

THE ROLE OF A BILATERAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

A bilateral Chamber of Commerce is a private membership organisation which helps Belgian and Luxembourg businesses exporting to and/or investing in a third country or region, saving them valuable time and money, by offering practical services and access to a wide range of events, which are complementary to those by the Belgian regions, and access to a local network of trusted partners and contacts in different market sectors.

A bilateral Chamber is a bridge between the foreign companies and the local official representatives of Belgium and Luxembourg. A bilateral Chamber knows the country where it is established, its staff lives permanently in the represented country, and the Chamber is able to show companies the way that minimizes the risk of failure and increases the chances of success.

In many cases, a bilateral Chamber also acts by transferring knowledge and experience, especially towards the more vulnerable younger generations, guiding them to integrate fluently into business life, according to the growing need for internationalisation, through a direct cooperation with Universities.

When circumstances lead to a scenario of possible political tensions relating to a specific country, a non-profit, independent, apolitical organisation stands for continuity of relationships and has more chances to organise successful new activities.

The Belgian regional trade officers provide complementary services to those of Chambers: market information, databases of potential customers and agents as well as financial support for translating documents or participation in a trade fair.

Compared to the regional trade officers, bilateral Chambers defend the interests of their member companies in their relations with the third country administration; for instance, by participating in governmental meetings on fiscal and legal reforms and assisting their members in the recovery of financial claims. Bilateral Chambers play an important role in giving practical advice on the first steps companies need to undertake when entering the third country's market and introduces potentially beneficial partners for those companies. To this purpose, flexibility and quick reaction are key for bilateral Chambers.

The added value of a bilateral Chamber compared to the actions of the 3 Belgian regions lies in the following elements:

- voluntary support of the Chamber's directors and members who are directly in touch with local business reality in different sectors;
- promotion of the image of Belgium, often more rewarding than that of a single Belgian region;
- freedom of organising less institutional activities (lunches, business drinks, competitions)
- freedom of setting up different kinds of cooperation with other Chambers of Commerce, with the purpose of enlarging the mutual networks and reaching critical mass;
- cooperation in the regional trade officers' activities.