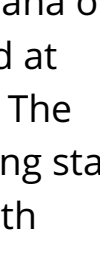
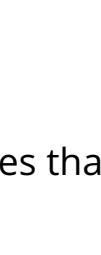


BUSINESS

Catalonia and Cuba sign agreement to boost trade relations

Catalan exports to Cuba grew by 50% in 2015, reaching €294 million. With this in mind, the Catalan Minister for Business and Knowledge, Jordi Baiget, and the director of the centre for the promotion of foreign trade ProCuba, Roberto Verrier, signed on Thursday in Havana an agreement that seeks to strengthen trade relations. ProCuba, under the Cuban Ministry for Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment, works to promote the internationalisation of the industry of the country. According to the agreement, Cuba will now provide Catalonia with information on the investment opportunities in the region in order to promote the arrival of new Catalan businesses to the island. Baiget, who is participating in a trade mission to Panama and Cuba organised by the Port of Barcelona and Acció, the Catalan Public competitiveness and internationalisation agency, stated that the measure was “really important”. It implies “direct capacity for dialogue” with the Cuban body responsible for foreign investment, he added.

25 November 2016 02:38 PM by ACN

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Barcelona (CNA).- The Catalan Minister for Business and Knowledge, Jordi Baiget, and the director of the centre for the promotion of foreign trade ProCuba, Roberto Verrier, signed in Havana on Thursday an agreement aimed at strengthening trade relations. The memorandum of understanding states that Cuba will provide Catalonia with information on the investment opportunities in the region in order to promote the arrival of new Catalan businesses to the island and encourage Catalan investment. Baiget assessed the agreement as “really important” because it implies a “direct capacity for dialogue” with the Cuban body responsible for foreign investment. The accord was signed under the framework of a trade mission organised by the Port of Barcelona and Acció, the Catalan Public competitiveness and internationalisation agency, to Panama and Cuba. Baiget and the Catalan Minister for Planning and Sustainability, Josep Rull, accompanied fifty Catalan companies on their visit to these countries.

The agreement will “give more opportunities to Catalan productive activity so that it can export and invest in Cuba”, explained Baiget. According to the Catalan Minister, it will mean “greater exchange of information, greater capacity to organise joint activities and missions and more facilities for any Catalan investment project in Cuba”. Besides this, Acció will also provide knowledge to all the technical experts of ProCuba regarding foreign investment and promotion.

For his part, Verrier detailed that Catalonia and Cuba have been working on the agreement for a year and stated that it will allow “an exchange of information between the two major trading countries”. “We encourage Catalan businessmen to come to Cuba, either as suppliers or potential investors”, he added.

The agreement was signed within the framework of an event with the Cuban Chamber of Commerce, which represents 80% of the economic activity in the country and has 700 associated companies. During the meeting, Baiget explained to the more than 200 attendees, among whom were Cuban and Catalan companies, that Catalan exports to the island have not stopped growing and, in fact, in 2015 saw the highest increase, with a 50% rise over the previous year, thus reaching €294 million.

The sectors that recorded the most sales to Cuba are: machinery; paints, dyes and plastic materials; electrical equipment and vehicles. According to data provided by Acció, there are currently 1,032 Catalan companies exporting to Cuba, while 30% of the sales by Spain in this country are from Catalan companies.

Close Barcelona-Havana collaboration dates back to 1993

Relations between Barcelona and Havana began in 1993 and since then both cities have collaborated on multiple projects. Currently Barcelona’s City Hall is working on two initiatives on the island. One of them consists in the rebuilding of 11 antique buildings to turn them into council flats. The other one is the development of a museum proposal for the Architecture and Urbanism room of the Segundo Cabo Palace, which counts on the collaboration from the Barcelona History Museum.

On Wednesday, the representatives from the Havana Office of the Historian met with the Catalan delegation. Baiget and Rull visited the projects being carried out in the historical centre of the Havana and promoted by the Office, the entity responsible for managing all the initiatives in the old town. The representatives of the Havana institution emphasised Barcelona’s imprint on the city. Indeed, the director of international cooperation of the Office of the Historian, Neli Garcia, explained that there are other projects underway, such as the urban redevelopment plan for the Bay of Havana.

Currently Barcelona gives support to the activity programme of the Barcelona-Havana Cultural Centre, located on the Barcelona Street, which was restored thanks to material and technical cooperation from Barcelona City Hall. In fact, the network of exchange between the two cities was created, according to Garcia, to “share experiences and undertake a transfer of knowledge” on various problems faced by the cities such as accessibility, social housing, the use of public space and the recovery of heritage.

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Catalan Minister for Territory and Sustainability, Josep Rull, at Cuba's Chamber of Commerce (by ACN)

