



Inaugural Meeting of the re-launched British Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce (BBCC)

The BBCC hosted, in conjunction with the British Embassy, a high-profile Inaugural Meeting for 100 Members and Friends at the Ambassador's Residence on the evening of 24th November. Distinguished guests and principal speakers were Mrs Meglena Kuneva and Mr Anthony Hassiotis. Also on the panel were Catherine Barber, Charge d'Affaires at the British Embassy, Richard Clegg, a Board Member of the BBCC, and Bill Drysdale, BBCC Chairman. Short biographical details of the speakers and panel members are given below.

After an introduction by Bill Drysdale on the new focus of the BBCC to raise its profile and visibility in Bulgaria and to promote all possible opportunities for foreign investment from Britain to Bulgaria, Meglena Kuneva gave a comprehensive review of the opportunities and challenges in doing business here. She drew attention to many areas in the fields of competition, rule of law, regulation of business activities, concern for consumers, and the lack of a level playing field for new entrants to the market. Tony Hassiotis spoke of the special opportunities available at present to enter the Bulgarian market and invest in projects of all sizes, with particular regard to the strong and prudent fiscal management of the Government, the sound capital adequacy and credit control supporting a well regulated banking system, and a low cost, well educated and entrepreneurial workforce. Tax rates and other incentives are also generous, though lack of growth in many leading European economies can't be ignored and will have a dampening effect. Mr Hassiotis concluded with some very valuable and practical advice, from his recent experience as chairman of AmCham and the HBCB, about how we should grow our Chamber into an effective and respected business forum which will make a real difference in stimulating trade and investment here from the UK. Richard Clegg drew together the themes of both speakers and emphasised the major positive impact here which financing from banks and fund managers in London and other major financial centres can have on doing deals of all sizes in Bulgaria.

Following the business session, those present enjoyed an hour to network over drinks and a light buffet. The meeting was an enjoyable and instructive first step in a very active programme of events, listed separately in our website, being mounted over the coming eight months by the BBCC for its members and friends. The next meeting, a Business Breakfast (see separate invitation letter) with the CEO of InvestBulgaria Agency, Borislav Stefanov, will be on Tuesday 13th December and is already attracting strong interest.

Re-launch of the British Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce

Speakers and Panel

Meglana Kuneva is a lawyer by background, working from 1990 for ten years as a Senior Legal Advisor at the Council of Ministers. She was Minister for Europe in the Saxe-Coburg government and its successor administration from 2001 to 2006, Bulgaria's Commissioner at the European Union in charge of Consumer Protection from 2007 to 2010, and one of the leading candidates for the Presidency of the Republic of Bulgaria in 2011. In Brussels Mrs Kuneva continues to serve as an advisor to Siim Kallas, Vice President of the European Commission in charge of Transport, and Chairs the Board of the European Policy Centre, an independent NGO.

Anthony Hassiotis is CEO and Chairman of the Management Board of Postbank in Bulgaria. He is immediate past Chairman of AMCHAM and the Hellenic Business Council in Bulgaria. Mr Hassiotis has served in top management positions in three leading banks in Greece, and for 17 consecutive years was in senior executive positions with Citibank in the USA, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Costa Rica and Greece. He also served in Mellon Bank in Pittsburg and London. He won 'Banker of the Year' Award in 2007, and has served on the board of the Bulgarian Business Leaders Forum.

Catherine Barber has been Charge d'Affaires (acting Ambassador) at the British Embassy in Sofia since early 2011. An economist by profession, she holds graduate degrees from Cambridge and Harvard, and has taught at Oxford University. Before joining the FCO she worked as an analyst at the Association of European Businesses in Moscow and as a policy advisor to Oxfam GB. As a government adviser she has worked on labour market issues, globalisation, and climate/energy policy.

Richard Clegg is a Partner at Wolf Theiss and advises international and Bulgarian businesses on a wide range of investments and transactions in Central & Eastern Europe. Richard joined Wolf Theiss from Bulgaria Telecom (Vivacom) where he served as Group General Counsel and Group Investment Director respectively throughout the Group's post-privatisation restructuring and development. Richard is a trustee of a disabled charity in the UK and sits as a non-executive director on the boards of several technology focussed companies. He studied at University College London and INSEAD and is an English qualified Solicitor.

Bill Drysdale is Chairman of the newly re-focussed BBCC. He operates a free-lance consulting practice in Bulgaria and the Western Balkans. After an initial career in KPMG in Scotland, Bill was managing Partner for nine years first of KPMG Poland then KPMG Bulgaria and Macedonia. From 1998 he was a founder member and first chairman of the BBLF. From 2003 to 2005 he served as an advisor the Bulgarian Prime Minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg, then spent 5 years as a member of the management and consulting team at AIMS Human Capital. Earlier in 2011 he held an advisory appointment with the Macedonian Economy Minister.