STRENGTH IN UNITY

ANDRZEJ WÓJCIK, new president of PolChambers, an independent association which co-ordinates the worldwide network of Polish chambers of commerce and business organisations, talks to Jerzy Mosoń.

PM First of all, may I congratulate you on taking over the presidency of PolChambers. What are your goals?

Thank you. PolChambers is a young association of chambers of commerce scattered around the world. That's why, above all, I would like to carry on the process of pooling together to promote Polish companies and Polish entrepreneurship abroad. I would also like to use my experience gained during many years of co-operation with French business circles, to help Polish entrepreneurs find their feet in foreign markets, and to achieve successes in relations with foreign companies which operate in Poland. To improve their chances, it is necessary to encourage those who have already succeeded to work in partnership with those are yet to succeed.

PM Your predecessor Hanna Stypułkowska stressed her links with France. You also come from the French-Polish Chamber of Commerce. It is just a coincidence, or do relations between Poland and France play a special role in helping Polish business make inroads into other markets?

I have introduced Auchan, Leroy Merlin and Decathlon to the Polish market. I also work in the Polish and French real estate sectors. I know French entrepreneurs. The chamber, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, is very efficient. The key factor is that it is very active, and thus it enjoys a high profile among PolChambers members. We know our area of operations very well, and we can boast of a number of projects which have been implemented.

PM French business in Poland is very visible, but it doesn't quite work the same way the other way round, even though Polish businessmen are working dynamically in France. What's the reason for this and what to do to change it?

That's exactly what motivates me even more to bring Polish business circles abroad even closer together. I feel it's wrong for some Polish investors to have a very individualistic approach. They need to realise that strength lies in joint action. Working together is conducive to development. French businessmen who work in Poland are doing just that.

PM I can see one more reason, SMEs account for a large proportion of Polish business, and it's probably more difficult for small firms to speak with one voice than for big corporations.

In a way, Polish business in France is a mirror image of the Polish market, in which small and medium-sized firms are dominant. We do not have too many giants, though it is worth mentioning those which are becoming more and more visible on the French market: Solaris, Nowy Styl and Okno Plus. It is obviously more important for smaller firms to achieve good economic results as soon as possible, rather than to raise their profile, and this is where the Chamber comes in.

PM A large player has enough resources to study a foreign market before taking the plunge. A small player must take a risk, unless help is available from a larger player. Is the chamber involved in such match-making?

It is our goal to support co-operation between large players and SMEs on foreign markets. It's beneficial for both parties, all the more so that in many countries some sectors of the economy are very well penetrated by Polish business. In France, construction is one of them.

PM The amended EU Posted Workers Directive is giving Polish entrepreneurs headaches, because it runs contrary to the interests of Polish drivers, logisticians and construction workers in France and other EU member states. Has the chamber taken actions to reduce its negative impact?

We have been taking appropriate measures addressed to institutions and the French state for a long time, we are lobbying on the issue, and we are calling for respect for labour rights on the single market. We are also addressing Brussels on this matter.

PM Can you feel support from the Polish state in this respect?

Yes, we can, but of course we would like more, especially because we are aware of how much support French entrepreneurs receive from their state. We are also ready to provide support. The PolChambers initiative may also provide invaluable support for Polish economic diplomacy in pursuing political objectives. Our strength lies in unity. •