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“DCFTA Implementation: Partnerships, Push-backs and Potential”

PRESS RELEASE

On May 8th, 2019 the implementers of the European Union funded project “*Georgia on the European Way: Creation of Effective Model for DCFTA and SME Strategy Implementation*” hosted the project’s closing conference - “DCFTA Implementation: Partnerships, Push-backs and Potential” - in Tbilisi.

Welcome remarks were delivered by the main supporters of the project: H.E. Carl Hartzell, Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia, stated that “The EU is keen to see more Georgian companies taking advantage of the opportunities contained in the EU-Georgia DCFTA. We are working hard to this end together with the Georgian government and other stakeholders, including in the domains of information sharing, financing, training and market access prioritisation. Through this project a distinct contribution has been made to these efforts, not least thanks to its regional outreach and systematic involvement of civil society”.

H.E. Giedrius Puodžiūnas, Ambassador of Lithuania to Georgia, gave an overview of Georgia’s export to the EU, based on the first quarter report of Georgia-EU trade. Both H.E. Puodžiūnas and Ambassador of Slovakia Pavel Vizdal, continued voicing their countries’ support to Georgia’s ambition to increase the trade turnover with the EU. The Slovak Ambassador informed that Georgia has become a program country of the SlovakAid, according to the newly adopted mid-term strategy of the Slovak development assistance.

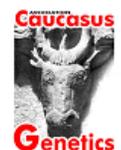
The keynote speech was delivered by Khatia Tsilosani, the Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture. In her remarks, Ms. Tsilosani updated the participants on the most current development in case of DCFTA implementation from the point of view of her sector. She noted that “healthy food and healthy environment are important for all Georgia”. She brought attention to the fact that DCFTA is not only about the export, but also about providing high quality products to Georgian consumers.

The conference panels discussed DCFTA implementation from three different angles: civil society engagement, development of SMEs and the challenges they face; and the regional perspective of the three DCFTAs in Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. The program was based on recommendations for policy reforms developed during the two-year consultation process in all 10 Georgia’s regions - including the proposals of the local and central councils, and the good experiences of Lithuania and Slovakia.

Conference speakers continuously stressed the importance of civil society actors to advocate for reforms and improvements to the DCFTA implementation process. According to Ukrainian civil



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society actor **Maksym Koriavets**, “In the context of SMEs development, the civil society can be not only a messenger between the government and local businesses - it can provide consultations, learning and experience exchange for making small and medium-sized enterprises stronger and adaptable to new conditions created by DCFTA.” Project results, when partnered civil society organizations hosted over 500 events in all Georgian regions and reached more than 1 million of Georgian citizens, stands as a proof.

It was agreed that results of DCFTA implementation to be more visible in the years to come. “DCFTA is an instrument for country’s transformation, which we will certainly work to achieve,” - re-assured **Mariam Gabunia**, Head of the Foreign Trade Policy Department at the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development.

“We should synchronize our efforts with other civil society organizations and across sectors, because DCFTA is everybody’s business”, noted **Rusudan Kalichava**, Executive director of Association ATINATI, Zugdidi, Georgia.

From their side the project implementers were encouraging continuation of local and central DCFTA advisory councils, which were established and regularly held during the duration of the project. The local councils in every Georgian region provide a platform for civil society representatives, local businesses and public administration to discuss major challenges of DCFTA implementation. Findings of local councils are then being presented at the central council, which additionally includes representatives of Ministries directly responsible for DCFTA implementation. Such format ensures exchange of information, increases central government’s awareness about local issues and leads to addressing existing challenges with a joint effort.

The CONFERENCE AGENDA can be accessed here.

For any inquiries or questions regarding the event, please contact - Mariam Akhalkatsi (Communication Coordinator, GIP) +995 599 990 212; Info@gip.ge

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