

Eastern Partnership

Platform 2 "Economic Integration and Convergence with EU Policies"

Work Programme 2014 – 2017

General Remarks

Platform 2 of the Eastern Partnership (Platform 2) aims at economic integration between Partner Countries and the EU and convergence with relevant EU policies based on multilateral cooperation. The Work Programme for Platform 2 reflects the priorities of the ENI Regional East multiannual indicative programme (2014-2017). Platform 2 and its various Panels and Work Areas have the objective to contribute to the smart, sustainable and inclusive development of a free market economy in Partner Countries, thus increasing their resilience and stability. Whilst economic integration lies at the heart of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs), economic cooperation with the EU and the streamlining of sectoral policies is also of interest to Partner Countries who have chosen different types of relations with the EU. Thus, Platform 2 incorporates an array of issues related to mutual trade, a flourishing business environment, a modern, social, equitable, gender balanced and environmentally friendly economy which provides for sustainable growth and employment, thus also contributing towards meeting the commitments made under the Paris Climate Agreement and the 2030 Agenda.

The Work Programme of Platform 2 is guided by the joint declarations of the Eastern Partnership Summits to date. It takes into account the revised European Neighbourhood Policy¹, which emphasises the principle of differentiated relations within the Eastern Partnership, while maintaining an inclusive framework open to all Partners. The translation of this revised policy in the sphere of economic development and governance will lead to reshaping relations between the EU and its Partner Countries and prioritise cooperation in this field. These changes will be reflected in the activities undertaken by Platform 2 in consultation with all its stakeholders.

The Work Programme shall seek to further exploit synergies between the different multilateral Platforms and Panels and enhance the communication of its activities to both stakeholders and the broad public. Platform 2 will promote, potentially through a dedicated web portal, its activities and results and will provide access to stakeholders as regards relevant consolidated information. It will endeavour to focus on increased ownership from both Partner Countries and Member States, bearing in mind that **the implementation of the Work Programme is a common responsibility of all Platform 2 participants** acting in close cooperation with the EU Institutions.

¹ Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Region – Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, JOIN(2015) 50 final, 18.11.2015

The Platform will aim to improve the understanding of relevant EU acquis and provide the opportunity to share information and best practices on reforms and modernisation activities implemented by the Partner Countries in the respective Panels/Work Areas. The Platform will also provide a forum to share experience and information on the Partner Countries' steps towards implementation of DCFTAs and provide practical information on cooperation between Commission services and Partner Countries in this regard. The work done on multilateral level complements agreements and actions on bilateral level (e.g. Association Agreements and Agendas), since actions on multilateral and bilateral level should mutually reinforce each other.

Platform and Panel meetings as well as more technical seminars, workshops, conferences bring together Partner Countries, EU Member States and EU Institutions and have the purpose to share information, exchange best practice on policies as well as follow up on and provide policy guidance to the various dedicated cooperation programmes undertaken within the framework of Platform 2. In order to reach the objectives foreseen in this Work Programme, Partner Countries and Member States representatives will seek to engage parliaments, civil society (via the EaP Civil Society Forum), local and regional authorities, International Financial Institutions (IFIs), business representatives, social partners and other non-governmental stakeholders to continue to work closely together in order to provide the necessary expertise and input to the work under the Platform.

Activities undertaken within the framework of Panels will be reported under the umbrella of the Platform meetings which is chaired by the Directorate-General for the Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs. Panels are chaired by the responsible Directorate-General in cooperation with the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations. Whilst technical discussions on topics of common interest covered under the Platform will be taking place within the framework of the Panels, the Platform will focus on more strategic and horizontal matters. Platform 2 will, thus, address the issue of 'economic integration' in broader terms through a comprehensive and continuous policy dialogue. Within this context, the following subjects (non-exhaustive list) could be discussed:

- Economic cooperation: Regional and EU integration (including development of regional programmes), diversification and integration in Global Value Chains, cooperation with neighbours and beyond, bottlenecks in the integration process (e.g. standardisation);
- Trade: Investment policies and reforms of investment environments, trade facilitation, trade issues between DCFTA, non-DCFTA countries and the EU, analysis of potential consequences of DCFTAs for trade and investment relations between the EU and non-DCFTA countries, market access for goods and services for all partner countries, Regional Convention on pan-Euro-Mediterranean preferential rules of origin (PEM Convention);
- Economic governance: Policy dialogue on key economic governance issues such as public procurement, competition law, state aid, tax policy, reform of the banking sector (addressing the issue of the stock of non-performing loans, Central Bank policies), role of Public-Private Partnerships as regards socio-economic development;

- Impact of sectorial policies on economic performance: Interconnectivity, impact of climate change, integrated border management, agricultural development and economic integration, mainstreaming of environmental policies including climate change mitigation measures;
- Sustainable municipal development: National policy enabling local sustainable development, role of municipalities for socio-economic development, energy efficiency, etc.;
- Social innovation: Social entrepreneurship, innovative social services, financial inclusion and participatory economics.

The initial Work Programme foreseen for a period of four years (2014-2017) is hereby revised mid-term and brought in line with recent developments in the Eastern Partnership. The Participants of Platform 2 adopt the following objectives, targets and planned activities (established per Panel and Work Area) of the Work Programme 2014-2017 in accordance with the General Guidelines and Rules of Procedure of the Eastern Partnership Multilateral Platforms.

Panel on Transport (chaired by the Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport)

The Commission Communication “The EU and its neighbouring regions: A renewed approach to transport cooperation“ (COM (2011) 415) provides a framework for and sets out the objectives of the Transport Panel. The key policy objective is to strengthen transport connections with Partner Countries. This has been taken forward through regulatory approximation and definition of priority infrastructure connections. Concrete deliverables from this work were endorsed by the EU and Eastern Partnership Transport Ministers at their second meeting in autumn 2013 – which will further guide the work of the Transport Panel.

Partner Countries will be represented at the Panel meetings at the Head of Unit or equivalent level, accompanied by experts as required. Participation will vary depending on the specific subjects covered. A wide range of IFIs will be invited to participate in the Panel meetings. Other experts from Member States, EU agencies, other organisations and third countries (other than those covered by the Eastern Partnership) can be invited to the Panel meetings on an ad-hoc basis, to share experience, information and best practices.

The following is an overview of priority issues to be dealt with by the Transport Panel which will be held at least twice per year:

- Tangible follow-up to the Riga Eastern Partnership Summit and the 2nd Eastern Partnership Ministerial Transport Meeting (held on 9 October 2013);
- Updating the list of priority actions covering all modes of transport and ensuring necessary follow-up;
- Assisting Partner Countries in implementing priority infrastructure projects that are located on the indicative extension to Neighbouring Countries of the TEN-T comprehensive network and that could be (co-)financed from existing EU funds and by IFIs;
- Work further towards the definition of an inland waterways indicative TEN-T network in the Eastern Partner region;
- Define a core TEN-T network in the Eastern Partner region;
- Exchange of relevant information about future and on-going activities of the Eastern Partnership Integrated Border Management Panel (Platform 1) in order to ensure synergies between activities in transport and border management sectors;
- Exchange of best practice on innovative infrastructure financing, including public-private partnerships and user charging;
- Discussion on the development of efficient traffic management systems such as the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) at regional level ensuring cost effectiveness, interoperability and high quality;
- Presentations on the work of the EU Transport Agencies and related programmes.

Additionally, further technical seminars/workshops (two per year) on priority topics to be identified by Partner Countries might be organised in order to further promote regulatory approximation with the EU. Partner Countries should state their interest as regards the organisation of a specific seminar at the occasion of a Transport Panel. Technical seminars can cover the following topics:

- Increasing the use of NIF (Neighbourhood Investment Facility) and CEF (Connecting Europe Facility) on transport-related projects;
- Maritime, inland waterways and road transport: safety, security, environmental and social aspects;
- Motorways of the sea;
- Multimodal ways of transport;
- Interoperability and safety in railway transport;
- Functioning of the transport market, safety conditions in inland waterway transport;
- Accident investigation in all sectors of transport.

Objectives:

- Implementation of the Commission Communication “The EU and its neighbouring regions: A renewed approach to transport cooperation “ (COM (2011) 415) with a view to further foster economic integration of interested Partner Countries into the EU and to advance the gradual opening of the EU transport market to Partner Countries taking account of relevant safety, security, environmental and social aspects
- Follow-up to the Declaration of the Riga Eastern Partnership Summit, thus making transport links between the EU and Partner Countries safer and more efficient, and supporting the improvement of logistics systems, including motorways of the sea and fostering cooperation between rail corridors

Targets to be achieved:

- Cross-sectoral cooperation in all areas of transport in line with environmental, sustainability and social concerns
- To improve the safety of maritime, road, railway and air transport
- To improve transport connections through closer market integration (connection between Eastern Partnership network and Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T)) and balanced improvements in infrastructure
- To implement priority infrastructure projects that are located on the Eastern Partnership transport network

- To cooperate closely with the International Financial Institutions that can contribute to improved transport connections through financing

Business Development Panel (chaired by the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs)

The Business Development Panel will serve as a forum to discuss issues related to a conducive business environment in line with the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA) and to learn from and replicate EU best practices. Issues to be discussed will include all ten principles of the SBA such as women entrepreneurship, regulatory impact assessment, the “Think Small First” Principle, SME internationalisation, business infrastructure, access to finance and innovation in the SME sector. The Panel will also focus on issues regarding the implementation of DCFTAs related to SMEs and enterprises in general.

The main purpose of the Business Development Panel is policy dialogue between participants in order to promote a modern and competitive economy. Partner Countries will exchange best practices and concrete support measures for enterprises and particularly SMEs among each other and with EU Member States. This dialogue will also strengthen economic integration within the region and with the EU on governmental as well as on business level.

The Business Development Panel will meet at least once per year. Participation varies depending on the subjects covered, but consists of experts from Partner Countries’ ministries and institutions involved in the different subjects covered by the Panel. The Partner Countries have appointed a national SBA coordinator for the purposes of the Panel.

International Financial Institutions, the main EU business organisations and partner organisations in Eastern Partner Countries associated with the East Invest project are considered as participants to the Panel. Other stakeholders from industry and professional organisations in the Partner Countries can take part provided that they are identified by the Partner Government and attend as part of the Partner’s Delegation. Additionally, the European Commission can invite business representatives from Partner Countries and/or EU Member States if this contributes to the objectives of the Panel meeting.

The Panel will continue to cooperate closely with the Panel on Environment and Climate Change with regard to the promotion of green technologies and eco-innovation. The Business Development Panel will serve as an important tool to assess the impact of the recommendations issued by the Panel on Environment and Climate Change on SMEs in Partner Countries. The Panel will equally cooperate with the Anti-Corruption Panel (under Platform 1) – in respect to SMEs' vulnerability to corruption – the Panel on Agriculture and Rural Development, the Panel on Harmonising Digital Markets, the Statistics Panel and with Platform 3 on Energy Security. As regards the implementation of Association Agreements and in particular DCFTAs and as regards the improvement of the business environment, the Business Development Panel will work together with the Panel on Trade and Trade Related Regulatory Cooperation.

Representatives of the projects that form part of the SME Flagship or related projects which fall under the EU4Business umbrella (see below) will update the Panel on progress and inform on future activities. In addition to below mentioned tangible projects, the Panel will also be the forum for discussion on a sustainable continuation of the Business Forum by way of engagement and ownership of the business community. The Business Development Panel will also address any questions/issues around Partner Countries' participation in COSME (Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs) and the Enterprise Europe Network. Partner Countries will discuss their respective experience as regards the implementation of COSME and the added value of the Enterprise Europe Network.

The EU4Business Secretariat will provide support to all SME Flagship programmes and operational support to this Panel. The objective is to enhance synergies and coordination among various programmes under the EU4Business brand. Concrete activities include monitoring the implementation of the programmes within the framework to the SME Flagship, consolidated reporting for the whole SME Flagship, organising regular Steering Committees involving the programme implementers and developing and implementing the SME Flagship communication strategy. The support function will also include ad-hoc expertise on technical questions related to financing for SMEs and SME policy in the Partner Countries.

The following is an overview of concrete projects which will be undertaken under the umbrella of the Business Development Panel. Project meetings will also be held as much as possible back-to-back to the Panel to allow for synergies.

- Second round of SBA Assessment undertaken by the OECD in cooperation with the European Commission, European Training Foundation (ETF), EBRD (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) and EIB (European Investment Bank): The second round of the SBA Assessment follows the same rationale as the first assessment and has the objective to support Partner Countries in identifying strengths and weaknesses in their SME policy frameworks and to remedy these based on the recommendation made by the project partners. The specific objective of this project is to measure progress made in SME policy implementation over time (2012–2015) based on the results of the SME Policy Index published in 2012. It also aims to support regional policy dialogue between SME policy makers in the region, notably by providing a set of recommendations for further policy reforms. A specific focus is put on how to monitor and evaluate the impact of SME policy interventions to strengthen capacity of SME policy makers in the region and to measure impact on the ground. Results of this project are also disseminated to and discussed with representatives of civil society and business in the countries.
- Follow-up project to SBA Assessment: Following the publication of the second SBA Assessment at the end of 2015 ("SME Policy Index: Eastern Partner Countries 2016 – Assessing the Implementation of the Small Business Act for Europe") this project will assist Eastern Partner Countries with the dissemination of the results of the SBA Assessment to all relevant stakeholders in Partner Countries as well as with the implementation of the tailor-made policy roadmaps outlined for each country This will

also allow keeping the positive momentum of the SBA Assessment. Furthermore, an analysis to what extent the positive developments in Partner Countries as regards SME policy-making translate 'on the ground' will further strengthen the impact of the SBA Assessment. The latter will also allow to benchmark Partner Countries against EU Member States and possibly enlargement countries.

- Project on implementation of SME Policy (“Supporting SME Competitiveness Reforms in the Eastern Partner Countries”) undertaken by the OECD in cooperation with European Commission: This project will assist Partner Countries with the implementation of policy reforms based on policy recommendations resulting from the SBA Assessment. It aims to increase government responsiveness to SMEs’ needs and requests and an improved public private dialogue at national level. A key feature will be policy dialogue and peer review at regional level focusing on SME competitiveness in the Eastern Partner region. This should provide for increased cooperation between SME stakeholders from the region and facilitate exchange of best practices.
- East Invest II: This project aims at promoting trade and investment through networking of SMEs and consolidation, sustainability and empowerment of SME and business associations in Partner Countries – also on the basis of long-term partnerships with EU organisations. It will also improve public-private dialogue in Partner Countries and enhance capacities of business associations to represent SMEs in dialogue with their governments. The project will support the participation of SMEs in the DCFTA process while ensuring the familiarisation of business associations and SMEs with the EU *acquis* and obligations deriving from the DCFTA agreements.
- Project on auditing and reporting (STAREP): STAREP will focus on building stakeholder awareness of and commitment to corporate financial reforms (CFR). It will provide senior officials from Partner Countries with technical advice on the content of CFR reforms and on the process to conduct them. It will, thus, improve the capacity of key CFR institutions, particularly the accounting profession, to fulfil their mandate effectively and be better equipped to provide business support services required by SMEs. Furthermore, it will ensure broad-based knowledge sharing activities on international and EU auditing and reporting standards and support access for SME borrowers to bank and investor finance through modernised accounting and financial reporting.
- Small Business Initiative: The EBRD's Small Business Initiative provides for individual technical assistance helping enterprises adapt to the demands of a liberal market economy. The objective of this initiative is to develop capacities of local SMEs as well as local business advisory services. Technical assistance is on an individual basis and tailored to the needs of each enterprise accepted for assistance. The second phase of Small Business Support focuses specifically on the DCFTA countries, providing business advisory services to SMEs as regards the challenges posed and opportunities offered by the DCFTA. It complements the DCFTA Facility for SMEs meant to improve access to finance mainly.

- SME Finance Facility: The SME Finance Facility combines EBRD, EIB (European Investment Bank) and KfW loans with EU grant resources to support SME lending in the EaP region. The EU contribution is channelled through participating financial intermediaries (PFI) and used to enhance their lending to the SME/MSME (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) segment. The funds are to be used to finance institution building, technical assistance and/or credit enhancement support for PFIs.
- DCFTA Facility for SMEs: The DCFTA Facility for SMEs has been established for the three countries which have signed a DCFTA with the EU. It aims to finance investments necessary for SMEs to comply with the provisions of the DCFTA, to seize trade opportunities with the EU and within the region which have been opened up due to the DCFTA, and to benefit from the inflow of foreign direct investment.
- EFSE: The European Fund for Southeast Europe (EFSE) aims to foster economic development and prosperity in Southeast Europe and the European Eastern Neighbourhood Region. The EFSE works with local partner lending institutions (PLIs) to meet the financing needs of micro and small enterprises.
- Export Marketing Training: The Export Marketing Training cycle will be a dedicated 5-day workshop for SMEs on how to enter the EU market and how to acquire new clients and projects. This training will be provided by CBI (Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries – part of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands).
- Mayors for Economic Growth: The Mayors for Economic Growth initiative will contribute to the objectives of the Panel by supporting local authorities in Partner Countries to become active facilitators for economic growth and job creation in the region. The project will encourage and support local authorities to design and implement Local Economic Development Plans (LEDP) and strengthen the technical skills and capacities of local authorities to implement economic strategies in line with the principles of good governance and sound financial management.
- Entrepreneurial Learning and Women's Entrepreneurship:
 - The Eastern Partnership Entrepreneurial Learning conference organised by ETF aimed at supporting countries of the region in their actions that follow the SBA Assessment 2016 and the publication of the corresponding report. The Conference elaborated regional and national approaches to the systemic introduction of the entrepreneurship key competence into education policies and the learning process, with a special focus on teacher capacity and tools for teachers.
 - The International Women Entrepreneurship Laboratory 2016 – organised by ETF – will build on the momentum created during the second round of the SBA Assessment on the human capital development, and in particular on women's entrepreneurship. It will strengthen the established regional synergies and support the governments' commitment to promote women's

entrepreneurship. The Laboratory will engage active national and regional organisations to share expertise and coordinate their action plans in order to set regional targets on women's entrepreneurship promotion and achieve visible progress in the period between the last and the next SBA Assessment in the region.

- Following the above events, ETF will organise a follow-up event which will provide a platform for reviewing and adjusting the state of implementation of SBA recommendations on Entrepreneurial Learning and Women's Entrepreneurship and support the further implementation before the next SBA Assessment.
- Women in Business: The EBRD has developed specific support to women entrepreneurs in the Southern Neighbourhood which has been extended to all Eastern Partner Countries as of December 2015. The project aims to improve the conditions for women led businesses, particularly in terms of access to finance, but also know-how. As such the project merges two components: access to finance (First Loss Risk Cover) and technical assistance to local banks.

Objectives:

- Improvement of the business environment in Partner Countries
- Alignment of policies in Partner Countries with the principles of the SBA
- Support to private sector development in Partner Countries
- Implementation of DCFTAs with a focus on SMEs

Targets to be achieved:

- To enhance economic relations and to improve the business environment which is conducive to further SME and private sector development and national, regional and international investment and trade through dedicated projects
- To implement better and less regulation – including transparency in the regulatory process, public consultation, regulatory impact assessments and the reduction of the administrative burden in line with the “Think Small First” Principle
- To increase business to business contacts and to strengthen cooperation between SMEs in EU Member States and Partner Countries
- To improve the quality of financial reporting and the provision of reliable information about the financial position and performance of enterprises and to increase access to finance for SMEs
- To improve entrepreneurial skills in general and of specific target groups

Panel on Environment and Climate Change (co-chaired by the Directorate-General for Environment and the Directorate-General for Climate Action)

The Panel on Environment and Climate Change will focus on cooperation with regard to enforcing commitments as foreseen in Association Agreements (and any other type of agreements Partner Countries are part of) aiming at the gradual approximation with the EU *acquis* in the areas of environment and climate change. This will include promoting the alignment with EU standards, exchanging information and best practices, building administrative capacities and supporting civil society development.

In the area of environment, topics for discussion and activities will be focused on a selected number of topics, for instance, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), waste reduction and recycling, air pollution, biodiversity and water management.

In the area of climate action, the Panel will support further regional dialogue on climate policies, including within the framework of the regional cooperation project "ClimaEast", with a view to strengthen cooperation of Partner Countries with the EU and its Member States in global climate negotiations, and to share best practice so as to promote the implementation of climate policies – particularly in the context of the Paris Climate Agreement which calls on all partners to undertake and communicate ambitious efforts as nationally determined contributions to the global response to climate change.

The Panel will support the preparation of Ministerial Meetings on Environment and Climate Action and guide strategic cooperation in these areas. In addition, it will aim to identify solutions for common environmental problems for the countries in the region, while taking into account their specific relation with the EU.

Two events (Panel meetings, seminars or study missions) will be organised under the umbrella of the Panel per year focusing on environment and climate action. The Panel will also host discussions and exchange of views and practices as regards the below mentioned projects. The Panel will meet at the level of experts from relevant agencies/ministries from EU institutions, EU Member States and Partner Countries. The Regional Environmental Centre established in the Partner Countries and the European Environment Agency are invited to take part in the work of the Panel. Other stakeholders may also be consulted or involved as appropriate. In particular, IFIs should be invited to participate to support policy implementation by exploring suitable investment options.

Following the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which sets 'energy security and climate action' as a joint priority for cooperation, close coordination will be sought with the activities of the Energy Security Platform and its Flagship initiative in the field of sustainable energy as well as with other Panels of Platform 2 due to the cross-cutting nature of environmental issues and climate change.

The Panel for Environment and Climate Change will also oversee the overall implementation of ongoing cooperation projects, focusing on their results, and will provide feedback to the new projects currently planned, as well as to any potential proposals for cooperation projects. The main ongoing and the new projects planned include the following activities:

- Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS): The project, which is part of the Environmental Governance Flagship, aims to promote the protection of the environment in the Eastern Partner region by extending the principles of SEIS to this area, and developing the capacities of the relevant authorities responsible for environmental data management and reporting. The SEIS is an EU initiative to modernise and simplify the collection, exchange and use of data and information required for designing and implementing environmental policy.
- GREEN Project: The overall aim of the GREEN project is to support Partner Countries in their efforts to shift to a greener economy by decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation and resource depletion. In the face of evidence of increasingly unsustainable consumption patterns and environmentally harmful production processes, the project aims to achieve the integration of a product life-cycle approach into decision-making, making it possible to tackle pollution at source rather than concentrating on remedial actions. The work on green economy principles will be continued with a specific focus on topics such as eco-innovation and resource efficiency. The upgrading of the GREEN project as a Flagship will also be discussed with a view to make it country-focused whilst strengthening the communication strategy, programme management and implementation at the national level.
- EU Water Initiative Plus (EUWI+ EAST): The EU Water Initiative is expected to be launched in 2016. It will address existing challenges in both development and implementation of efficient management of water resources in Eastern Partner Countries. It will specifically support them to move towards approximation to the EU *acquis* in the field of water management with a focus on trans-boundary river basins management as identified by the EU Water Framework Directive.
- Clima East Package: The Clima East Package supports climate change mitigation and adaptation in the Neighbourhood East and Russia. The package comprises two separately implemented but closely coordinated actions: (i) a policy project providing information services and technical assistance to foster improved climate change policies, strategies and market mechanisms in the Partner Countries that are more in line with the EU *acquis*, and (ii) a pilot projects based angle supporting the development of an ecosystems-based approach to climate change by financing a number of pilot projects in the region that will demonstrate the relevance of nature management techniques for climate mitigation and adaptation.
- Covenant of Mayors East: The Covenant of Mayors encourages and supports local authorities in Partner Countries to achieve and implement a more sustainable local energy policy. Furthermore, a new global covenant was launched at the COP21 that extends the

covenant to areas such as climate adaptation and access to clean and affordable energy in addition to mitigation. The Commission has set up a large support mechanism to help municipalities to fulfil their commitments in designing and implementing the related Action Plan and to improve access to finance.

Objectives:

- Gradual approximation with the EU *acquis* in the areas of environment and climate change
- Enhancing the capacity of Partner Countries as regards sustainable development, environmental governance and climate action and their cooperation in this regard

Targets to be achieved:

- To assist in the concrete implementation of commitments taken in bilateral and international agreements as regards gradual approximation with the EU *acquis* in the area of environmental protection and climate change and to further improve administrative capacity in this regard
- To continue to improve environmental governance, data collection and management systems in the Eastern Partner region and to address common environmental problems for the countries in the region
 - To prepare Ministerial Meetings on Environment and Climate Action and guide strategic cooperation and oversee follow-up action
- To strengthen cooperation of Partner Countries with the EU and its Member States in global climate negotiations
- To share best practices so as to promote the implementation of climate policies, particularly in the context of the Paris Climate Agreement
- To focus on green policy measures and to demonstrate sustainable consumption and production patterns

Panel on Trade and Trade Related Regulatory Cooperation (chaired by the Directorate-General for Trade in cooperation with the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs and the Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Affairs)

The Trade Panel comprises a variety of issues ranging from setting up of appropriate quality infrastructures, over technical regulations and standards, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures to customs cooperation. These measures and actions also aim to assist with the implementation of DCFTAs. The Trade Panel will exchange information, experiences and best practices as regards the development and implementation of measures by participants and

will promote the alignment with international practice and approximation to the EU *acquis* in the different areas. It will also promote consistency of measures taken by Partner Countries at national, bilateral and regional level.

The Trade Panel meets at the level of experts. Participation will vary depending on the subjects covered, but consists of experts from Partner Countries' ministries and institutions involved in the different subjects covered by the Panel. Other stakeholders from industry and professional organisations in the Partner Countries can take part provided that they are identified by the Partner Government and attend as part of the Partner's Delegation.

- Cooperation on the implementation of the DCFTA part of Association Agreements (AAs) and on other bilateral agreements between EU and Partner Countries based on Partner Countries' needs: Member States will share their experience as regards the implementation of the EU *acquis* and the implementation of the regulatory system in the area of industrial products (horizontal and sectoral legislation) related to the Internal Market for Goods. Panel meetings and workshops will discuss issues revolving around technical regulations, market surveillance, conformity assessment, accreditation, standardisation and metrology and related infrastructure. Particular focus will be put on standards-respective regulatory models and on market surveillance. Furthermore, time will be dedicated to sharing information and presenting the necessary prerequisite for “Agreements of Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products” (ACAAs) and exchange of information with Member States. As regards SPS, workshops will be especially dedicated to the discussion of horizontal and sectoral legislation and the exchange of experience between Food Safety Agencies from EU Member States and from Partner Countries. Participation of the business community in relevant Panel meetings and workshops will be envisaged.
- Achieving specific policy objectives without implementing trade barriers: The Trade Panel will explore alternative measures to trade barriers to develop and support certain sectors in Partner Countries. Panel meetings and workshops will look at different issues of interest to all participants such as export restrictions, certification of certain goods, government procurement, SPS measures, etc. Moreover the Panel meetings will discuss and promote anti-corruption measures and serve as a platform to share experiences as regards the implementation of international conventions and principles in this regard. Information on procedures for transparency of regulations and procurement processes will equally be exchanged.
- Customs Trade Facilitation Training for Young Customs Managers: The overall aim of the proposed training project is to improve the efficiency of the public service as regards customs management and the transfer of knowledge to young customs managers based on EU best practices, including the revised Customs Blueprints. Potential areas for discussion and training will relate to recurring/current issues as regards trade and customs cooperation between the EU and Partner Countries and to

the implementation of DCFTAs. The curriculum of the training may cover the following topics based on the Union Customs Code:

- Customs valuation;
 - Classification of goods;
 - Rules of origin;
 - Common transit procedure;
 - Customs declarations processing;
 - Protection of intellectual property rights;
 - Customs control based on a risk management system;
 - Post clearance;
 - Customs audit;
 - Authorised economic operator;
 - Simplified procedures;
 - Trade to customs cooperation;
 - Integrity and ethics;
 - Processing and analysis of customs statistical data;
- Commercial Attaché Training: The Commercial Attaché Training will focus on export promotion and foreign direct investment (FDI). It is targeted at Economic Diplomats or Commercial Attachés working at a strategic and operational level as regards the promotion of the respective Partner Country, sectors and/or companies in the EU and attracting FDI to the region. This training will be provided by CBI (Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries – part of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands). CBI will also provide a presentation on the CBI Market Intelligence Portfolio (www.cbi.eu/marketintel_platform).
- Market Intelligence Programme: The aim of this Workshop or dedicated Panel meeting is to equip participants with tools and skills needed to tackle market intelligence related issues within international trade. This could, for instance, cover buyer requirements, trade data or competition/rules of origin. The emphasis is put on knowing which information is available and how to use it. This will be complemented by a discussion which has the aim to provide insights into recent and future developments and market trends from different angles as depicted by Panel participants (including policy makers, Business Support Organisations, industry representatives, exporters etc.). This Workshop/Panel will be organised by CBI.

Objectives:

- Increasing trade between Partner Countries and the EU
- Implementation of DCFTAs
- Prevent and tackle specific trade barriers
- Promote transparency of regulations and procurement processes, as well as other anti-corruption measures

Targets to be achieved:

- To assist partners in their efforts concerning trade and trade related regulatory approximation and to further enhance the administrative capacity building process
- To support partners in their efforts to enhance economic relations in order to promote national, regional and international investment and export and to strengthen traditional trade links in particular business to business contacts in order step up trade in goods and services among partners
- To remove technical barriers to trade and to further harmonise standards as set out in the DCFTAs
- To strive towards better regulation – including transparency in the regulatory process, public consultation, impact assessments and the reduction of the administrative burden
- To avoid new trade barriers being implemented
- To assist in building the necessary administrative capacity and knowledge as regards trade and customs issues
- To ensure a smooth flow of goods between the EU and Partner Countries through cooperation on customs and trade facilitation
- To enhance the security and safety of trade lanes and the supply chain and to combat tax fraud through border management (done in cooperation with Platform 1)

Panel on Agriculture and Rural Development (chaired by the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development)

The Agriculture and Rural Development Panel (ARD Panel) was established at the end of 2012 given the importance of agriculture and rural areas for further sustainable and inclusive development of Partner Countries. In its meetings, the Panel will provide updates on ENPARD (European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture & Rural Development) as the initiative is aimed at assisting all EU neighbourhood countries in developing their agriculture and rural areas.

The ARD Panel participants will exchange knowledge, experience and good practices as regards policies, measures and capacities for the sustainable development of the sector. It will promote gradual approximation to the EU *acquis* in the different areas and will encourage consistency of measures taken by Partner Countries at national, bilateral and regional level. Cooperation and exchange of experience and best practices will focus on priority issues related to agriculture and rural development which were jointly established with Partner Countries. The Panel will also provide Partner Countries with the opportunity to present their experiences of successfully implemented measures/projects/initiatives which resulted from or were helped by the know-how or best practices shared in the previous Panel meetings. The work of the Panel will complement the bilateral policy dialogues on the sector development cooperation between the EU and the Partner Countries under the ENI (European Neighbourhood Instrument). The Panel provided technical background and policy recommendations for the 2014 meeting of EU and Eastern Partner Agriculture Ministers.

The Partner Countries and Member States participating in the Panel will be encouraged to actively participate by presenting case studies, giving illustrations of the status of their respective countries in specific areas and by submitting questions on specific problems that they have encountered. The Panel will meet at the level of experts from Partner Countries' and EU Member States' ministries and institutions involved in the subjects covered by the Panel – these being mainly services responsible for agriculture and rural development but also, if need be, those dealing with regional/territorial development.

The Panel shall also cooperate closely with the Panel on Environment and Climate Change with regard to the promotion of green technologies, eco-innovation and bio-diversity, with the Trade Panel on SPS matters as appropriate and with the Business Development Panel.

The Panel will meet twice per year with the option to replace one of the meetings by a technical meeting (workshop, conference, seminar). The EU Member States which have acquired advanced or unique knowledge/experience in one of the areas included in the Panel's Work Programme are welcome to share this know-how via workshops/study visits/trainings to be organised in cooperation with the Commission, including in the EU Member States interested².

The following is a list of issues for discussion to be addressed by the Panel for Agriculture and Rural Development over time:

- Policy responses to fragmented land holdings and ways of increasing the attractiveness of producer cooperation and integration;
- Building a rural development policy, assigning competence or budget resources;
- Practical solutions to increase the level of professionalism and training in rural communities and to develop advisory services;

² Note the example of the conference on “Rural and Agricultural Advisory Systems (RAAS): Best Practices and Experience in the Eastern Partnership” which took place on 15-16 April 2015 in Riga, Latvia.

- Definition of a regional codex for good agriculture practices;
- Identifying and addressing gaps in standards, regulations, legislation and comparative information;
- Developing the food safety system: phytosanitary-veterinary;
- Gradual update of technology and appropriate infrastructure and drafting of realistic investment plans in rural areas;
- Food security in strategic cereal and animal origin products;
- Potential solutions to limited finance and viable credit in rural areas;
- Community led local development;
- Diversification of activities in rural areas;
- Regulation and restructuration of agricultural markets;
- Reforming/reorganising agricultural science and education/professional development of specialists;
- Implementation of basic information systems needed to support the functioning of the food chain (needs analysis of the agri-food information system), evidence (farm/farmers' register, crops, agricultural machinery, etc.), traceability (products of animal and non-animal origin).

Furthermore, the Panel will work on the gradual approximation with relevant EU *acquis* in the area of agriculture and rural development – for example:

- Organic farming (Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 on organic production and labelling of organic products);
- Marketing standards (Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 establishing a common organisation of the markets in agricultural products and repealing Council Regulations (EEC) No 922/72, (EEC) No 234/79, (EC) No 1037/2001 and (EC) No 1234/2007);
- Protected designations of origin, protected geographical indications and traditional specialties guaranteed (Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs).

Objectives:

- Support Partner Countries' efforts in developing their agriculture and rural areas by benefitting from EU practice and the sector experience of other Partner Countries participating in the Panel

- Improve rural and local development

Targets to be achieved:

- To provide expertise for formulating and implementing policies and related reforms by following best practices in EU Member States and Partner Countries
- To contribute to the preparation and, if applicable, the implementation of long-term agricultural and rural development strategies in consultation with and based on participation of all relevant stakeholders
- To build the necessary institutional capacities at national and local levels
- To promote the strategic modernisation of the agricultural sector and increase domestic production of safe and quality food in a sustainable way

Panel on Statistics (chaired by the Directorate-General Eurostat)

The Statistics Panel will address a variety of issues related to the institutional environment of the national statistical systems in the Partner Countries and their capacity to produce good quality statistical information serving user needs and being reliable, comparable and produced in time. This will strengthen the capacity of Partner Countries to provide relevant and timely statistical information as a basis for good governance and sound decision making. At the same time, the work of this Panel will contribute to better monitoring the effectiveness of implemented policies. To this end, the dialogue between the major producers and users of statistics³ will be enhanced through the Statistics Panel to encompass the interests of all stakeholders and to empower users including policy-makers, economic operators and civil society. The activities of the Statistics Panel are based on and oriented towards the implementation of the Strategy for Statistical Cooperation in the ENP-East Region 2014-2020 developed in close cooperation between Eurostat and the Partner Countries.

The Statistics Panel will aim at a dynamic exchange of information, experience and best practices between EU institutions and Member States' representatives and participants from Partner Countries, focusing on the development of the national statistical systems in the Partner Countries and promoting the alignment with international standards and approximation to the EU *acquis* in different areas of statistics.

The Statistics Panel meets at the level of experts. Participation will vary depending on the subject covered, but will consist of experts from Partner Countries' National Statistical Offices (NSO), other producers of official statistics depending on the subjects covered by the Panel and major users of statistics. Other stakeholders from any branch of the economy,

³ Major producers of official statistics in a country are the national statistical office, the Central Bank and ministries and agencies that produce official statistics. According to the European standards, the focal point and the coordinator of the statistical system is the national statistical office. The main users of statistical data are

professional organisations or research institutes from Partner Countries can take part, provided that they are identified by the Partner Government, and attend as a part of the Partner's Delegation.

The Statistics Panel meets at least twice a year. One of the Panel meetings may be replaced by a workshop or seminar, the most suitable format being chosen depending on the theme. The activities of the Statistics Panel will promote a user-producer dialogue on how to best serve user needs with relevant and good quality statistics, policy relevance of statistical information and how good quality data can serve good policy design and monitoring. In the context of the cooperation on the implementation of AAs including DCFTAs, the Statistics Panel will address the issue of practical understanding and implementation of the EU *acquis* in statistics so as to promote the production of comparable data.

The work of this Panel will consist of an exchange of information and best practices on European standards in selected statistical domains and support towards harmonising these statistics where so decided. The indicative list of specific issues to be addressed by the Statistics Panel includes:

- Business statistics, especially data availability on small and medium-sized enterprises;
- Price statistics;
- Macro-economic indicators, including national accounts, trade statistics, non-observed economy;
- Agricultural, environment and regional statistics;
- Social and demographic statistics, including gender statistics, population and housing censuses;
- Availability and dissemination of data required in the context of the AA/DCFTA;
- Quality in statistics, including standards, classifications, methodologies, dissemination procedures;
- Use of administrative data for statistical purposes;
- Serving user needs with good quality statistics.

Objectives:

- To improve the availability of good quality statistics in line with the EU *acquis* in statistics

ministries and agencies of public administration designing and implementing various policies, research institutes, civil society and the private sector.

- To strengthen the institutional capacity of the National Statistical Systems and the role and capacity of the NSOs within these by implementing the European Statistics Code of Practice which all Partner Countries committed themselves to implement
- To support the implementation of the ENI Regional East Strategy with statistical data
- To implement the AA/DCFTA provisions in respect of statistics
- To empower users including policy-makers and civil society

Targets to be achieved:

- Improved knowledge of the EU *acquis* in statistics in the countries concerned
- Availability of good quality data relevant for bilateral relations, in particular the AAs/DCFTAs and the ENI Regional East Strategy
- Gradual application of the European Statistics Code of Practice at all stages of data production and dissemination by all the actors of the national statistical system, including the NSOs and other national authorities producing official statistics
- Improved coordination of the national statistical systems
- Improved services to users

Panel on Harmonisation of Digital Markets (chaired by the Directorate-General for Communications, Networks, Content and Technology)

The HDM Panel was established in autumn 2015. The Commission Communication "A Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe" (COM (2015) 192)⁴, as well as the Ministerial Declaration⁵ of the First Eastern Partnership Ministerial Meeting on Digital Economy, held in June 2015, provide the policy framework of the Panel and set out its objectives.

The key objective of HDM policy is to promote the harmonisation of digital markets within the Eastern European Partner region, and between Partner Countries and the EU. Individuals and businesses, irrespective of their nationality or place of residence, will be enabled to exercise online activities seamlessly, under fair competition and with a high level of consumer and personal data protection. Harmonised digital markets will foster better online services at better prices, offer more choice and boost employment. Existing companies will be able to grow faster and start-ups will be created more easily within a pan-European digital market.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/digital-single-market/docs/dsm-communication_en.pdf

⁵ https://eu2015.lv/images/news/2015_06_11_EaP_Digital_Economy.pdf

The HDM Panel will address all the topics which are included in the First EaP Ministerial Declaration on the Digital Economy: eGovernment, including open data, eHealth and eCustoms; eCommerce for SMEs; eLogistics and digital transport corridors; electronic identification and trust services; network and information security, cybersecurity and cybercrime; ICT-based infrastructures for eTrade; ICT-based infrastructures for research and education; digital skills; telecom rules; and Internet governance. Additional topics might be addressed by the HDM Panel, if these have direct relevance to the Digital Economy and are identified by the HDM Panel as priorities for the Eastern Partnership. Priority actions to be addressed in the period 2016-2017 were further detailed by the 1st HDM Panel meeting.

HDM Panel participants include representatives of EU institutions and relevant stakeholders from the Partner Countries and EU Member States including public administrations, professional and industrial associations, regulatory bodies and civil society. Each Partner Country will appoint an HDM national coordinator who will represent the country at the HDM Panel and ensure appropriate follow-up at national level. The Panel will meet at experts' level. Experts participation will vary depending on the specific subjects covered in each Panel meeting. Experts from EU Member States, EU Agencies, IFIs, other organisations and third countries beyond the EaP can be invited to the HDM Panel meetings in order to share experiences, information and best practices. The HDM Panel will meet at least once per year.

In line with its Terms of Reference, the Panel will focus on the following types of activities:

- Discuss the state of play of developments in the area of digital economy and digital markets in partner countries and in the EU and as regards priority topics which are identified by the Panel. Exchange experiences and best practices, discuss the gaps between the Partner Countries and the EU and identify challenges and opportunities for harmonisation. Use the findings of the HDM study as input to this discussion;
- Contribute towards an HDM strategy, taking into account the relevant policy and financial frameworks in the EU, national priorities in Partner Countries and relevant bilateral agreements;
- Explore implementation possibilities for the HDM strategy, including funding sources for relevant actions. These would typically comprise ongoing projects and programmes, IFIs, the wider donor community, EU Member States and Partner Countries (see also below the section on synergies with other Platforms and Panels). Explore the best approach to secure the recognition of the strategic importance of HDM, including with regard to the creation of any future Eastern Partnership Flagships;
- Assess implementation progress of the pilot HDM activities and ensure consistency and coherence at national, bilateral and where appropriate, at regional level. Based on implementation progress, contribute to refine/revise the HDM strategy;
- Studies to be initiated on specific topics related to HDM. Studies could be initiated to support any of the activities (a)-(d) listed above;

- Workshops/seminars on priority HDM topics to be proposed by Partner Countries: These workshops/seminars could support any of the activities (a)-(d) listed above. They could be organised on the occasion of HDM Panel meetings or separately and should focus on topics which fall within the scope of the key issues addressed by the HDM Panel.

As the HDM is intrinsically cross-sectorial and multidisciplinary, the HDM Panel will seek to develop synergies with other Platforms and Panels. In Platform 1, synergies should be sought with the Panel on Integrated Border Management (e.g. in relation to eCustoms and cross-border parcel delivery), the Panel on Public Administration Reform (e.g. as regards eGovernment) and the Panel on Common Security and Defence Policy (e.g. as regards cyber-security). In Platform 2, synergies should be developed with the Panel on SMEs (e.g. as regards eCommerce for SMEs) and the Trade Panel (e.g. as regards the implementation of the parts of the Association Agreements which are related to the digital economy, notably the Information Society Chapter). In Platform 4, synergies should be sought with the Research and Innovation Panel (e.g. as regards ICT-based infrastructures for education and research, promotion of research & innovation in ICT, as well as digital skills).

Objectives:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Harmonisation of Digital Markets within the Eastern European Partner region, and between Partner Countries and the EU, and where relevant, gradual approximation of legislation in partner countries to applicable EU <i>acquis</i> |
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Targets to be achieved:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improved exchange of experiences and best practices between partner countries and with the EU on issues related to the digital economy – Coordinated follow-up to the First Eastern Partnership Ministerial Meeting on Digital Economy through a carefully developed Eastern Partnership regional strategy for HDM – Mobilisation of an optimal mix of sources for financing HDM actions in the priority topics identified – Concrete achievements during this first work programme, leading to the 2nd Eastern Partnership Ministerial Meeting on Digital Economy, to be held in 2017 before the next Eastern Partnership Summit – Recognition of the importance of HDM as a strategic priority, including with regard to the creation of any future Eastern Partnership Flagships |
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Work Area: Taxation and Public Finances

The Work Area on Taxation and Public Finances deals with cooperation as regards the gradual approximation to the EU system and structure of indirect taxes (value added tax

(VAT) and excise duties). This should reduce tax fraud and lead to increased good governance in the tax area. Additionally, this Work Area will also discuss issues and practices related to Public Internal Financial Control (PIFC) in order to strive towards a sound framework of public finances. For the time being, it is foreseen to address these issues through presentations within the framework of Platform meetings. Capacity building and promoting a business friendly environment based on EU quality standards can be achieved by using the EU Fiscal Blueprints.

As regards taxation, the Work Area will address the following issues and Directives in order to encourage adoption of a VAT system which is based on the EU model:

- Exchange of experience on measures and procedures that ensure proper administration of excise duties, control on the movement of excisable goods and proper administration of the VAT system;
- Council Directive 2006/112/EC on the common system of value added tax;
- Council Directive 2007/74/EC on travellers allowances;
- Council Directive 86/560/EEC on the harmonisation of the laws of the Member States relating to turnover taxes – arrangements for the refund of value added tax to taxable persons not established in Community territory;
- Council Directive 2011/64/EU on the structure and rates of excise duty applied on manufactured tobacco;
- Council Directive 92/83/EEC on the harmonisation of the structures of excise duties on alcohol and alcoholic beverages;
- Council Directive 2003/96/EC restructuring the Community framework for the taxation of energy products and electricity;
- Council Directive 2008/118/EC concerning the general arrangements for excise duty and repealing Directive 92/12/EEC.

As regards public finances, the Work Area will share information and exchange best practices in the field of Public Internal Financial Control. Topics for discussion could include the following:

- Capacity building of internal auditors;
- Development of an internal audit function within local governments;
- Design and implementation of an external quality assessment programme for internal audit;
- Strengthening the managerial control system within public entities in accordance with the COSO (Committee of Sponsoring Organisations of the Treadway Commission) model;

- Development of the current financial management and control monitoring system;
- Enhancing the central harmonisation function capacity to coordinate the implementation of PIFC.

Objectives:

- Working towards good governance in the tax area and in the area of public finances

Targets to be achieved:

- To assist in the implementation of Association Agreements in the tax area in order to work towards gradual approximation with the EU system and structure of indirect taxes
- To share information on EU best practices and tools as regards PIFC in order to improve capacity and knowledge in Partner Countries

Work Area: Employment and Employability

The Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) confirms supporting an inclusive growth and social development in the EU's neighbouring countries as one of the priority areas for joint cooperation between the EU and Partner Countries. Creating employment opportunities for youth is a key measure of economic stabilisation as are improving the employability of the workforce overall, developing skills, and better matching skills and labour demand. In that respect, the ENP Review indicates the need to consult Partner Countries on the opportunity of setting up a specific Panel on Youth Employment and Employability within the Eastern Partnership.

The ETF is called to play an active role and will therefore continue to support the activities to be undertaken in the area of youth employment and employability, skills development and labour migration.

Structured dialogue on employment and employability

It is proposed to establish a structured dialogue on employment and employability with a focus on youth that would serve as a forum for exchanging knowledge, information, experience and good practices between Partner Countries and with the EU and EU Member States with regard to the development and implementation of relevant policy responses. Youth employment is a shared concern of the EU, its Member States and Partner Countries. Youth employment and employability is the outcome of the interplay between a number of factors (economic development, overall functioning of the labour market, jobs supply, skills supply etc.) and policies (employment, social policy, education and training). The dialogue would aim at fostering coherent and comprehensive policy approaches, improving implementation by supporting capacity-building of relevant administrations, institutions and

agencies, and at identifying pathways to create opportunities for youth and priorities for EU-level support (through the ENI instrument) and cooperation between Partner Countries and EU Member States. This dialogue could benefit from cross-fertilisation with other Panels and/or multilateral cooperation undertaken under Platform 2 (e.g. on rural development, SMEs and entrepreneurship) and with activities undertaken under Platform 4. A report on the progress of the dialogue and its main recommendations for future action will be presented to Platform 4 at least once a year, in order to enhance synergies with education and training policies and corresponding decision makers.

The dialogue will bring together experts from Partner Countries and EU Member States authorities in charge of training, employment, and social policies, the main agencies (employment services and VET agencies in particular) and the European institutions. It will also associate in an appropriate manner the representative social partners (from Partner Countries, as well as European and international players). The dialogue will be established with the support of the ETF and also draw upon relevant experience of international organisations.

- Skills matching: Mismatch of skills and qualifications with the needs of the economy and with the changing societal and technological environment remains an important cause of underutilisation of the labour force and of recruitment bottlenecks for many companies. Use of findings from analyses on employment and labour market trends (in various dimensions – national, regional, sectoral, occupational) for policy purposes is considered weak and ineffective in Partner Countries. Some Partner Countries have developed tools and analytical capacities to produce relevant labour market intelligence, involving varied stakeholders in analysis and discussion for skills matching. Other countries are opening up for more up-to-date analytical tools and flexible approaches for anticipation and matching. Skills anticipation and matching is fully recognised as an important factor for more effective management of public and private expenditure in education and training, in career guidance services, and in labour market policies.

In 2014-2015 the activities of the skills matching component contributed to elevate the level of awareness and knowledge among the members of the "Make it Match" network on coordinated approaches and systems for skills anticipation and matching. Three capacity building seminars and experience sharing events with relevant bodies from several EU Member States (France, Finland, Portugal, Italy and the Netherlands), and the launch and operationalisation of an online Platform supporting experience sharing in the "Make it Match" network have generated cooperation at EaP (regional) level, as well as between stakeholders at national level.

In 2016 the activities on skills matching include two regional thematic workshops for the "Make it Match" network, complemented by further ETF support to national level activities as well as to the online Platform. A final conference will conclude the activities in 2017. At the end of 2017 it is expected that the EaP countries have made progress in the

implementation of coordinated actions to use more and better information on needs for skills and qualifications for a more effective skills matching in their countries.

- Labour migration: The recent migration flows and refugees crisis in Europe are also affecting Partner Countries. Promoting circular migration and addressing root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement are key elements of the Neighbourhood Policy. Better identification of skills gaps, recognition of qualifications and dialogue on academic mobility are identified as key areas for an intensified cooperation.

Migration surveys suggest a strong need for policy measures to support migrants before departure to secure an efficient job and skills-matching process and recognition of their qualifications, and to facilitate labour market reintegration and validation of new skills gained abroad upon their return. ETF made in 2014-2015 an inventory of policy measures and good practices to support migrants/returnees from skills and employment perspective (MISMES project) at global level and five country studies of countries which signed a Mobility Partnership with the EU (Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Morocco and Tunisia).⁶ The results of MISMES has been shared in a Platform 2 conference entitled “Skills Dimension of Migration: Perspectives from the ETF Partner Countries” in September 2015 in Brussels. The conference emphasised the inextricable link between migration, skills development and employment policies and the need to mainstream migration into the national policies of origin countries. It also concluded the importance of further regional dialogue on policies and ‘skills partnerships’ between countries of origin and destination. Building on the work carried out under the Mobility Partnerships, a regional labour migration conference in 2017 will focus on transparency, portability and readability of professional qualifications, including validation of non-formal and informal learning practices.

- Inclusion of disabled people in the labour market: This Work Area will also address the inclusion of disabled people in the labour market and the vocational rehabilitation of people with disabilities as well as the general policy framework (European Disability Strategy and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). Starting in 2017, presentations and activities on these issues will, amongst others, address accessibility as a precondition for persons with disabilities to participate in society and employment, economic implications of accessibility including the role of industry and employment and social situation of persons with disabilities.

Objectives:

- Promoting inclusive growth and social development in Partner Countries

⁶ See the web links - Migrant Support Measures from Employment and Skills Perspective (MISMES): Global Inventory with a focus on Countries of Origin (2015): http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/MISMES_global_inventory; MISMES Armenia report (2015): http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/MISMES_Armenia; MISMES Georgia report (2015): http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/MISMES_Georgia; MISMES Moldova report (2015): http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/MISMES_Moldova.

- Supporting skills development and the creation of opportunities in close connection with the labour market needs, particularly for youth as a contribution to improving the employability of Partner countries' workforce
- Improving policy coherence and a holistic approach to employability and human capital development
- Promoting social dialogue

Targets to be achieved:

- To establish a forum for policy dialogue, exchange of information and experiences between Partner Countries, the EU and EU Member States on youth employment and employability, skills anticipation and matching
- To continue improving the capacities of relevant institutions/experts in Partner Countries to develop and implement policies that support skills development, the employability of their workforce and better labour market integration of migrants and returnees
- Identify pathways towards opportunities for youth

Work Area: Macroeconomic and Financial Stability

Cooperation on questions of macro-economic and financial stability between the EU and the Partner Countries will continue. This will take the form of a dialogue which will be mainly undertaken within the framework of Platform 2 meetings. In addition to this dialogue, macro-economic and financial stability issues may be taken up during dedicated activities (seminars, workshops etc.) organised under the Platform 2. Discussion and information points will include issues related to:

- Conduct of sound fiscal, monetary and exchange rate policies;
- Financial stability and oversight;
- Economic reforms to improve the investment climate and increase the economic growth potential.

At the same time, an exchange of views and sharing of experience on important economic issues of interest to Partner Countries due to the interdependence of the region with the EU is foreseen.

Objectives:

- Contributing to achieving sustainable growth and macro-economic financial stability and full recovery from the economic and financial crisis

Targets to be achieved:

- To assist Partner Countries on their path towards sustainable growth and macro-economic and financial stability by sharing the EU experience