

First Draft of the Project on developing effective business structures and business relations in the framework of the EU Eastern Partnership

## 1. INTRODUCTION ON THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP BUSINESS FORUM

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) can help six countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) to be politically associated and economically integrated into the EU economy. One of the main purposes of this policy is defined in the Core Objectives and proposed Work Programme 2009-2011 of the Platform 2 “Economic integration and convergence with EU Policies” in the paragraph on Socio-economic development as identification of key issues for effective enterprise policies and the promotion of a conducive business climate; involvement of the private sector and business in the process, through workshops, seminars and “business to business” contacts. To improve business climate and to bring it as close as possible to the EU standards is even more needed in current times of economic crisis. The proposal to establish **the Eastern Partnership Business Forum will serve to support and promote this goodwill in practical terms**. The earlier we start, the more value can be delivered. The first step is to support online discussions between the business representative organizations on the Business Forum, making them substantial and inclusive. The business role is vital. Business can take this opportunity to show that it has stakes in EaP countries and cares about future opportunities there. To make this a two way process we call on business to get involved now to multiply its benefits. EUUBC main and constant objective is to promote as much as possible a truly “Business Friendly” atmosphere.

## 2. EASTERN PARTNERSHIP WORKING GROUP ON ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND CONVERGENCE WITH EU POLICIES

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (CSF) made a good start. It elected its Steering Committee which works very actively and met in Brussels on 21 and 22 January 2010 to discuss procedural, organizational and budget matters.

The Eastern Partnership CSF Working Group on economic integration and convergence with the EU policies recommended to establish a permanent **Eastern Partnership Business Forum**. The better involvement of businesses in working closer on the Eastern Partnership (both bilateral and multilateral dimensions) is supported by the European Commission (DG Enterprise and Industry, DG Trade, with a particular commitment from DG External relations).

With support of the European Economic and Social Committee we have started discussions on involvement of BusinessEurope, Eurochambres, UEAPME in developing the concept of the Business Forum. In parallel we will involve business organizations in Eastern Partnership countries. Through the DG Enterprise the discussions with OECD Eurasia Competitiveness programme has been started as well.

The next meeting of the Thematic Platform on economic integration and convergence with EU sectoral policies where the project of the EaP Business Forum can be proposed will take place on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2010.

### 3. THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP BUSINESS FORUM –CONCEPT

The Eastern Partnership Business Forum should be a platform to elaborate the position of the business representative organizations of the EaP on the Core Objectives and programmes defined by the official structures of the EaP (Thematic platforms) on the economic and social issues. It would also be a tool to strengthen the capacities of business organizations of the EaP partner countries for convergence with the EU *acquis* in the economic and social field, and become a basis for B2B contacts.

SMEs needs should be specifically targeted due to the fact that they will be more effected by the adaptation of new regulations in line with the EU *acquis communautaire*. This is a reciprocal process because market liberalizations and regulatory approximation should establish grounds for the EU SMEs to go to EaP partner countries both for trade and investment.

The better involvement of business organizations (chambers of commerce and industry, unions of industrialists, SMEs organizations, women entrepreneurs' organizations, industries sectoral organizations, including farmers and agrarian unions etc.) and social partners (employers organizations and trade unions) into the EaP Civil Society Forum activities is needed.

The Eastern Partnership Business Forum should be flexible, open and inclusive for all business structures and organizations both from the EU and the EaP partner countries. Existing networks and programmes in the region should be taken into account to avoid overlapping and duplication of effort.

### 4. EASTERN PARTNERSHIP – PRACTICAL STEPS PROPOSED BY THE WORKING GROUP OF THE CSF ON ECONOMIC INTEGRATION FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EAPBF

- (1) ***Invovement into drafting SMEs Facility flagship initiative and further projects:*** Through its members the Eastern Partnership working group is trying to use the opportunity of the newly opened call for the proposal “East-Invest” to make its first successful step and integral part for further business organizations and networks development in the EaP region. We propose to include the concept of the Eastern Partnership Business Forum as a tool for strengthening capacities of business structures and their ability to internationalize into the SMEs Facility flagship initiative which is to be adopted at Platform 2 meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2010 in Brussels.
- (2) ***Online discussions:*** It is necessary to take advantage of the momentum to facilitate the elaboration of a concept paper and online discussions on structure of future Eastern Partnership Business Forum. This can be achieved by opening a bilingual English/Russian Website devoted specifically to open inclusive debates on this matter so that the Forum reflects the real needs of the participants.

This Website should be linked to the DG External Relations Website and the future Website for the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. The online discussions, translations, preparing information, any additional activities related to developing

Business Forum concept will be conducted by the EU Ukraine Business Council Secretariat in Brussels.

A first Webpage can be created at Facebook which is free of charge but has limitations. But the EUUBC and Working group members will spend their time to support exchange of information, translation, carrying out discussions where we would appreciate financial support from the European Commission. Online discussions to promote involvement of business organizations into the Eastern Partnership might be started in February 2010 and last until Eastern Partnership Business Forum is established. After that the Business Forum should have its own secretariat that would be running the webpage.

- (3) **Raising awareness and involvement of business organizations into the EaP:** Based on the results of online discussions on Eastern Partnership Business Forum we suggest to carry out an experts meeting in Autumn 2010 in one of the EaP partner country (we propose Crimea, Ukraine) to agree about further terms of reference which should be basis for further call for proposal from the European Commission on establishing such Business Forum.

## 5. MAIN GOALS OF EASTERN PARTNERSHIP BUSINESS FORUM –

As main goal for Eastern Partnership Business Forum we foresee that each of EaP partner country will have ‘single strong voice of business’ as the EU Member States and the EU itself has. The Forum would become the main source of information from the EaP business community on the core objectives and needs and proposals for the proper implementation of the programmes and projects of the EaP in the field of economic integration and convergence with EU policies The business and economic links between EaP partner countries will be developing to provide regional integration in parallel with integration with the EU economy. The business community, industries and SMEs will be ready to tackle difficulties and use benefits from deep and comprehensive free trade areas with the EU, which foresee regulatory approximation.

We strongly believe that healthy business environment and strong private sector promoted by the Eastern Partnership Business Forum will have significant input into developing democracy and eradicating corruption in the EaP partner countries.