

New initiatives at AmCham



Author:

Nikica Kusinikova

Executive Director of Konekt

In the past years AmCham has been promoting good business practices among the companies in Macedonia. AmCham's leadership recognized the importance of strategic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for the competitiveness of the companies in today's economy as well as its benefit for the wider society, and has been engaged in various activities to promote the concept and bring it closer to its member companies. AmCham's CSR work involved organizing related conferences, discussion forums and fundraising events for charitable causes. According to the feedback, AmCham's engagement in this area is highly valued by its membership.

Recently, AmCham launched two new initiatives related to the area of CSR which are briefly outlined further in this article. The first initiative is rather outward, for the benefit of the society and falls in the CSR area of Community Engagement. The second initiative is related to the Human Resources Development and is directly connected

to the work of AmCham's Workforce Committee. These projects will add value to previous AmCham's work by showing that the Chamber is not only talking about it, but is also practicing strategic CSR. It creates a niche for AmCham and its members to be recognized as a leader in socially responsible practices.

Both initiatives are designed and implemented in cooperation with Association Konekt.

First Social Entrepreneurship Competition in Macedonia

Just as this issue of Emerging Macedonia will be out of print, AmCham will launch the first Social Entrepreneurship Competition for University students in Macedonia. For those not familiar with the term, Social Entrepreneurship (also referred to as a "social-purpose business") covers the market actors with a mix of motivations that go beyond profit seeking and display strong social functions, i.e. strive to address social issues.

The aim of this program is to contribute to entrepreneurship development in Macedonia by encouraging young people to innovate and to look for business opportunities in any possible circumstances, at the same time raising their awareness about the wider social context and needs. The competition will support young students to cre-

In this process, distinction should be made between the internship of students and those outside the educational system, and to appropriately address their particular needs and challenges.

ate innovative business models to address social problems in their communities by combining economic and social objectives.

The competition will be publicly announced and is open to all undergraduate students from public and private Universities in Macedonia. Students will have month and a half to submit their social

enterprise ideas following Application Form and Guidelines specifically prepared for this competition. Submitted proposals will be evaluated by a Selection Committee comprised of 5 AmCham members with different professional backgrounds. They will mark the proposals based on previously set evaluation criteria.

Winning Social Enterprise business plan will be awarded with monetary prize of 1500 Euro and will receive advisory sessions with AmCham Board Members to improve their business plan, identify small loan opportunities and partners etc.

To increase visibility, the Competition will be promoted in various media, through students networks and at the Universities. We encourage AmCham members to disseminate the information to any interested individuals and groups.

We would like to thank the AmCham member companies for their generous support to this year's competition.

It's about the time for changes in the legal framework for internships

Throughout the years, companies that have initiated internship programs have been alerting on the lack of appropriate legal provisions in this area. Existing legislation in the area of labour and education, provides some provisions on the students' internships and the probation and volunteering term which are obligatory in some professions. The newly introduced Law on volunteerism does not cover companies as possible organizers of volunteer work, rightly so, since this law makes clear distinction in the definition between the volunteerism and internship which often are interchanged.

What are the practical implications of the existing legal framework related to internships? What are the challenges and obstacles faced by the numerous companies as well as those that send interns (such as the educational institutions)? What kind of changes are needed to encourage internship programs in Macedonia? These are some of the questions discussed at the Meeting of AmCham's members, organized by AmCham in May this year attended by around thirteen participants and rep-

resentative from the Ministry of Labor and Social Politics.

Discussions during the meeting revealed that there is apparent need to define framework that will provide directions for those interested in engaging interns as well as for those that serve as intermediaries in providing ("sending") interns. In this process, distinction should be made between the internship of students and those outside the educational system, and to appropriately address their particular needs and challenges. Measures should be introduced to provide benefits and motivate subjects interested in engaging interns. Besides the legal provisions, there is a need to support the companies, especially small/medium ones, in developing internal internship programs.

KONEKT

Konekt is a Macedonian, not-for-profit organization focused on promoting and encouraging philanthropy and CSR towards effective, long-term development of the country. We advise and support companies and individuals on how to donate and invest in the community strategically, conduct relevant research and comparative analysis and advocate for creating encouraging environment.

Konekt is a member of the UN Global Compact Network in Macedonia and associate member of the National Coordinative Body on CSR. This year, Konekt co-financed and was part of the Committee that organized the National CSR Awards for 2008. The organization has supported the organization of several CSR events in the country and delivered workshops for companies. Konekt is part of the consortium led by the Institute for Sustainable Communities for the implementation of USAID funded Civil Society Strengthening Project (CSSP). Within this project, Konekt is currently supporting the Ministry of Labor and Social Politics in drafting the Strategy on promotion of volunteerism in Macedonia. The Author of this text was part of the Working group that drafted the National Agenda on CSR and the Working group that drafted the Law on volunteerism.

In the following period, AmCham in cooperation with Konekt will initiate process for revising the legal framework in this domain with the relevant institutions. What is crucial is to enable wider participation from all relevant stakeholders (companies, business associations, educational institutions, employment agencies etc). The participants at AmCham's meeting supported the initiative and expressed interest to get involved and contribute to the process.

Hopefully not for long, in some of the following issues of Emerging Macedonia we'll have the opportunity to announce the long expected legal changes in this sphere.