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IMEX Politicians Forum forges ahead

A total of 29 politicians and 65 meetings industry leaders met yesterday to analyse and debate the full economic value of the global meetings industry at the annual IMEX Politicians Forum.

The Forum's influence and reputation has grown measurably over the past few years. Political representatives travelled from as far afield as Sweden, Greece, Austria, Hungary, Canada, Korea, Croatia, Poland, Cyprus, Germany, Denmark, Scotland, France and Australia to discuss the key issues shaping the industry's future and its power to generate true economic return at a local level. For the first time the Forum also included the CEOs of several convention and visitor bureaus who attended with a view to increasing their lobbying efforts and inviting their local politicians next year.

The day's programme began with a welcome by Michael Hirst OBE, chairman of the Business Visits & Events Partnership and director and treasurer of The Tourism Alliance UK. In his capacity as director of international development for the International

Association of Convention Centres (AIPC), Rod Cameron then presented a case study on how to leverage meetings and conventions as strategic tools for economic development. Further opening remarks were made by Leigh Harry, president of the Joint Meetings Industry Council (JMJC) and president of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA); Olivier Lepine, chairman of the Convention Division of European Cities Marketing (ECM), and Edgar Hirt, president of the International Association of Convention Centres (AIPC).

As Ray Bloom, IMEX Group chairman explained to the group: "Each year the Forum provides a unique and powerful opportunity for two highly influential groups of people to meet in private and debate those issues that are presenting the biggest challenges or opportunities in their respective worlds. It is always fascinating and informative. More importantly this kind of dialogue is vital to the future of the industry. If we do not continue to make

the time and effort to understand each others' objectives, demands and even language, we do the global meetings industry and its political representatives a huge disservice.

"We all bore witness to the forceful rearguard action that the US meetings industry had to take last year. That provided a sobering reminder to us all that political dialogue and engagement is absolutely essential if the industry is not to be misunderstood or even unintentionally misrepresented," says Bloom.

Other speakers included Hein Verbruggen, president of SportAccord and honorary member of the International Olympic Committee, who shared his insight and experience on how an Olympic event enriches a destination. Later in the day, Australian MP, Bruce Baird, spoke passionately about the ongoing advocacy work being delivered by one of Australia's most influential lobby groups. Mayor of Le Touquet, Daniel Fasquelle also shared his experience of working with a recently formed French lobby group – France Terre de Tourisme.



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