

Albania Wants to Attain Worldwide Recognition for Design, Fashion and Quality

In the near future, Albania wants to acquire an international reputation for design, fashion and quality. This was reported by Mara Michel, managing director of the VDMD/Verband Deutscher Mode- und Textildesigner e.V. (Association of German Fashion- and Textile Designers) (www.vdmd.de), Würzburg, to Textination after her third design-consultation journey into this Eastern European country.

Looking at Turkey – said the fashion expert – you can see that the development there in the clothing sector has taken 20 years with the start of the consulting activity. Nowadays Turkey is wage- as well as fashion design country. Many of the Turkish designer labels and company brands are making a name for themselves. The same could become true for Albania, she said, since here are also all the requirements given for a clothing- and design economy.

In the Albanian clothing industry are currently mostly men`s shirts, working clothes, knitwear, jeans, pants and underwear produced. In this economically upcoming country there are at the moment altogether around 400 clothing companies, most of them in the capital Tirana and in Durres. The big companies have between 200 to 250 employees, the small and middle industrial plants vary between 50 to 150 employees. The big and middle-sized industrial plants do not work with design, although a great potential in talents exists in Albania. CAD/CAM is used by companies in the scope of contract production, where 90% work mainly for Italian and Greek customers. Some of them are, however, already active for German customers.

With the wages they are operating in Eastern Europe on the lowest level. The companies get their models ready-cut from the customer. At most 5 companies are able to make their blank cuts themselves, and only rarely they use CAD/CAM. The enterprises have no own designers. The Albanian designers – mostly established in Tirana – work self-employed in their studios. For their collections they usually make 2 pieces per model. They do not cooperate with the industry. There are, however, some cases of joint ventures with the industry, e.g. for bank uniforms.

The fabrics are bought in Italy or Turkey, since no fabrics are produced in Albania. The clothing machines are mostly bought used in Italy, rarely in Germany. The big companies use the technology of Pfaff, which has an own subsidiary in this country. The Albanian clothing export is still in the early stages of development, since at the moment the contract production is advanced. Parallel to it they are trained in designer labels to maybe wake the awareness and the appetite in the industry to make profit with design. Especially German companies are – according to Mara Michel – highly welcome in Albania with contract production, “they are thinking highly of our secondary virtues and respect clear words, punctuality, quality consciousness, reliability and punctual payment”.

At the moment all paths are made free for investing foreign companies – also from other branches – for effective action. Even literally, since Tirana is right now just one big street construction site. Contract production is necessary since there are no brands in Albania, only the smallest designer collections. Even if

own collections are developed, contract production will still see to a high occupancy rate, like in Rumania and Bulgaria.

Mara Michel is together with Gabriela Kaiser owner of the TREND agentur FUTURIZE (www.trendagentur.de). She traveled through altogether 7 Eastern European countries (Serbia, Belarus, Rumania, Bosnia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania) on behalf of the GTZ (Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit, Community for Technical Cooperation), Eschborn, as counsellor for fashion-design. Her task is to train the companies there (e.g.

in Bulgaria and Albania) in fashion design, so that they can develop their own collections, which can be sold as brands in their own country as well as in Western Europe. A further goal is to develop thus in each country more purchasing power, which in the end is advantageous to Western European companies for their export. The last goal is to create a strong entrance of the clothing industry of the whole of Europe versus low-wages countries, especially in Asia.

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