Interreg
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BALKANMED E-BP

BalkanMed
E-Business Pages

Analysis of Export Industries – Greece

Hellenic Management Association – Athens, Greece

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1 Introduction

This project was carried out by the company GNOSI ANAPTIXIAKI Business Development Consultants, under the project "BalkanMed E-Business Pages - BalkanMed e-BP", financed by the INTERREG V-B Balkan-Mediterranean 2014-2020 Programme.

This deliverable was assigned to GNOSI ANAPTIXIAKI Business Development Consultants by the **Hellenic Management Association** under the contract of 9/3/2018.

The project objective is to develop a database for small, medium and large manufacturing companies, clusters and other business associations operating in Greece, as well as the processing of data that was obtained from the field research and entered into the database. 250 enterprises and Bodies participated in the field research, in particular, 245 enterprises and 5 Bodies. The aim is to raise information on the export activity of Greek businesses, create Guides to strengthen business co-operation initiatives, and capitalize digital tools to enhance incorporation of innovative know-how / technology into local markets.

The current deliverable presents the results from the field research carried out in Greek enterprises under Work Package 1, aiming at supplying the BalkanMed E-Business Pages database.

Specifically, the Consultant processed and analyzed the results of the data entered in the database, aiming to highlight the main information regarding export activity, focusing on parameters and conditions of export efforts, as well as on the difficulties and problems addressed by Greek companies when entering international markets, in order to cope with competitive pressures.

Specifically, **objectives of the current deliverable** are the following:

- Classification and processing of the data entered in the database, relevant to the export activity of 250 enterprises, clusters and business associations.
- Analysis of the field research results.
- Correlation of the field research results with the secondary research findings.
- Conclusions on the current export activity of enterprises in Greece.

2 Methodological approach

The objective of this deliverable is to present the results of the field research carried out in Work Package 1, which aimed at supplying the database with the title "BalkanMed E-Business Pages Database" and investigating critical information related to the export activity and difficulties that Greek companies address when entering international markets.

In particular, data from ***250 companies and bodies*** were introduced in the database, classified, processed and analyzed. Then, results of the field research were correlated with the findings of the secondary research and conclusions on the current export activity of enterprises in Greece, were presented.

The methodological tool that the researcher used was the primary research to collect qualitative data through the questionnaires listed in Annex II. In particular, two ways of collecting information and data were used:

- ⇨ **Electronic self-completion and supplementary telephone communication when deemed necessary with business representatives.** The data collection was carried out by emailing the questionnaires to the representatives of companies. If further clarification was required, researchers made a telephone conversation with the company's representative. The questionnaire included a series of structured questions, asking representatives to answer exactly the same set of questions.

- ⇨ **Telephone Interview.** Interviews were conducted by telephone and personal contact with the business representative - export manager. Business representatives were asked to answer all the questions of the questionnaire, having the advantage of receiving immediate clarifications from the researcher.

The data collected and analyzed, concerned the following:

- General information for businesses and bodies
- Products and services, they offer
- Collaborations that they want to offer
- Collaborations that they seek

In particular, the project team carried out an investigation, systematic collection and processing of the data collected from 250 enterprises and bodies, and listed in the following fields:

- **Company Profile:** Business sector, Legal form, turnover, turnover forecast, number of employees, difficulties, use of e-commerce, participation in organizations, networks and associations, certifications, countries supplying materials.

- **Company export activity:** Existence of exports department, export activity, entrepreneurship promoters, exports destination countries, contact with target markets, barriers and opportunities in target markets, desired countries for operations, collaborations offered, collaborations requested

As for the bodies, information was collected in the following fields:

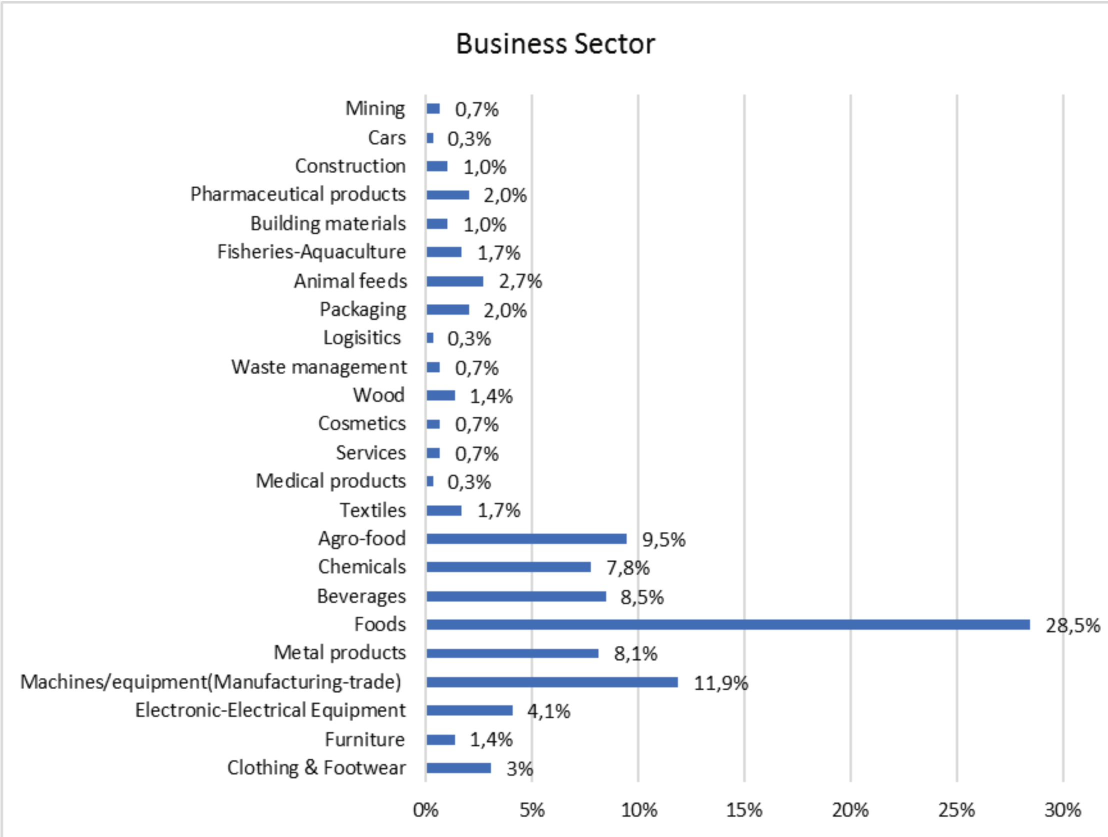
- Degree of support of the organization to its members
- Operation Difficulties
- Strengths / Advantages
- Weaknesses
- Participation in associations, groups, networks
- Tools for the transfer of technology / know-how
- Difficulties in transferring and applying technology / know-how
- Contribution to the development of its members' export activities
- Obstacles and opportunities in international target markets
- Development of partnerships

The project team processed the above data and demonstrated the results of the survey and the graphical presentation and analysis of the data collected, in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the export activity of the Greek companies and the difficulties they address when entering international markets.

3 Research Results

3.1 Sample Profile

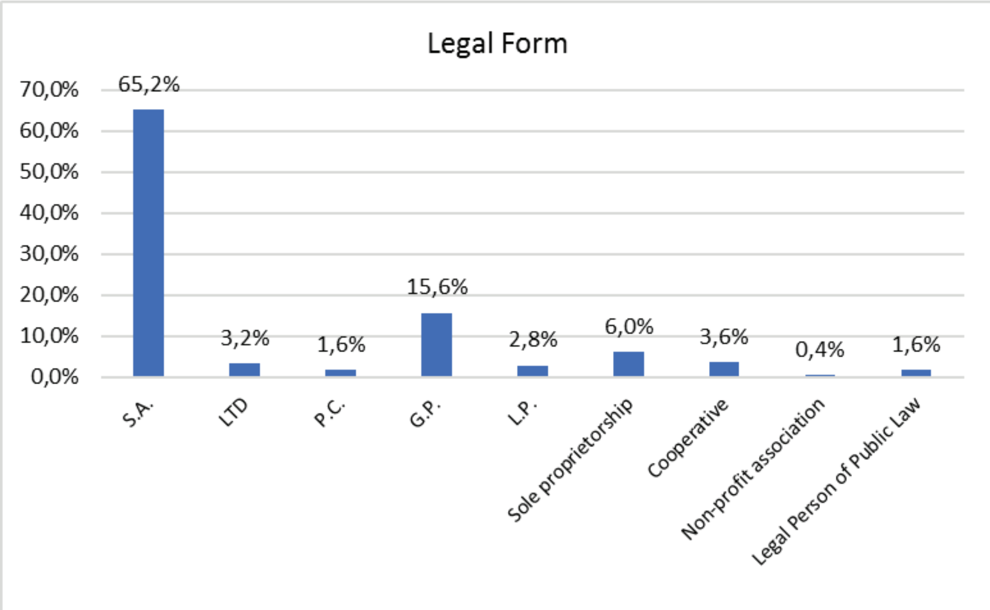
3.1.1 Business Sector



Graph 3.1 Business Sector

Enterprises that participated in field research come from various sectors of the economy (Figure 3.1). The main ones are the raw materials processing for food production (28.5%), the manufacture and trade of various types of machinery and equipment (11.9%) and the agro-food industry (9.5%). 8.5% of enterprises comes from the beverage industry, 7.8% from the chemical industry and 8.1% from metal products industry, while 4.1% from the electronics and electrical equipment sector. Additionally, enterprises in the clothing and footwear industry cover 3% of the sample, in animal-feed industry 2.7%, and in packaging industry 2%. Finally, the sample includes an insignificant number of companies from industries such as furniture, cosmetics, textiles, fishery, medical devices, services, transportation, waste management, building materials, pharmaceuticals, construction, cars, mining and wood. The sectors of raw materials processing for food production and machinery and equipment manufacturing, as well as agriculture, are the main sectors on which the Greek economy is based and it is expected that most of the enterprises will come from them.

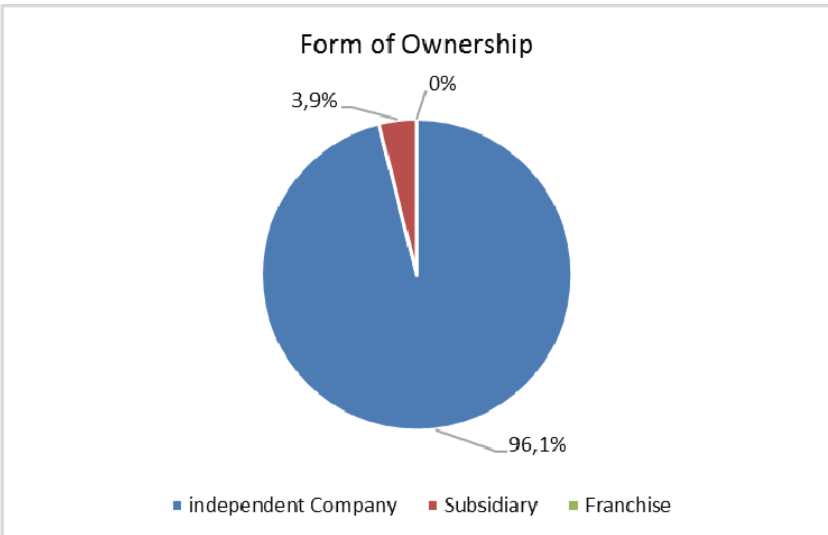
3.1.2 Legal form



Graph 3.2 Legal form

As illustrated in Graph 3.2, the majority of enterprises that participated in the field research (86.8%) consists of anonymous societies (S.A.), general partnerships, and sole proprietorships. In particular, 65.2% of the enterprises consist of anonymous societies, 15.6% of general partnerships, 6% of sole proprietorships, 3.6% of cooperatives, 3.2% of limited liability companies, 2.8% of limited partnerships, 1.6% of private companies and Legal Entities of Public Law, and 0.4% of NGOs.

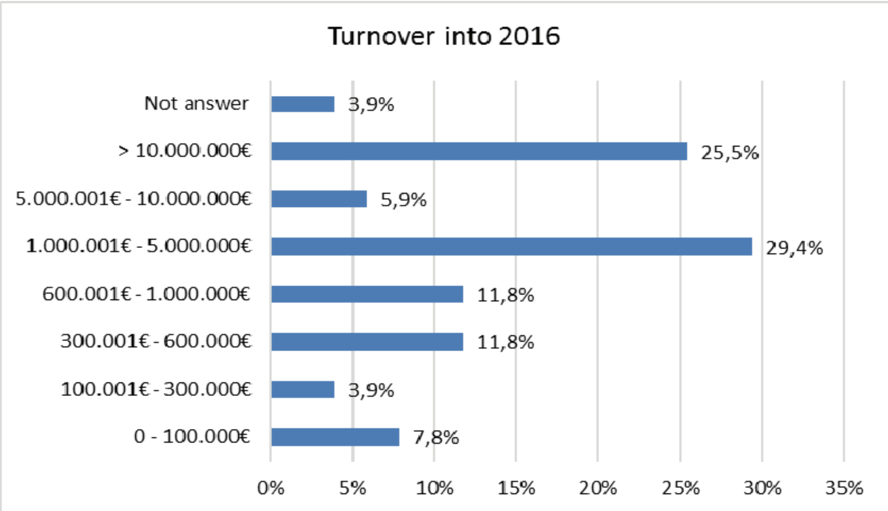
3.1.3 Form of ownership



***Graph 3.3* Form of ownership**

According to the form of ownership of the enterprises (Graph 3.3), almost the entire sample (96.1%) consists of independent companies, while 3.9% are subsidiary companies. It is worth noting that no franchise company was involved in this field research.

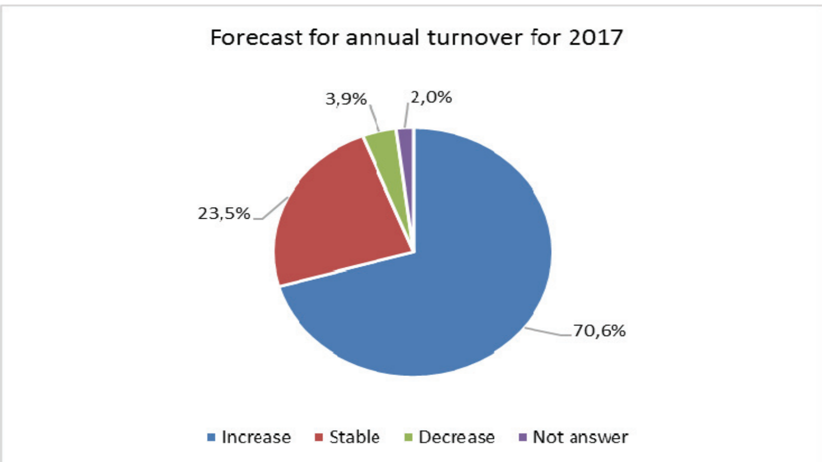
3.1.4 Turnover in 2016



Graph 3.4 **Turnover into 2016**

More than half of the sample enterprises present remarkable turnover (Graph 3.4). In particular, 29.4% has a turnover of 1.000.000-5.000.000€ and 25.5% more than 10.000.000€. 11.8% consists of enterprises with a turnover of 300.000-600.000 €, as well as by enterprises with turnover of 600.000-1.000.000 €. In addition, 7.8% of enterprises present turnover up to 100.000€, while 5,9% between 5.000.000 and 10.000.000€. Finally, there was a percentage of 3.9% did not want to reveal this kind of information.

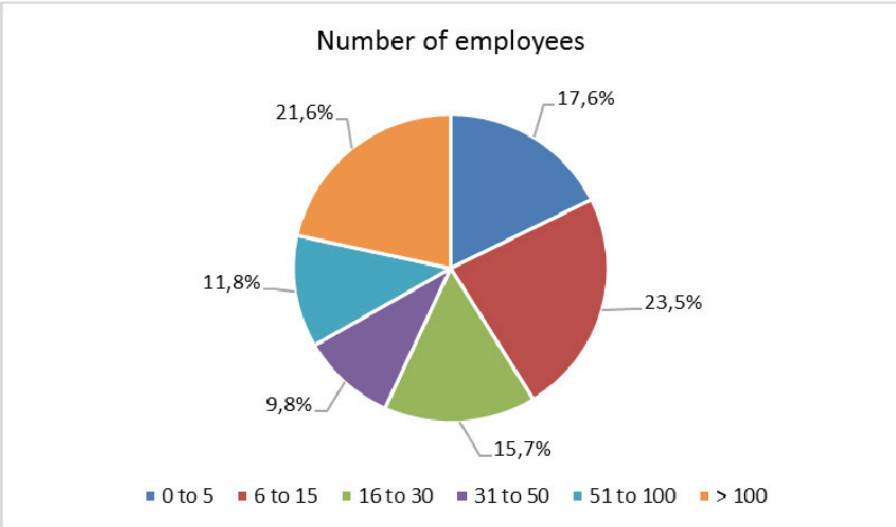
3.1.5 Forecast for annual turnover for 2017



Graph 3.5 **Forecast for annual turnover for 2017**

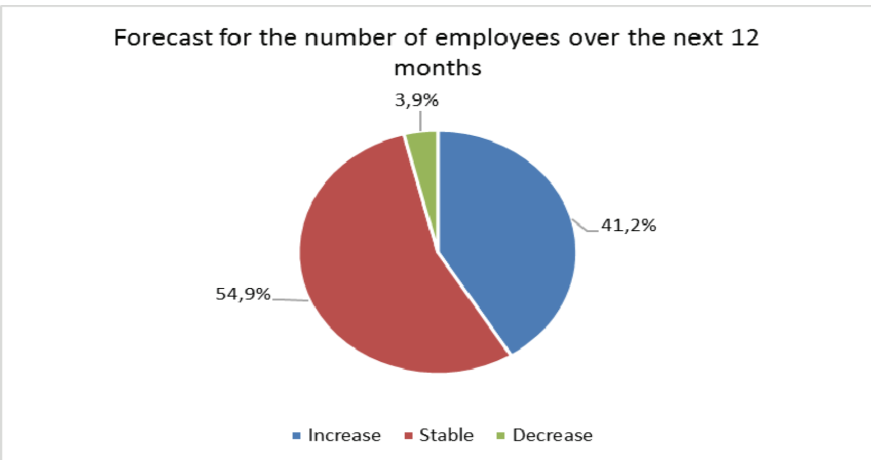
Graph 3.5 demonstrates the forecast for annual turnover for the year 2017. 70.6% of enterprises declare that their sales will increase. 23.5% of enterprises stated that will remain stable compared to 2016, while 3.9% of enterprises are pessimistic about their annual turnover for the year 2017. It is clear that the economic environment, following the recent economic crisis, is now considered to be favorable by a significant percentage of enterprises to raise their revenues.

3.1.6 Number of employees and forecasts



Graph 3.6 Number of employees

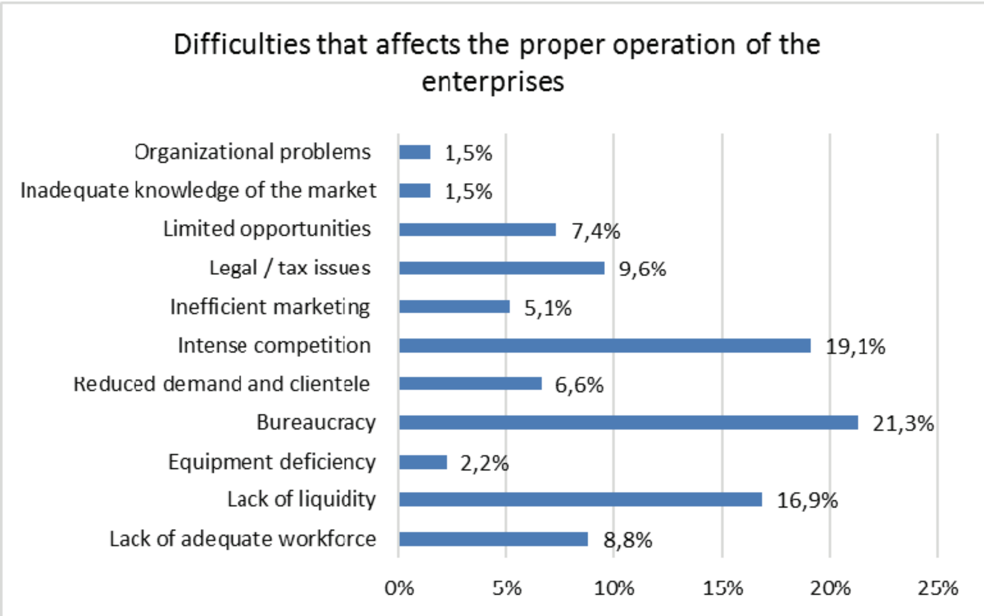
Graph 3.6 shows the number of employees (in percentage) that enterprises of the field research employ. 23.5% of enterprises employ between 6 and 15 people, while 21.6% of enterprises employ more than 100 people. 17.6% employ between 0 and 5 people, 15.7% between 16 and 30 people, and 11.8% between 51 and 100.



Graph 3.7 Forecast for the number of employees over the next 12 months

Regarding the forecast of enterprises for the potential increase of their workforce, more than half of them, and in particular 54.9% mentioned that the number of their employees will remain stable, while 3.9% declared that workforce will decrease (Figure 3.7). Finally, 41.2% of enterprises believe that their workforce will increase over the next 12 months. A general conclusion of the above is that there is a trend in enterprises not to reduce the number of their employees, with a significant percentage of them being positive about recruiting a new workforce.

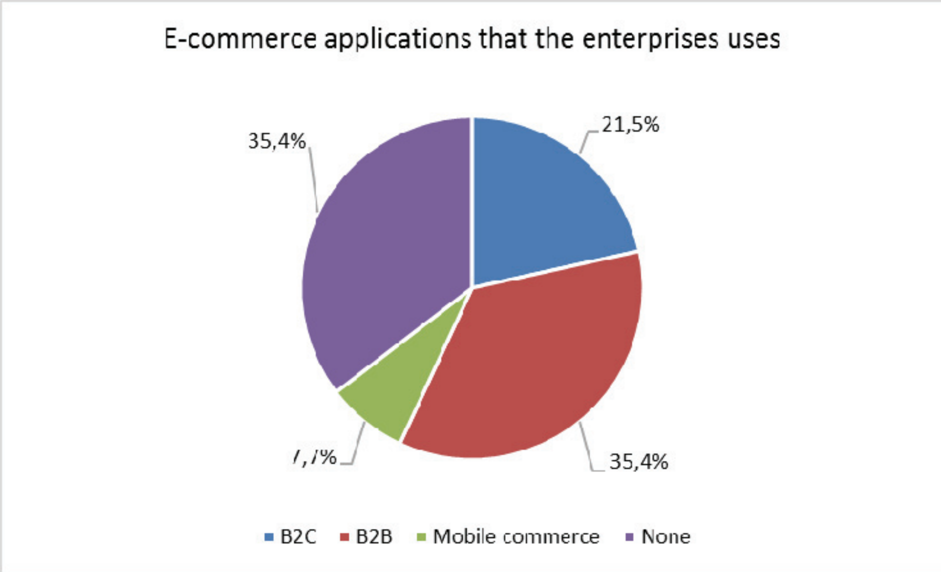
3.1.7 Difficulties that affects the proper operation of the enterprises



Graph 3.8 Difficulties that affects the proper operation of the enterprises

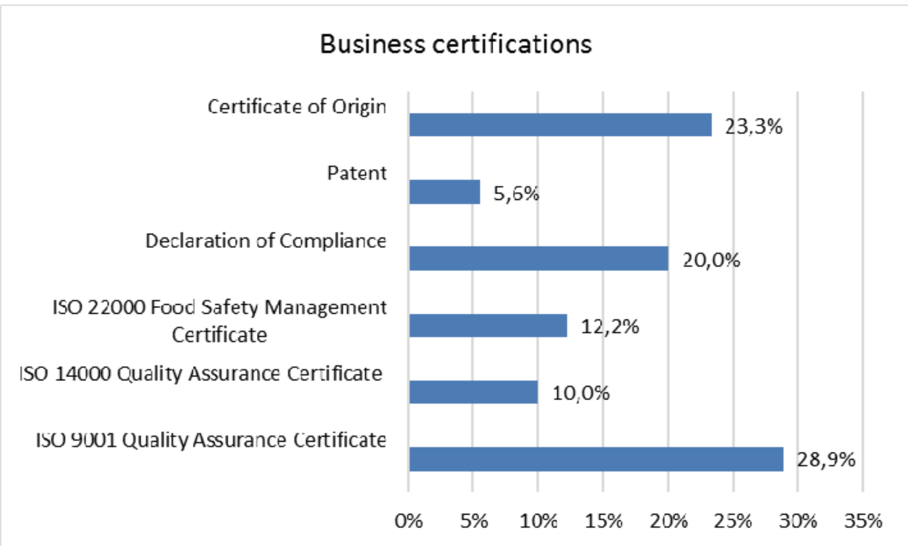
Regarding the difficulties faced by the enterprises of the sample, affecting their proper operation, bureaucracy in their transactions (21.3%), intense competition from other enterprises (19.1% %) and the lack of liquidity (16.9%) seem to be the most critical problems (Graph 3.8). In addition, other difficulties mentioned were the various legal / tax issues that most of the enterprises face (9.6%), the limited opportunities (7.4%), the reduced demand and clientele (6.6%) and the inefficient marketing (5.1%). Less important issues (from 1.5% to 2.2%) are the inadequate knowledge of the market, the inadequate equipment and the organizational problems in relevance to the business management. In conclusion, it is worth noting that the bureaucracy faced by Greek enterprises is considered as a critical problem, more than the lack of liquidity, even in a difficult economic environment like the present one where all the bureaucratic procedures related to the operation of enterprises should be quite simplified.

3.1.8 E-commerce applications and business certifications



Graph 3.9 E-commerce applications

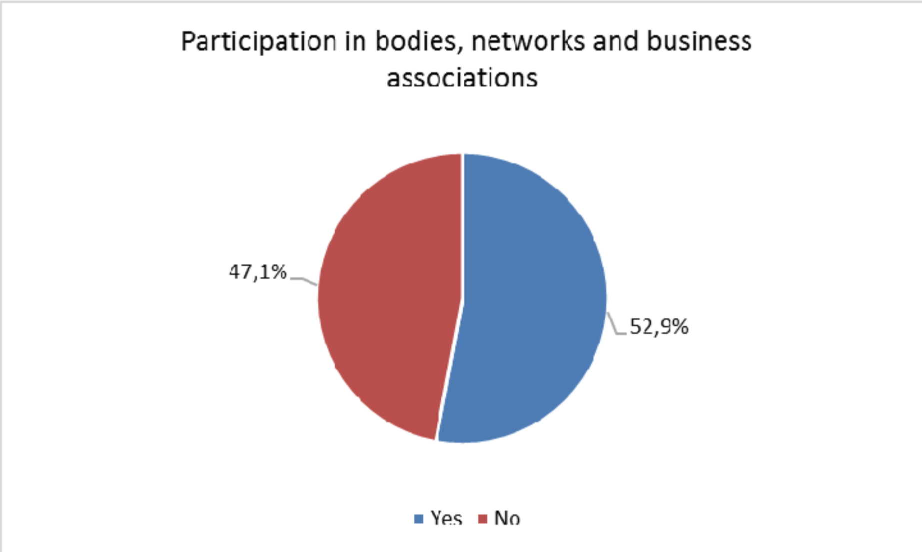
Graph 3.9 shows the e-commerce applications that the enterprises use. 35.4% of enterprises do not use any e-commerce service, while at the same percentage there are also enterprises that use business to business (B2B) e-commerce services. More than one-third of the enterprises of the survey stated that they use e-commerce services, or other internet services in order to deal with suppliers or other enterprises. Moreover, 21.5% of enterprises use business to consumer (B2C) services, that is, they implement the strategy of selling their products via the internet. Finally, a small percentage of businesses (7.7%) use mobile commerce applications, which means that Greek enterprises are not familiar with such practices, as opposed to foreign enterprises.



Graph 3.10 Business certifications

According to Graph 3.10, almost one third of enterprises (28.9%) holds a Quality Assurance Certificate in compliance with ISO 9001, while 23.3% of enterprises hold a Certificate of Origin. 20% of enterprises hold a Declaration of Compliance, while 12.2% of them hold Food Safety Management Certificates in compliance with ISO 22000. In addition 10% of them are incorporate effective environmental management system that are certified by ISO 14000 and finally only a small percentage of them (5.6%) holds a Patent.

3.1.9 Participation in bodies, networks and business associations

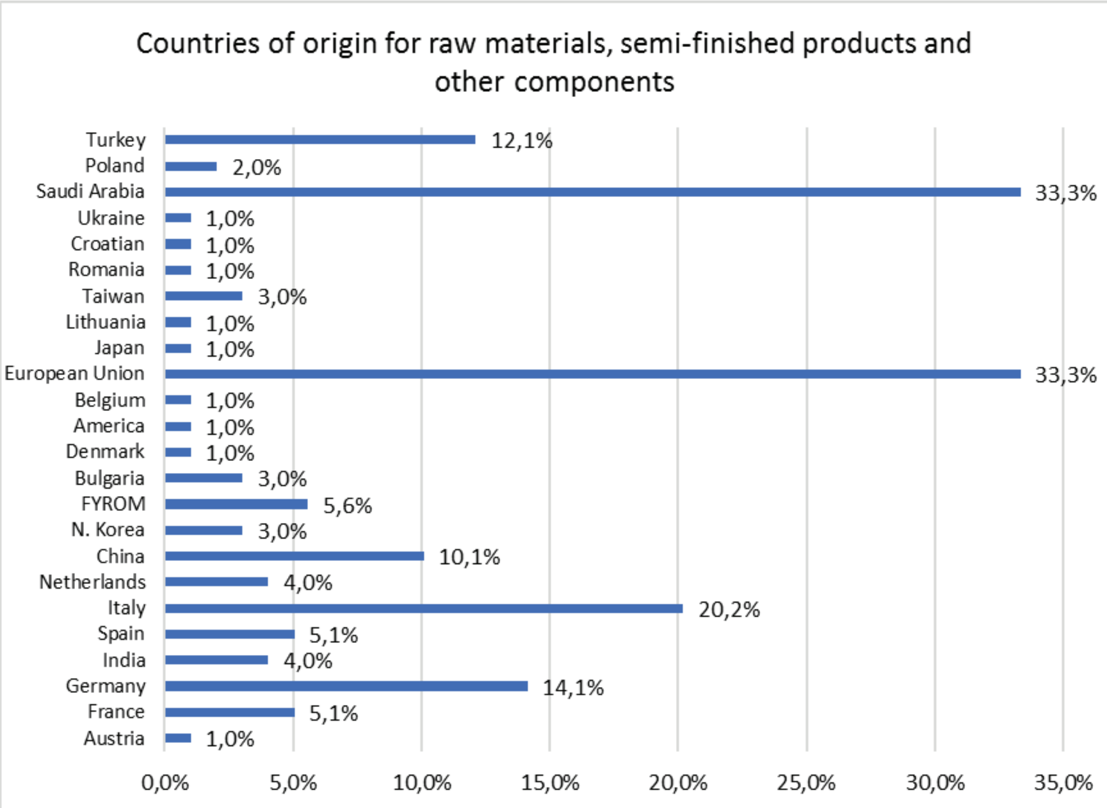


Graph 3.11 Participation in bodies, networks and business associations

Graph 3.11 shows the participation rate of the sample enterprises in bodies, networks and business associations. In particular, 52.9% of enterprises are members of various bodies and associations, while 47.1% do not participate in such associations.

In brief, some of the bodies that the enterprises are involved are the Greek Exporters Association, Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Association of Manufacturers of Agricultural Machinery of Greece, etc.

3.1.10 Countries of origin for raw materials, semi-finished products and other components

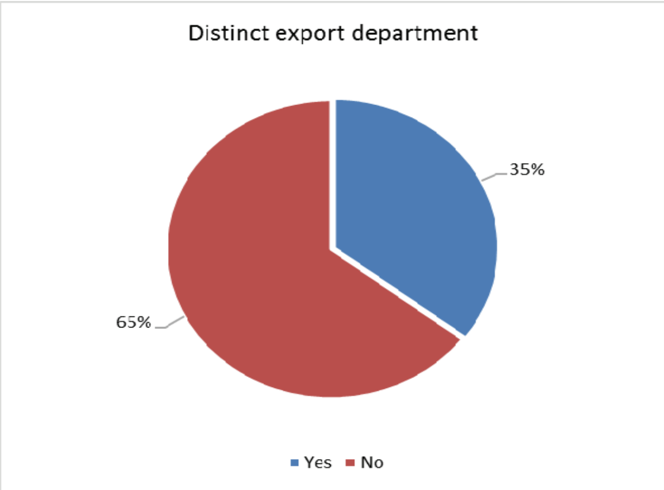


Graph 3.12 Countries of origin for raw materials, semi-finished products and other components

Concerning the countries of origin of raw materials, semi-finished products and other components, it seems that the EU and Saudi Arabia are the first two choices for raw material imports (33.3% each), (Graph 3.12). Of the European countries, Italy with 20.2%, Germany with 14.1%, Turkey with 12.1% have the largest share in the preferences, followed by China with 10.1%. Countries such as FYROM, France and Spain have a percentage around 5%, while India, the Netherlands, South Korea, Bulgaria and the Taiwan are the last choices. In addition, a very small number of enterprises import raw materials from countries such as Austria, Denmark, the USA, Belgium, Japan, Lithuania, Romania, Croatia, Ukraine and Poland.

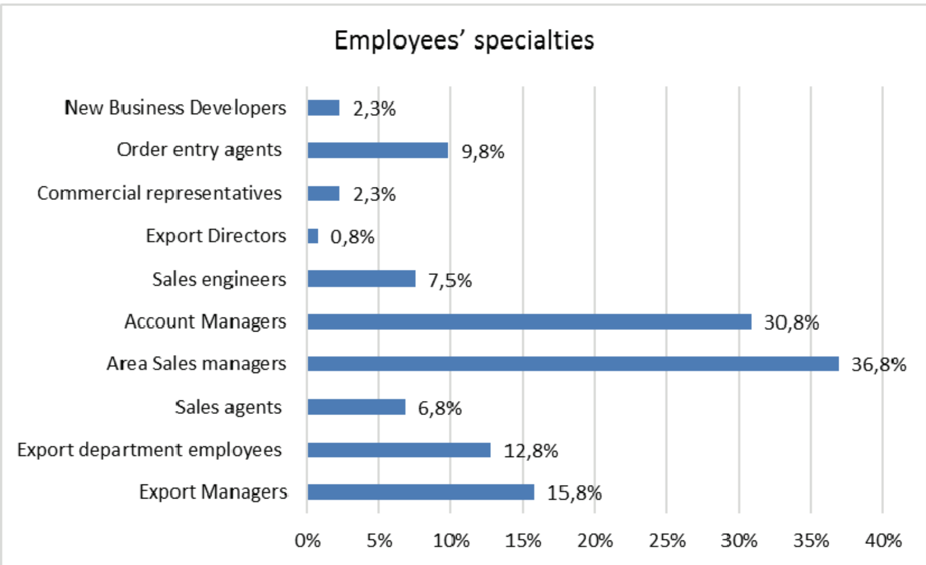
3.2 Export activity of enterprises

3.2.1 Export department



Graph 3.13 Export department

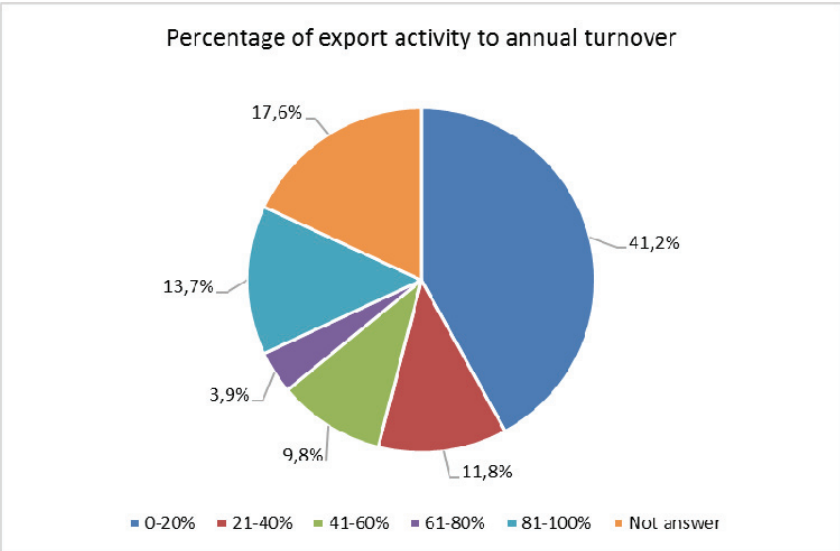
Graph 3.13 refers to the existence or not of a separate export department in the enterprises. It is worth noting that the majority of the enterprises (65%) that participated in the research, although being exporting companies, they do not have an export department. That means that all export-related processes are moved on other departments, possibly resulting in a reduced efficiency of the employees who bear the burden of these additional processes.



Graph 3.14 Export department employees' specialties

Graph 3.14 shows the main specialties from which the export departments are composed, for those enterprises in which there is an export department (35% of the sample - Graph 3.13). In 36.8% of the enterprises there are "Area Sales managers" and in 30.8% "Account managers". In 15.8% of the enterprises there are export managers, while in 12.8% apart from export managers there are employees in the export department as well. Only 9.8% of the enterprises have order entry agents and 7.5% sales engineers. In addition, enterprises with sales agents account for 6.8% of the sample, while these with Export Directors, commercial representatives and "New Business Developers" account for a small part of the sample ranging from 0.8% to 2.3%.

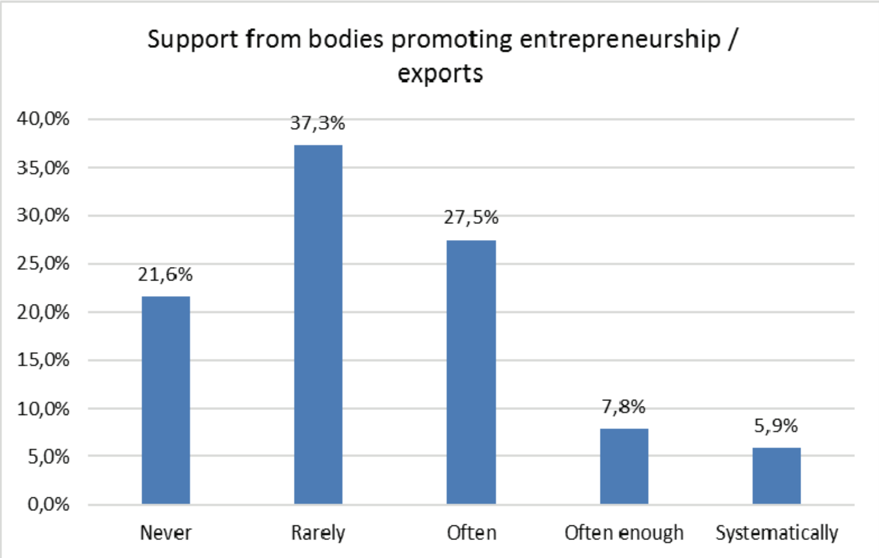
3.2.2 Percentage of export activity to annual turnover



Graph 3.15 Percentage of export activity to annual turnover

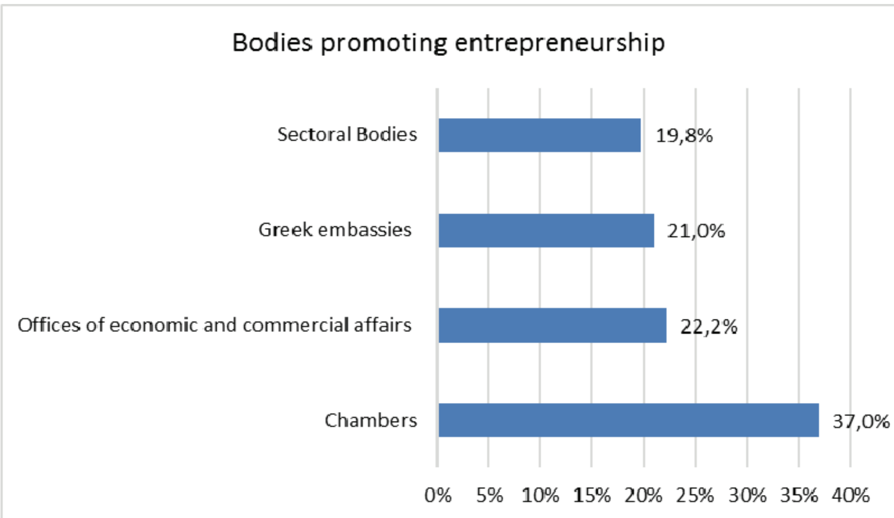
Graph 3.15 illustrates the percentage of gross revenue of the sample enterprises, derived from their export activity. For 41.2% of enterprises the percentage of the turnover derived from exports ranges from 0-20%, for the 13.7% of the enterprises ranges from 21-40%, while for the 9.8% from 41- 60%. In addition, 3.9% of enterprises present revenues from export activity ranging from 61-80%, while 13.7% of enterprises rely on a very significant percentage to exports, ranging from 80-100%. It is worth noting that 17.6% of enterprises did not want to reveal this kind of information.

3.2.3 Bodies promoting entrepreneurship



Graph 3.16 Support from bodies promoting entrepreneurship/exports

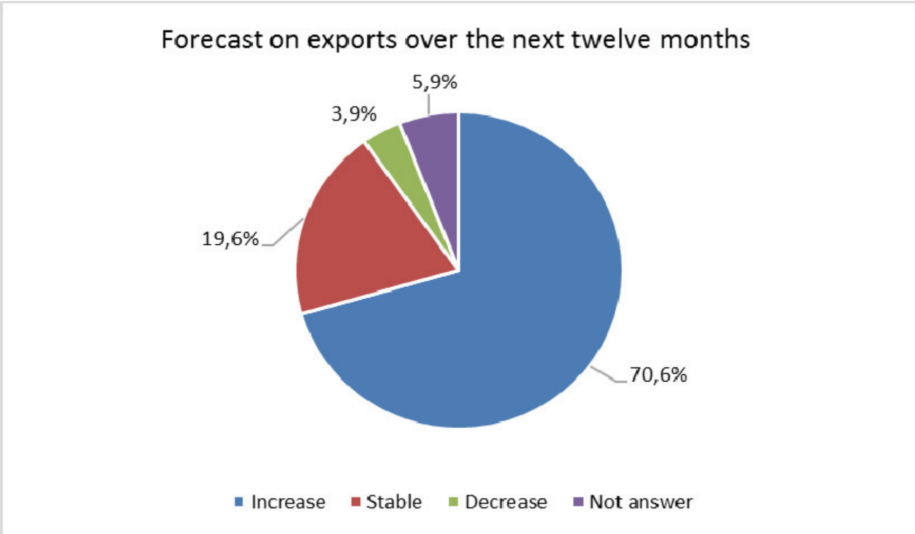
Most of the enterprises involved in the field research (37.3%) rarely refer to support from bodies promoting entrepreneurship, while 21.6% have never been in contact with such bodies (Graph 3.16). It is worth noting that even though the sample of the research consists of export companies, however, it seems that 60% either do not want or have not cooperated with bodies aiming at providing export consultancy and support services. On the contrary, 27.5% of the enterprises often refer to support from bodies promoting entrepreneurship, 7.8% fairly often and 5.9% systematically.



Graph 3.17 Bodies promoting entrepreneurship

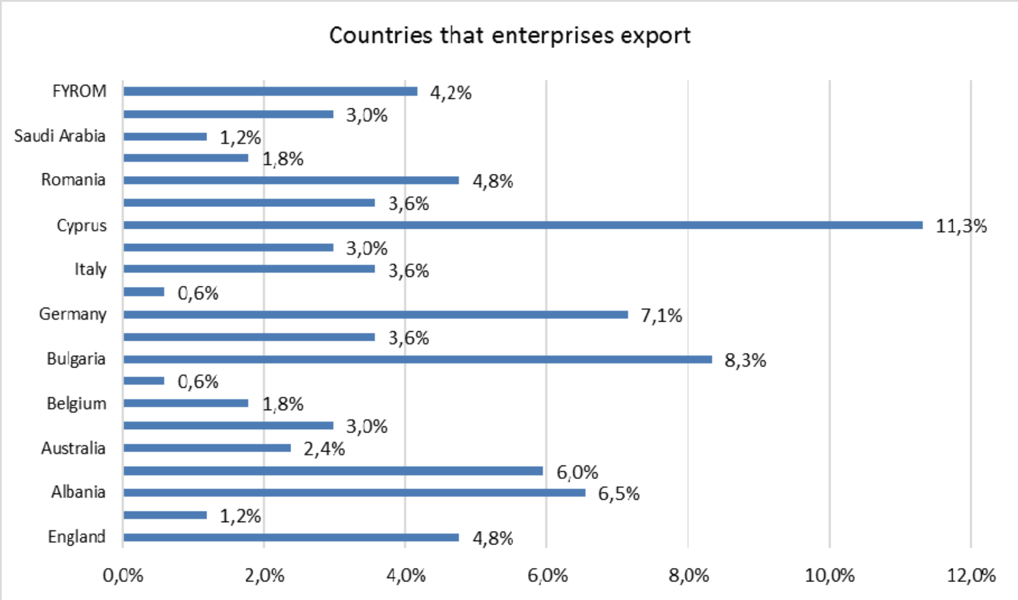
Regarding the types of bodies of promoting entrepreneurship in which enterprises focus on when they want to support them, the chambers come first with 37%, followed by the offices of economic and commercial affairs with 22,2%, the Greek embassies with 21% and finally various sectoral bodies with 19.8% (Chart 3.17).

3.2.4 Export activity and countries that exports are directed

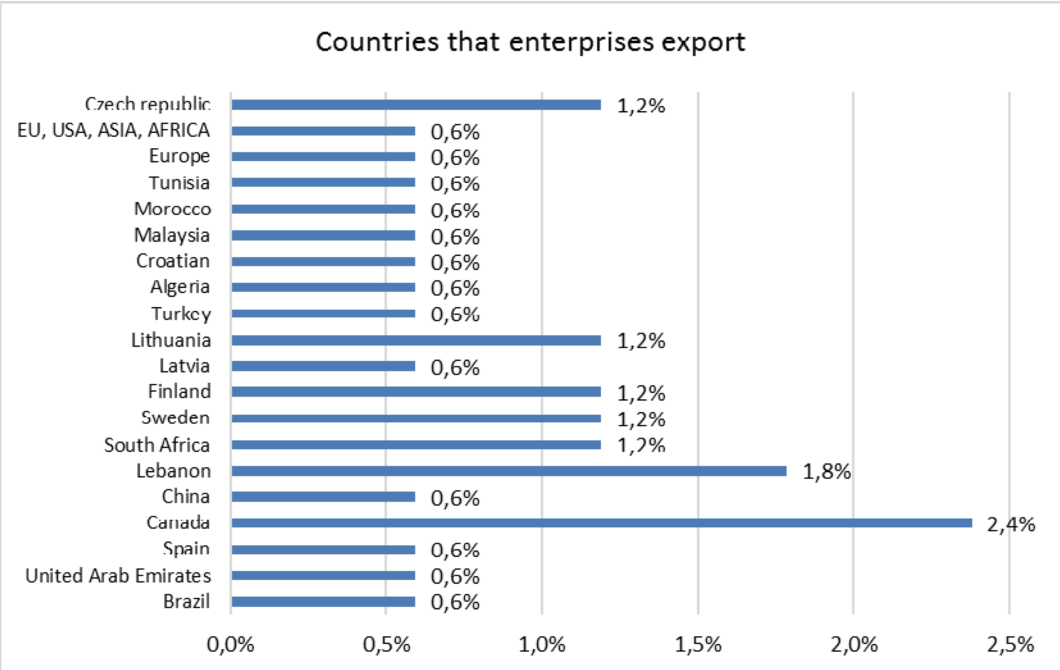


Graph 3.18 Forecast on exports

Graph 3.18 presents the companies forecast on exports in the next 12 months. 70.6% of enterprises are optimistic that exports will increase, while 19.6% declare that exports will remain stable. Only 3.9% of enterprises state that exports will decrease, while 5.9% refuse to give this information. In general, enterprises' responses indicate that they are optimistic that their economic situation will be improved, as well as the general economic environment.



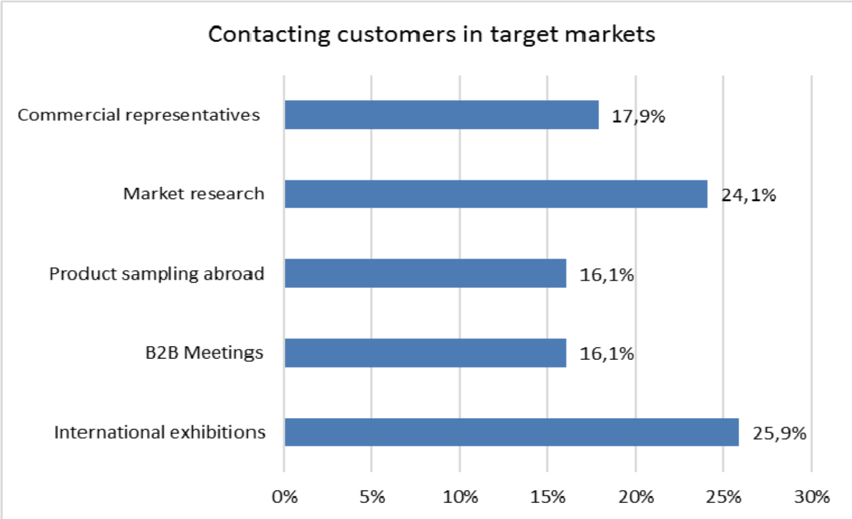
Graph 3.19 Countries that enterprises export



Graph 3.20 Countries that enterprises export

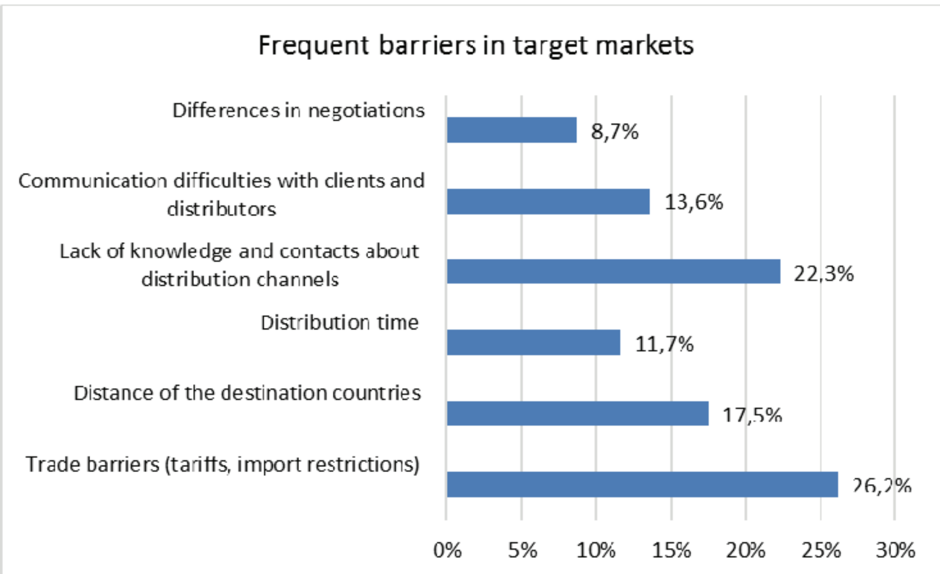
Graphs 3.19 and 3.20 show the countries in which enterprises of the sample export. Most of them are European countries, while some of them are established in Africa and Asia. In particular, Cyprus is the main destination of the enterprises' exports with 11.3%, followed by Bulgaria with 8.3%, Germany with 7.1%, Albania with 6.5%, the United States with 6%, England and Romania with 4.8% and FYROM with 4.2%. Egypt and N. Africa with 1.2% are the main destination from Africa, while Lebanon with 1.8% is the main destination from Asia. The rest, mainly European countries, present an insignificant percentage of enterprises' exports.

3.2.5 Contact with customers in target markets and ordinary barriers



Graph 3.21 Ways of contacting customers in target markets

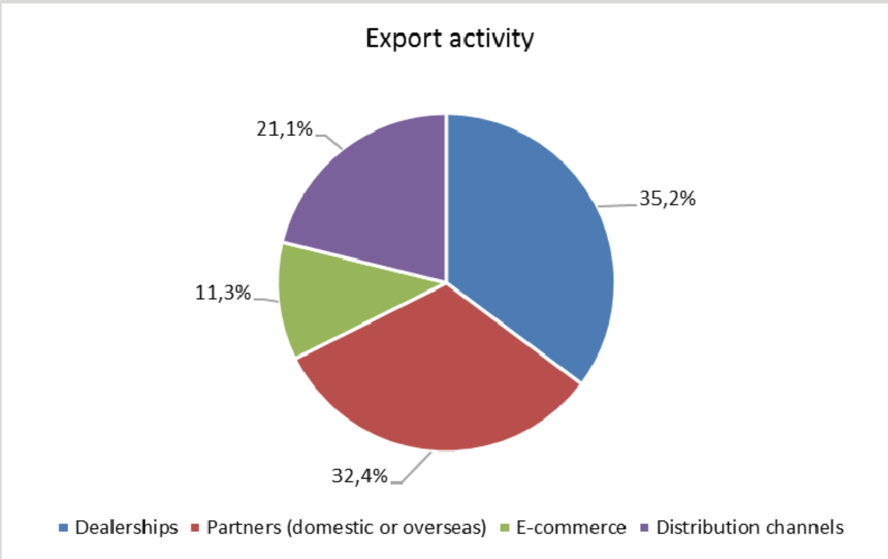
The main way of enterprises to export their products is their presence in international exhibitions with 21.1% (Graph 3.21). This is absolutely reasonable because in international exhibitions the business community is concentrated and it is possible to reach important trade agreements for the benefit of enterprises. Commercial agents (17.2%), market research (15.5%), distribution channels (14.2%) and product sampling abroad (10.2%) are the rest choices. Business-to-Business Meetings account for 9.9% of sample preferences, foreign partners for 9.1%, while e-commerce for 2.8%. It is clear from responses that despite the technological advancement that favors identifying foreign customers, few companies rely on e-commerce to get in touch with potential customers in international target markets.



Graph 3.22 Barriers in target markets

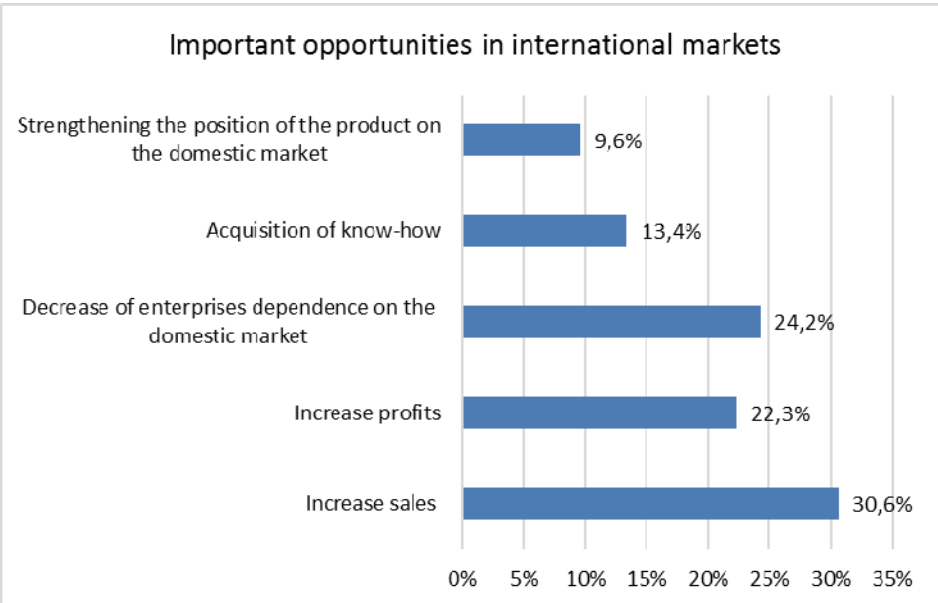
Regarding the most frequent barriers faced by enterprises in their export business, 26.2% of enterprises state that trade barriers such as tariffs or import restrictions is the main barrier that they address when exporting mainly to countries outside the European Union (Graph 3.22). Another problem is the lack of knowledge and contacts about distribution channels (22.3%), which, however, are gained over time through experience on exports. The distance of the destination countries is a considerable deterrent for enterprises (17.5%) that want to expand into international markets due to the high transport costs. Finally, difficulties in communicating with foreign customers and distributors (13.6%), distribution time (11.7%) and differences in negotiation (8.7%) are also some of the most frequent barriers to exports to various target markets.

3.2.6 Export activity and significant opportunities of target markets



Graph 3.23 Export activity

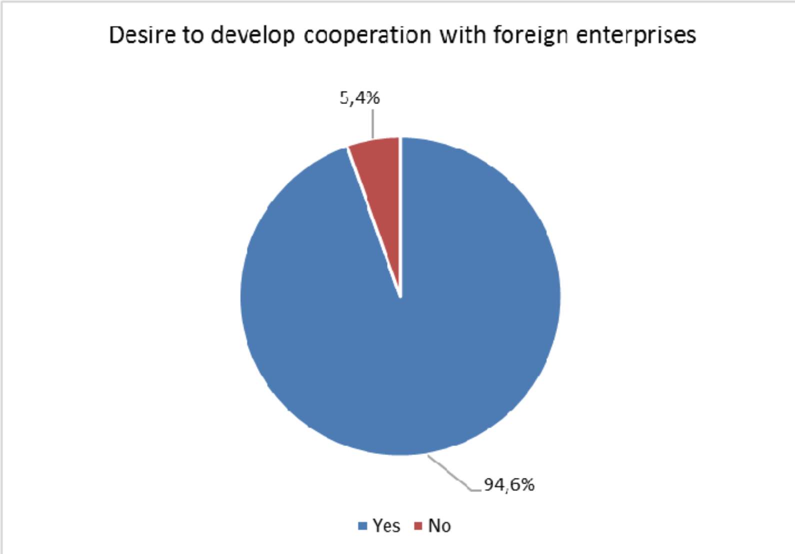
Graph 3.23 presents various ways by which enterprises implement their exports. 35.2% of enterprises export products through dealership, 32.4% through partners (domestic or overseas), 21.1% through distribution channels and finally 11.3% via the internet with an online store for products sales.



Graph 3.24 Opportunities presented in international target markets

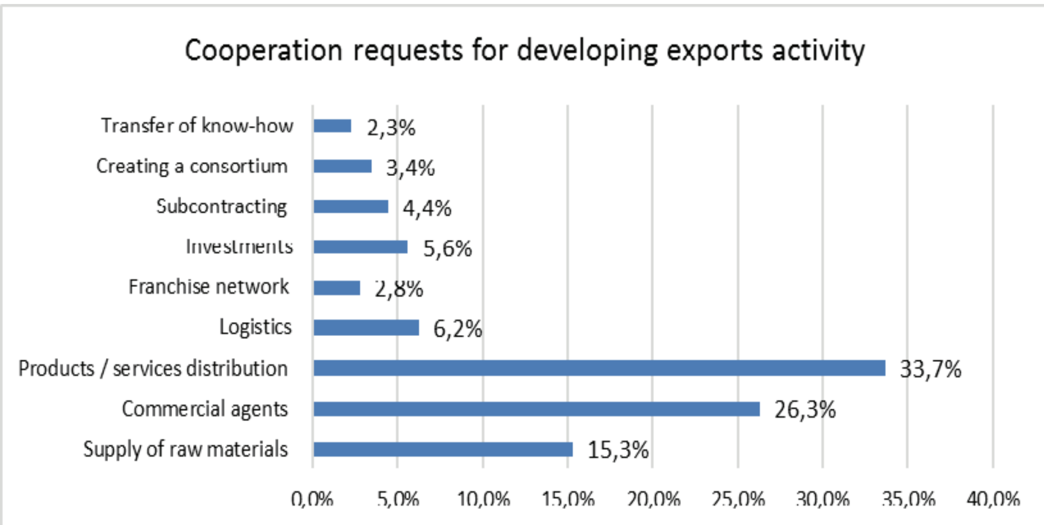
Concerning the opportunities presented in the international target markets and their connection with exports, increase of sales revenue (30.6%) comes first, followed by the decrease of enterprises dependence on the domestic market (24,2%) (Graph 3.24). 22.3% of enterprises consider exports as a significant opportunity to increase profits, while 13.4% for acquisition of know-how. Finally, 9.6% believe that through exports the product is strengthened on the domestic market. In conclusion, searching for new markets for product distribution seems to be of great importance and can be a growth strategy for any enterprise.

3.2.7 Cooperation and exports enterprises



Graph 3.25 Desire to develop cooperation with foreign enterprises

Graph 3.25 illustrates the desire of export enterprises to develop cooperation with foreign enterprises. 94.6% of sample enterprises wish to cooperate with foreign enterprises, while only 5.4% were negative in this perspective.

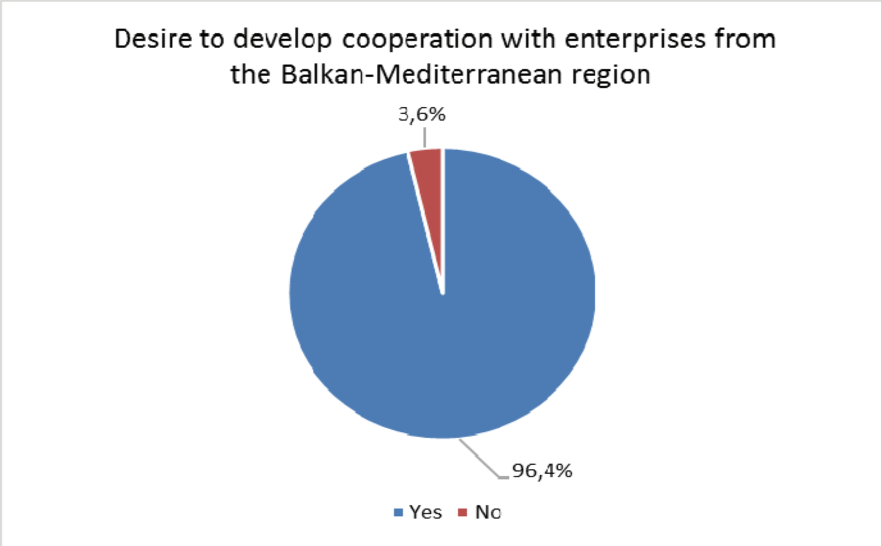


Graph 3.26 Cooperation requests for developing exports activity

Graph 3.26 shows the enterprises' preferences for cooperation in order to further develop their export activity. The main choices are the products / services distribution with 33.7% and searching for commercial agents with 26.3%. Moreover, 15.3% of enterprises are looking for suppliers of raw materials that are used for the production of their final products. Furthermore, 6.2% of enterprises are looking for cooperation with logistics companies to transport their products overseas. Investing (5.6%), subcontracting (4.4%), creating a consortium (3.4%), developing a franchise network (2.8%), and transferring of know-how (2.3%) are the next options on searching for partnerships. In conclusion, what more than half of the enterprises are looking for, are ways to distribute their products abroad, having as the primary choice commercial agents.

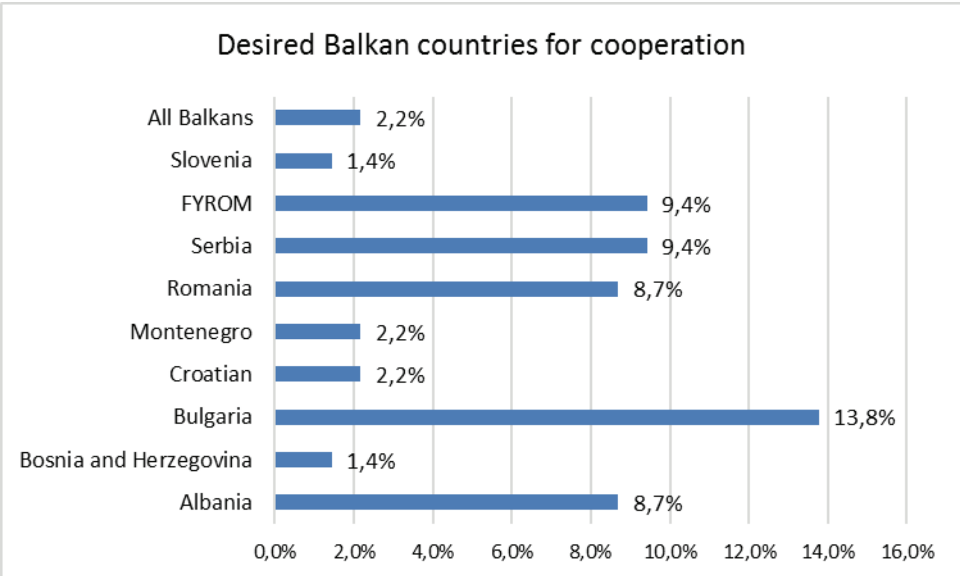
Graph 3.27 Cooperation offered by export enterprises

Graph 3.27 presents the main types of cooperation that enterprises want to offer foreign enterprises. The products / services distribution (41.9%) comes first, followed by the supply of raw materials (19.4%). Therefore, more than half of enterprises want to offer their final product, but also to supply foreign enterprises with raw materials. 18.1% of enterprises want to become commercial agent of foreign enterprises in Greece, while 8.9% to transfer their knowledge to the sector in which they operate. In addition, 5.3% wish to form joint ventures with foreign enterprises, 4.3% to offer subcontracts to them, 0.8% to invest overseas, to offer product transport services in the field of logistics and to develop a franchise network respectively.

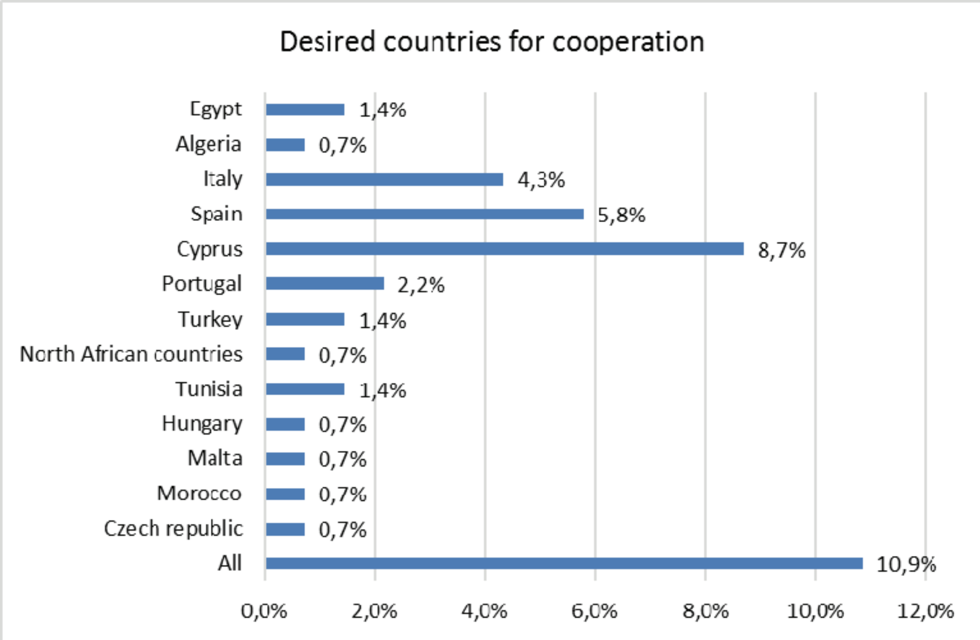


Graph 3.28 Developing cooperation with enterprises from the Balkan-Mediterranean region

Concerning the willingness of export enterprises to cooperate with enterprises from the Balkan-Mediterranean region, a significant percentage (96.4%) of enterprises are willing to cooperate, while only 3.6% are not interested in concluding cooperation with enterprises from the Balkan-Mediterranean region (Graph 3.28).



Graph 3.29 Desired Balkan countries for cooperation



Graph 3.30 Desired countries for cooperation

Regarding the desired countries of enterprises for operation and cooperation, the largest percentage concerns Balkan countries which are located close to Greece (Graphs 3.29 and 3.30). In particular, Bulgaria with 13.8% comes first, followed by Serbia and FYROM with 9.4%, while Romania, Albania and Cyprus account for 8.7% respectively. It is worth noting that 10.9% of enterprises have not targeted a particular country, but are open to partnerships with enterprises from any country. For the rest of Europe Spain (5.8%), Italy (4.3%), Portugal, Montenegro and Croatia (2.2% respectively) are preferable options. Finally, Tunisia and Egypt are the latter option for cooperation (1.4%).

3.3 Research results for entrepreneurship support Bodies

3.3.1 Fields of Body's support to its members

Bodies involved in the field research consisted mainly of chambers and business associations of various economy sectors. Regarding the Bodies' support to their members, the main fields to which they provide support are:

- Business and e-business issues,
- business partnerships promotion,
- official representation in institutions, organizations, national and international exhibitions,
- design, management and coordination of cofunded European and national programmes,
- representation of their members in central and decentralized institutions of social dialogue.

To a lesser extent, the Bodies provided their members with vocational education related to the training of their employees, studies on issues related to the members' field of activity, and ways to improve production, promotion, and distribution of their products in order to increase sales. In addition, the legal support of the Bodies to their members is moderate, as well as support for the introduction of new technologies and innovation. Finally, with regard to the provision of public authority services (granting of certificates, licenses, etc.), some of the Bodies are totally responsible for such services, while others are not related to them. In conclusion, Bodies place considerable weight on the development of cooperation, information, representation and counseling support to their members.

3.3.2 Difficulties faced by the Body for its efficient operation

Regarding the difficulties faced by the Bodies, resulting to their ineffective operatin, these consist of various factors such as the lack of human resources, the lack of liquidity, the lack of equipment and material resources, the legal / tax issues and the problems of organization / administration. It is worth mentioning that there are also Bodies that do not face any difficulty with regard to their proper operation.

3.3.3 Strengths/Advantages of the Bodies

According to the statements of the Bodies representatives involved in the research, their strengths/advantages are based on factors such as:

- Strong brand name
- Specialized workforce
- The competitiveness monitoring of Greek small and medium-sized enterprises
- Effective use of the available financial resources
- Effective information and cultivation of entrepreneurship to their members
- Personalized support for their members
- Adequacy of resources and infrastructure
- Institutional representation
- Market image
- Willingness to undertake initiatives and develop a collaborative network
- High level of expertise in extroversion issues and services offered
- Dedicated members

It is clearly understood that there is a plethora of strengths/advantages that are considered as incentives for enterprises to become members of a Body and enjoy any benefits from the support they receive from it.

3.3.4 Weaknesses/Disadvantages of the Bodies

According to the respondents Weaknesses/Disadvantages of the Bodies are summarized in factors such as workforce shortage, institutional rigidities, lack of supportive tools for enterprises, limited effective use of collaborations and synergies with other Bodies, lack of liquidity, the inability to collect debts and, finally, the remoteness of Bodies from the centers of power. It is clear that the major weaknesses of the Bodies are related to organizational, economic and institutional factors. These are disadvantages that can be corrected through internal processes, but also weaknesses directly related to the consequences of the economic crisis and the institutional framework governing the centers of power.

3.3.5 Participation of the Body in associations, groups, networks or other similar business associations

All the Bodies involved in the field research are members of wider public or private associations such as the Central Union of Chambers of Commerce, the International Chamber of Commerce, the Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Mixed Chambers of Commerce and the European Group of Territorial Cooperation.

3.3.6 Body's tools and mechanisms to facilitate transfer of technology/know-how of its members

Regarding Bodies' mechanisms to transfer technology/know-how to their members, the main one refers to networking with other Bodies for the exchange of experience and know-how. This is why Bodies are members of larger associations aiming at being updated and acquiring knowledge about the latest technological progress, which they will pass to their members. Other additional mechanisms are the development of an optimal guide, the drawing up of an action plan, studies and electronic platforms designed to expand the synergies among the members of the Body.

3.3.7 Difficulties related to the process of transferring and implementation of technology / know-how

The main challenges faced by the Bodies related to the process of transferring and implementing of technology/know-how are mainly: any restrictions arising from the current institutional and legal framework, the high costs of the aforementioned process and also the recipient's inadequacy to adopt new technologies /know-how. The limited degree of transferability and the lack of adequate workforce are secondary factors of obstructing the transfer and implementation of new technologies according to Bodies representatives.

3.3.8 Contribution size of the Body to the development of its members' export activities

Bodies involved in field research contribute to the development of their members' export activities with the following ways:

- Subsidies for exhibitions abroad,
- intersection of demand and supply,
- provision of personalized support,
- raising awareness about export issues and cooperation opportunities,
- development of synergies with other Bodies and individuals,
- organizing business missions, seminars and training programs for export marketing,
- provision of analyzes, studies, market research and extroversion guides

The role of the Bodies is basically advisory and supportive to their members, while at the same time they play a crucial role in improving the competitiveness, extroversion and business performance of their members. That is why the majority of the Bodies consider that they contribute significantly to their members' export activities.

3.3.9 Frequent barriers faced by the Body's members in the international target markets

The most frequent barriers faced by the Body's members in the international target markets are mainly related to the various international trade policies of each country such as tariffs and import restrictions. An important barrier to enterprises export activity is the lack of knowledge and contacts for distribution channels, while minor barriers are communication difficulties with foreign customers and distributors, distribution time and distance between traders.

3.3.10 Important opportunities for the Body's members in international markets

The most important opportunity for the Body's members, which emerges through their export activity, is the increase in sales and profits. That is expected, as exports contribute to the expansion of the enterprise's customer base and to the possibility of selling at a higher price, if enterprises are addressed to high income developed countries. Other opportunities, secondary but crucial, are the reduction of dependence on the domestic market, the acquisition of know-how and the strengthening of the product position on the domestic market.

3.3.11 Desire to develop cooperation with foreign enterprises from Balkan-Mediterranean region;

Regarding the desire of the Body's members to develop cooperation with foreign enterprises, especially with Balkan – Mediterranean region, the responses were entirely affirmative. Each of the Bodies wishes to cooperate with its members' sectors of activities, such as the food sector, wholesale and processing of machinery and equipment, building materials, furniture, clothing and textiles, agricultural products, catering, tourism, transport, health services and information technology.

The desired countries that Bodies' members are willing to operate and cooperate are mainly Bulgaria, FYROM, Albania and secondarily, Serbia, Cyprus, Romania and Turkey.

3.3.12 Cooperation that Bodies' members desire in the context of further development of their export activity

The Bodies' members' cooperation requests in order to further develop their export activity refer to commercial representation and distribution of products / services. The development of a franchise network, raw materials imports, Logistics (transport, storage), investments, subcontracting, joint venture and know-how transfer are secondary choices. In conclusion, what the Bodies' members of the research are looking for, are ways to distribute their products abroad, having as their primary choice for that, commercial agents.

4 Concluding Remarks

In the context of this study, the data and information obtained from the field research conducted in Greek enterprises under Work Package 1 were processed, in order to feed the 'BalkanMed E-Business Pages database'.

The field research referred to the export activity of small, medium and large manufacturing enterprises as well as clusters and other business associations operating in Greece.

The objective of the field research was the emergence of critical information related to the size of the export activity of Greek enterprises, analyzing the problems, the inhibiting factors and the prospects of their presence on the international market, while emphasizing the fields of support they receive and they further need.

According to the research results, the main difficulty faced by enterprises of the sample, influencing their proper operation is the bureaucracy in their transactions. Competition that exerts pressure but also the lack of liquidity are secondary factors. It is remarkable that although they operate in a highly competitive environment with difficult economic and fiscal circumstances, the bureaucratic procedures in their transactions have become the most important of the difficulties faced by enterprises. It is true that Greek exporters testify that they face extensive administrative barriers to export, as they operate in an environment where there is no coordinated and commonly accepted strategy and support for exports. The problem with time-consuming export procedures is caused by factors such as overlapping processes and lack of optimization of procedures between pre-customs and customs controls.

Another important finding related to the extroversion and internationalization of enterprises is **the extent to which internet technologies are being exploited**. Although 1/3 of the sample enterprises uses e-commerce applications, performing transactions with customers as well as with suppliers or other enterprises, only a small percentage has adopted mobile commerce applications, which demonstrates that Greek enterprises are not familiar with this kind of practices, as opposed to foreign enterprises. That is confirmed by the responses of the enterprises' representatives, which reveal that despite the tremendous technological advancement that favors finding customers in remote locations, only few enterprises rely on e-commerce to get in touch with potential customers in international target markets.

Regarding the export activity of enterprises, it seems that they do not have a strong export character since, for a large percentage of the sample, the export turnover ranges from 0-40%. In this context, it is a fact that most enterprises do not have a distinct exports department. Even companies with an export department are understaffed employing 1-2 people with "Area Sales Manager" or "Account Manager" duties.

That means that all export-related procedures are passed on to other departments of enterprises, resulting in a reduction in the efficiency of the employees who bear the burden of these procedures.

Regarding the **geographical distribution** of the export activity, the largest share of the destination countries refers to the European countries (mainly Cyprus), while some enterprises export their products to countries in Africa, Asia and the Americas. It is worth noting that the countries of origin of raw materials, semi-finished products and other components are the EU members, Saudi Arabia and China.

The common **problems** faced by enterprises in their export activity are associated with trade barriers such as tariffs or import restrictions when exporting mainly to countries outside the European Union. Also, the lack of knowledge and contacts for distribution channels is a problem, which justifies the fact that the approach of international markets is usually done through participation in exhibitions rather than through commercial agents and distribution channels. In addition, in many cases, the high cost of transportation due to the distance of the destination countries, is a significant inhibiting factor. Finally, difficulties in communication with foreign customers and distributors, the time needed for product distribution and differences in negotiations are also some of the most frequent barriers to exports.

To address all the above problems, a significant percentage of enterprises are involved in networks, and address to Bodies that promotes export activity.

In particular, as demonstrated by the research to entrepreneurship support Bodies, their members ask for support and information on business and e-business issues, on promoting business partnerships, as well as legal support and vocational training for improving production and marketing of their products, in order to increase sales, etc. There are also cases, where, in order to cope with international competition, Bodies provide transfer of technology/know how, although high costs, constraints related to the institutional and legal framework and inadequacy of recipients to adopt innovative technologies restrict effectiveness of transfer of know-how.

Also, there are difficulties faced by the Bodies for their efficient operation such as workforce shortages, institutional rigidities, shortages in tools and means of business support, limited cooperation with other Bodies, lack of liquidity, inability to collect debt and finally, the Bodies' remoteness from the centers of power.

It is clear from the above that the major weaknesses of the Bodies are related to organizational, economic and institutional factors. These are disadvantages that can be corrected through internal procedures, but also weaknesses directly related to the consequences of the economic crisis and the institutional framework governing the centers of power.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the promotion of exports is not a matter of the Managing Board of an enterprise or an association or entity. In the modern development environment, an integrated national strategy is required focusing on the review of existing procedure with a view to its rationalization and simplification, where appropriate, thus reducing time and administrative costs for the exporting enterprises.

Another critical point is the expansion of Greece's export base, i.e. the number of products and enterprises that export. The main goal is to produce and offer internationally competitive goods or services within a sustainable business model (product mix, innovation, equipment, human resources, stocks, economies of scale, funding, etc.). Also, the aim for the products produced is to find buyers overseas, through the rapprochement of traditional destinations, and the penetration into new emerging markets and networks.

For this purpose, there is a need for support to companies in Greece in order to focus on exports and to seek out trade partners abroad (international certifications, packaging, labeling, branding, marketing, distribution channels, partnerships etc.).

Moreover, exports are now a positive indicator of the Greek economy, as export performance of the country is improving. According to data from the Panhellenic Exporters Association and the Exports Research Centre, exports (including oil products) increased from €14.0 billion to €16,2 billion between January and June 2018, that is an increase of €2.2 billion or 15.6%. Excluding oil products, exports increased from €9.58 billion to €10.81 billion, which is an increase of € 1.23 billion or 12.8%. Hence exports support is one of the State's top priorities. At the same time, Greek exporters have strengthened their presence in traditional European markets, which absorb the largest share of Greek products and expanded their footprint into new and emerging markets, exploiting their comparative advantages.