**Vicky Loizou**

**Secretary General for International Economic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Chairperson of Enterprise Greece**

It is a great pleasure and honor to participate in today's event. This is an event that highlights the opportunities that exist all around the world, promotes and supports entrepreneurship, as well. As you are all well aware, entrepreneurship has no gender and no racial characteristics.

Africa and particularly sub-Saharan Africa constitutes one region of great interest to our country and our business community. Despite the fact that the overall trade volume remains low over time, it should be noted that there is a gradual increase in the volume of trade, while there is great room for improvement. Even greater investment opportunities are emerging. Energy, renewable energy, construction, wastewater management and interconnectivity sectors provide many opportunities for business. Greek groups coming from the energy and construction sectors are already active.

Greek businesses that will prepare themselves properly, study the market conditions and devote the necessary time and resources can take advantage of the attractive environment that has been created in Africa. It is also important to note that people in Ethiopia, Nigeria and Ghana have a positive view of our country due to the successful business presence of Greek groups.

Greece has all potential to become a transit centre of an international trade corridor between Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. A multi-faceted strategy focusing on the substantial upgrading of trade and economic relations with African countries is being implemented.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is now responsible for economic diplomacy and plays a leading role in attracting investment, promoting exports, as well as fostering entrepreneurship and extroversion.

Briefly, I would like to mention that both through our network of Embassies and Economic and Commercial Affairs Offices around the world, as well as through the two outward-looking bodies operating under our supervision, Enterprise Greece and Export Credit Greece, we take every possible initiative and use every available -financial and technological/digital tool- in order to support Greek entrepreneurship in a targeted manner, to strengthen the presence of Greek exports in international markets and to promote Greek exports.

The National Strategy for Extroversion is a strong proof of our initiatives to strengthen entrepreneurship. It is the road map that sets out the objectives and includes - in cooperation with export and production agencies - proposals and actions to strengthen Greek business. This year's Plan includes 779 actions. For the sub-Saharan Africa region, we have planned 10 actions, with a special focus on Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa.

In my capacity as Secretary General for International Economic Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - and this is the first time that a woman has assumed this portfolio - and as Chairperson of the Board of Enterprise Greece, I would like to emphasize that women's entrepreneurship is firmly at the heart of our initiatives.

A great asset of female creativity, skills and leadership remains untapped over time. It should be noted, of course, that recently more and more women are entering the world of business. This change is evident in several parts of the world, including Africa and Greece.

Recognizing the added value for the national economy, we are adopting dynamic initiatives to strengthen and highlight innovative and creative entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship regardless of gender. In particular, we are designing and implementing smart tools and incentives that will develop female entrepreneurship.

The change that is taking place globally is also evident in Africa. The growth of women entrepreneurs in Africa is significant. In fact, Africa has the highest percentage of women entrepreneurs in the world. To illustrate, Botswana, South Africa and Ghana lead the way in this area. In these countries, government support is provided to women entrepreneurs, resulting in a high percentage of businesses owned by women.

We encourage Greek women entrepreneurs to get in touch with the international business scene, to network and spread their wings all over the world, claiming the position they deserve. So today, we invite Greek women to establish business links with Sub-Saharan Africa, a region that presents significant prospects and opportunities for business cooperation.