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Second Edition of the International Footwear Forum in New York

How to better help companies to access international markets

Brussels, 15 June 2016

On the 9ᵗʰ of June 2016, the Second International Footwear Forum (IFF) was held in New York, bringing together footwear associations and federations from across the world to exchange views and propose ways to strengthen the footwear industry. This edition was dedicated to identify how to make the best use of the latest technologies to engage members, but also how to take most advantage of the knowledge and intelligence data of each national association in order to better assist footwear companies.

One year after the launch of the IFF at theMICAM in September 2015, the European Confederation of the Footwear Industry (CEC) in collaboration with the Footwear Distributors and Retailers of America organised the second edition of the International Footwear Forum (IFF) on the 9ᵗʰ of June 2016 at the FFANY New York Shoe Expo. Conceived by the CEC, the IFF provides a platform for representatives of footwear associations and chambers from around the world to annually meet in person to discuss sector challenges and opportunities, while sharing information and best practices.

The three subjects that took centre stage during this year's IFF were the latest technological tools for a more effective engagement with the associations' member companies, corporate responsibility, and access to markets.

On the topic of engagement with members, participants learnt about the possibilities offered by the latest IT technologies to enhance their members' engagement on key decisions for their businesses, while ensuring the effectiveness of the communication and working closer with them.

Regarding Corporate Social Responsibility, the participants agreed that there was an urgent need to reduce the number of audits for footwear companies and that the private and public stakeholders had to work in that direction instead of producing new certification schemes. For that purpose, representatives of associations came to an agreement to align under a unique code of conduct that can guide footwear companies, and to work on raising awareness among them on the need to implement a solid social responsibility strategy that creates a healthy workplace along the supply chain, and anticipates and reduces risks.

On the point of access to markets, the participants agreed that trade tariffs should be removed across the world, and in order to make it possible, associations had to work with public authorities and support them in order that a level playing field in trade was respected. Furthermore and in accordance with the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, associations committed to work together on elaborating useful intelligence tools to facilitate companies to penetrate new markets. Such tools would provide a better and transparent overview of legislation and requirements in force, and would represent the basis for analysing a possible harmonisation or approximation across the world.

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The President of the CEC, Cleto Sagripanti, was satisfied with the steps achieved during the discussions and remarked once the IFF concluded: "It has clearly been a more open and collaborative forum than last edition's with representatives actively proposing and committing themselves in joint initiatives. It is obvious that the more we meet, the more we will be able to achieve together, either in the elimination of trade barriers, or any other subject of common interest. I look forward to our next Forum in 2017, and in the meantime, we will keep informed and work on the agreed initiatives".