lebanon has signed the partnership agreement with the EU. The process involved the progressive trade liberalization among the countries of the whole area, the creation of new premises for investments in the region, and new financial and technical measures to support economic development. This will give us a greater exposure to trade with European countries and will help us to upgrade our industries.

There are many opportunities for cooperation and investments to be carried out. We should stress to establish mechanisms of cooperation in many areas between Lebanon and CZECH & SLOVACK republics.

Joint ventures, technology transfers, distribution agreements, & joint market efforts are some examples of industrial cooperation.

Cooperation in trade, tourism, banking and services are sectors that can be explored to obtain new investments & fruitful cooperation.

The government of Lebanon is keeping fiscal policy tight and maintaining monetary stability. This is helping to increase investor’s confidence.

The services of specialized agencies such as the Investment Development Authority of Lebanon are also at the disposal of investors.

As you may know, Lebanon’s banking system is one of the most advanced in the Arab world. Strict banking secrecy laws provide investors with additional security and peace of mind.

Other support services for investors include a dynamic advertising sector, excellent printing facilities (currently doing 60% of the Middle East's printing business) and a growing capital market (The Beirut Stock Exchange).

There are many opportunities for investment in Lebanon and for joint ventures with local companies. Especially in the industrial sector but because of the constraints of time, I will only explore opportunities in the Food Sector today.

Most independent studies find great potential for the Lebanese Agro-food business. The data in several studies refer to potential niches in different European markets for the following sub-sectors: Wine and Alcoholic Spirits - Canned fruits - Herbs & Spices - Olive Oil - Jam - as well as organic foods

A recent international study identified the strengths associated with the Lebanese Agro-food sector. These are:

- An outstanding reputation for its Middle Eastern food specialties

Popularity of the Mediterranean diet (for taste and health reasons)

- A ready consumer base among the emigrant communities all over the world.

The study also identified the natural product market as potential lucrative for Lebanon. These products can be divided into several major categories such as:

- Organic foods (fresh and processed)
- Nutrition-related foods Essentials oils for flavor and fragrance
- Herbs & spices for teas, remedies, cosmetics and foods
- Supplements for health and nutrition

The Lebanese manufacturing sector offers many possibilities for cooperation. Follow-up mechanisms should be put in place because it is important to deepen the dialogue that started today.

Our joint efforts must find ways to increase trade and investment between our countries. There are many ways for achieving the goal. We hope that Lebanese, Czech and Slovakian businessmen can begin to explore areas of mutually-beneficial cooperation.

Thank you.

ENG. ZDENEK FORMANEK
COMMERCIAL & ECONOMIC COUNSELOR OF THE EMBASSY OF THE
CZECH REPUBLIC IN BEIRUT

1) General Economic Conditions and History of Czechoslovak Foreign Trade

Czechoslovakia (1918 –1993) was rich neither in oil nor in other mineral sources. It could cover its imports only by export of industrial products.

Before the WW II the trademarks like SKODA and BATA became world known and famous, as well as other products bearing the respected MADE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA - sugar mills, oil refineries, breweries, diesel generators, railway engines, and many other items.

After the WW II, despite the nationalization and monopolisation of industry and foreign trade, this trend continued.

Anyhow, negative aspects of the planned economy and COMECON rules started to show their face in a bigger scale.

2) Foreign Trade of the Czech Republic

After the Czech Republic was established in 1993 Czech Business Balance moved to red figures. This continued till 2005. In 2004 our exports were 1.65 bln USD lower than our imports, in 2005 the exports have already surpassed the imports by 1.65 bln. USD. In 2007 our positive balance reached 4.3 bln. USD.

3) Mutual Trade with Lebanon

The below figures testify the facts more than any comments:

The below figures are in thousands of USD based on FCO Czech Boarder Parity.

Taking into consideration that the most important item of Czech Exports to Lebanon has been milk and dairy products, followed by paper and pulp plus timber and that the Lebanese export (except tobacco) is too low to be analysed, evidently there is a lot of work to be done.

This symposium, for which organization the “ALUMNI” are to be thanked for very much, has a target in a form of brainstorming debate to find new items for mutual trade and remove the obstacles for those once in the past traditional ones. And last but not least, to create new channels and centres of Lebanese export to the Czech Republic and its rich southern and western neighbours.

	Export	Index	Import	Index	Total	Index	Balance
1993	50523	-	2250	-	52773	-	48273
1994	34945	69,2	518	23,0	35463	67,2	34427
1995	53305	152,5	286	55,2	53591	151,1	53019
1996	61572	115,5	420	146,9	61992	115,7	61152
1997	44208	71,8	1449	345,0	45657	73,6	42759
1998	42594	96,3	965	66,6	43559	95,4	41629
1999	38806	91,1	301	31,2	39107	89,8	38505
2000	35834	92,3	168	55,8	36002	92,1	35666
2001	33349	93,1	241	143,5	33590	93,3	33108
2002	30689	92,0	449	186,3	31138	92,7	30240
2003	31083	101,3	222	49,4	31305	100,5	30861
2004	36257	116,6	1006	453,2	37263	119,0	35251
2005	33287	91,8	1065	105,9	34352	92,2	32222
2006	26385	79,3	1542	144,8	27927	81,3	24843
2007	31637	119,9	1154	74,8	32791	117,4	30483
2007/I-VIII	20688	-	767	-	21455	-	19921
2008/I-VIII	26363	127,4	676	88,1	27039	126,0	25687

ENG. JAN TYRALA
COMMERCIAL & ECONOMIC COUNSELOR OF THE EMBASSY OF
THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC IN BEIRUT

Provisional agenda possible areas for cooperation in Slovakia

INDUSTRY

As for cooperation in the field of industry, Slovakia could focus on:

- energy facilities, including construction of power plants;
- production of components and spare parts for motor vehicles;
- mobile construction equipment, equipment for agriculture and forestry, ships;
- equipment for dealing with environmental issues;
- defence industry products in the area of mobile technology, engineering technology, and equipment for responding to natural disasters, including field hospitals;
- metal industry products;
- chemistry, including pharmaceutical products, industrial fertilizers, petrochemicals;
- glass products;
- products of the wood processing industry;
- Products of the electro technical (electrical engineering) industry.

BUSINESS AND TOURISM

Topics for cooperation:

- opportunities for cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises;
- mutual promotion of tourism at international fairs and exhibitions;
- exchange of information on projects for tourism development;
- exchange of information for the development of tourism in both countries;
- cooperation within the framework of international organisations (WTO, ASTA, ETC);
- opportunities for mutual cooperation of national tourism offices;

Slovakia could be an interesting destination for visitors from Lebanon since it has a high concentration of natural attractions and cultural/historic sights. Of particular interest could be:

- SPAs and wellness facilities;
- the countryside, mountains and national parks, caves;
- water sites and thermal waters;
- Capital city Bratislava and its surrounding area;
- other historic towns and UNESCO world heritage sites;
- castles and chateaux;
- Folk architecture, openair museums, museums, galleries;
- Gastronomy - typical Slovak specialities and drinks.

BILATERAL FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC AGREEMENTS

In the connection with planned visit of the Minister of Economy of the Slovak Republic to Lebanon and the accompanying businessmen delegation early next year and in the interest of developing bilateral trade and economic cooperation the both the sides are finalizing for signing the Agreement on Promotion and Reciprocal Protection of Investments and are planning to start a new round of expert discussions on the draft on Double Taxation Agreement.

Slovak side is proposing the signing of an Agreement on Economic Cooperation

MR. MOUNIR TEENY
VICE PRESIDENT

Chamber of commerce, industry and agriculture of Zahleh and Bekaa

You're Excellencies

Dear invitees

First of all I like to express my sincere appreciation for the distinguished efforts exerted by the Czech and Slovak graduates association in Lebanon to prepare for this event, and I am sure that what motivated them to achieve this symposium is at one end their love for Lebanon and at the other end the sense of gratitude for Czech and Slovak republic , and sure with the collaboration of the dynamic commercial attaché I meant Mr. Formanek of the Czech embassy.

After the speeches of my colleagues there is not much left to talk, but still I would like to make my approach for the development of relations between Lebanon and Czech and Slovak republic in two basic ideas of cooperation which I think are feasible and achievable , these aspects of mutual cooperation are tourism and agricultural fresh produce exchange.

Before couple weeks my colleague the president of the chamber of Zahleh was in Czech republic in a tourism and health care trip and he is 82 years old, when he came back I asked him how did you like there , I knew that he visited almost all continents , but it was his first time to Prague , his answer was it is a pity that it took me that long to visit this country if I have been there earlier it could have been my favorite destination ever.

But how many people know this fact, I think few,

The same case for Lebanon too , we often receive foreign guests from everywhere and they come here with wrong pre concepts about Lebanon and they discover that all were false information and as a matter of fact they get shocked when they see Lebanon in real, and I believe that even most of the diplomats that were posted Lebanon for the first time discovered that Lebanon is more than they expected, So , tourism exchange is feasible and only needs some propaganda in both sides , and we have to admit that tourism strengthen the ties between the countries and opens new horizons for diverse business opportunities and investments.

Now talking about fresh produce and agro-alimentary products is my favorite as I am the vice president of chamber of Zahleh and Bekaa where we are mostly involved in these activities and also myself being involved in production and exportation of fresh produce,

We in Lebanon are considered as a consumer country, and as a matter of fact we have a great deficit in our trade budget balance close to 80 % , our free open economic system allows imports flow from everywhere with no restrictions and mostly tax free, however our exports are much less than our imports and mostly facing some obstacles and restriction specially in Europe, some of it are just and connected to quality control but at some other points we feel that we are mistreated in favor of other exporting countries , and on the other hand we might have a lack in communication in other possible potential markets like Czech and Slovak republics , which we expect some efforts from commercial sections in both embassies to render some aid in finding potential counterparties and also the association of graduates could help in establishing relations between businessmen from both sides.

In the Bekaa our main exports are fresh produce mainly, table grapes of diverse varieties, cherry, peaches, pears, apple, citrus, fruits And potatoes. Our markets are diversified lately but still our major market are Arab gulf countries , but we are making exports to European markets mostly to Great Britain , Russia, Romania, and other markets in far east like Indonesia and Thailand,

Quality wise we can compete with similar products, the need only is for counterparts and smooth entry without obstacles that might impede or delay the flow of our produce.

At the end I call for follow up committee in order to enhance and pursue all pending issues in collaboration with Lebanese chambers which are under disposal for any information connected to market studies and companies data base or whatever is within their capabilities,

I hereby come to end my speech with thanks to those who sacrificed their time and efforts to make this event hoping that it will bring mutual trade relation to better position between Lebanon Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Thanks and good luck.