

## Experts urge to improve access to finance for SMEs

Amman, March 12 (Petra) -- Financial and banking experts voiced the importance of empowering small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with access to finance due to their crucial role in boosting national economic growth and creating job opportunities. During the seminar held Thursday in Amman under the theme "International Seminar on Enhancing Access to Finance for SMEs", experts stressed the need of building on Jordan's experience in funding these companies simulating the Italian model in this domain.

The Governor of the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ), Ziad Fariz said that Jordan's top priority is to achieve sustainable growth and empowering SMEs, which is a goal we are all aspire. The role of the SMEs, which represent more than 95% of the corporate sector in the country is very important, is vital in supporting economic growth and reducing the unemployment and poverty, Fariz said.

SMEs sector provides 70% of job opportunities in private sector and contribute to around 40% of the GDP, he explained.

The seminar was organized by the Italian Embassy in Amman and in cooperation with the CBJ, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the International Finance Corporation, the Association of Banks in Jordan (ABJ) and the Italian company CRIF.

The meeting aimed at presenting success stories including the Italian model in supporting growth and competitiveness of businesses, the role of international organizations in providing technical and financial assistance in this sector. It also focused on the role of lending banks and micro-finance organizations, means to support innovative SMEs as well as the role of Jordanian institutions in facilitating access to credit.

The Italian Ambassador to Jordan, Giovanni Brauzzi said: "We do believe that reenergizing the SMEs

sector in Jordan, through a wider and easier access to credit, is bound to be a key component of any future development strategy.

Economic similarity together with the excellent political relations between the two countries, encouraged Italy to support Jordan, as affirmed at the London Conference. During the conference, Italy announced the allocation of 400 millions dollars in favor of Jordan and Lebanon, to ease the burden created by Syrian refugees, the ambassador added.

Head of EBRD office in Jordan, Dr. Heike Harmgart, said that "access to finance for small businesses is a strategic focus area for the bank , as we consider this sector the backbone of the economy." SMEs sector in Jordan represent the majority of enterprises in the country as they are the main source of economic growth and new jobs, he added.

ABJ President Mousa Shihadeh said in his keynote that during the past few years, Jordan's economy faced many challenges due to the regional turmoil and crisis, which added more burdens on the already strained economy mainly with regards to the SMEs sector.

These unusual circumstances push for an urgent need to create special investment programs in cooperation with international donors, he added.

The volume of trade exchange between the two countries stood at 600 Million Euros. Italy exports to Jordan include electric generator sets, combustion engines, refined petroleum products and jewelry. Jordan imports from Italy included gold, precious metal scraps and jewelry, raw aluminum, mixed mineral, chemical fertilizers and knit garments.

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