

**1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Georgia – European Union**  
**Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) Sub-Committee (SC)**  
**Joint statement of the Parties to the Joint Civil Society Forum**

- Senior officials of the EU and Georgia met yesterday (26 January 2016) for the meeting of the Georgia – European Union Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) Sub-Committee under the DCFTA part of the Association Agreement (AA).
- The Parties are pleased to meet the Joint Civil Society Forum at its first meeting to give an update on the state of implementation of the TSD chapter.
- The DCFTA represents a major agreement aiming to increase trade flows and contribute to diversification of the economy, growth and sustainable development as well as to increase Georgia’s attractiveness as a viable destination for foreign direct investment. The DCFTA provisionally entered into force on 1 September 2014, and we are already seeing its positive effects. Trade statistics show that bilateral trade is increasing.
- The DCFTA includes a comprehensive chapter on TSD that aims at enhancing the positive contribution that the DCFTA can make to sustainable development, while making sure that trade does not come at the expense of labour conditions or environmental protection. The chapter ensures that civil society is closely involved in its implementation.
- The first meeting of the Trade and Sustainable Development Sub-Committee proved a useful opportunity to exchange information on each side’s initiatives in the area of trade and sustainable development, discuss the implementation to date, and agree on the next steps to be taken.
- As a first procedural matter, through a video-conference last November, the Sub-Committee adopted:
  - Decision no. 1/2015 of the Georgia – EU TSD SC on rules of procedure ;
  - Decision no. 2/2015 of the Georgia – EU TSD SC on the list of experts.
- Secondly, in accordance with Article 241 of the AA, yesterday the TSD SC agreed on the rules of operation of the Joint Civil Society Dialogue Forum (the Forum), which meets today for the first time, as follows:
  - The objective of the Forum is to conduct in full transparency a dialogue on sustainable development aspects of the DCFTA among civil society organisations, as well as between civil society organisations and the Parties.
  - The Forum shall include members of each Party’s domestic advisory group(s) and the public at large. It shall have a balanced representation of relevant interests, including independent representative organisations of employers, workers, environmental interests and business groups, as well as other relevant stakeholders, as appropriate.

- The Forum shall be convened once a year unless otherwise agreed by the Parties. The meeting of the Forum may be web streamed.
- The host Party is in charge of providing with due notice the necessary information regarding the practical details of the Forum including any required information for registration of civil society. Each Party informs its civil society of the Forum including regarding the date, time and venue.
- The Forum will decide on its chair(s) for each meeting.
- The Parties shall present an update on the implementation of the TSD Chapter to the Forum. The views and the opinions of the joint civil society dialogue forum shall be submitted to the Parties and shall be made publicly available. When the Forum meets back-to-back to the TSD Sub-Committee, at the beginning of the meeting the Parties present a joint statement that reflects the outcomes of the meetings of the TSD Sub-Committee and in particular, any orientations of its future work.
- The Sub-Committee then discussed a number of institutional issues, with regard to the state of play of the domestic advisory group, the dialogue between Government and Civil Society, the participation of the civil society in the process of enforcement of the TSD provisions. Both domestic advisory groups were set up and have already had one joint meeting.
- The Sub-Committee welcomes and encourages the cooperative spirit and the active participation of civil society members in economic, environmental and social fields. The Parties stressed the importance of transparency and inclusiveness of the legislative process by involving civil society and social partners in the implementation of actions under the TSD chapter in particular.
- The Sub-Committee reviewed the state of play in the implementation of labour provisions of the TSD Chapter, including the ratification and implementation of provisions set out by international labour conventions (ILO). Significant changes were done in Georgia's labour legislation related to labor rights, freedom of association, labour dispute resolution, mediation, social partnership etc. Both Parties reaffirmed their commitment to consulting and cooperating on trade-related labour issues of mutual interest and encouraged the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including civil society organisations and in particular social partners, in policy development and reforms in Georgia and reiterated their willingness to engage into further cooperation on employment and social policy matters in all relevant regional, multilateral and international fora and organisations. Special attention was paid to fundamental ILO Conventions. Georgia is encouraged to strengthen the labour mediation mechanism and streamline the work of the Tripartite Social Partnership Commission. Georgia is also encouraged to ensure that the Labour Inspection reform is completed and is implemented effectively. Georgia is committed to continue raising awareness with social partners on labour legislation, regulations related to occupational health and safety, human trafficking and labour discrimination in order to decrease the number of accidents and professional diseases, and improve labour conditions in the workplace, reveal and address human trafficking and labour discrimination cases.

- The Sub-Committee reviewed the state of play in the implementation of the environmental provisions of the TSD Chapter, including the implementation of several multilateral environmental agreements, and highlighted the importance of enhanced environmental protection that would bring benefits to citizens and businesses in both the EU and Georgia. Progress has been made in the development of environmental strategies, legislation and policies and both Parties reiterated their commitment in achieving the objectives set forth by the multilateral environmental agreements and conventions and engaging in active dialogue with civil society organisations on environmental matters. Georgia started by highlighting the recent institutional changes in the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources protection of Georgia. Georgia paid special attention to the planned steps for the implementation of the DCFTA provisions on sustainable management of forests and biological diversity and underlined the active role it played under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The EU hailed the successful conclusion of the Paris Agreement at the last UNFCCC conference and welcomed the constructive role played by Georgia during the negotiations. In addition, EU praised Georgia for its active role under CITES and stressed the importance of joining the UNECE Conventions.
- As next steps, the Sub-Committee plans to hold its next meeting by the end of 2016 and to develop a work programme by then, focusing on issues and actions that will generate positive linkages between trade and sustainable development. Input from the domestic advisory groups and the Civil Society Forum would be welcome. The contact points will hold videoconferences to develop the work programme, to plan the next workshop and to keep each other informed of new developments.
- Yesterday's meeting of the TSD SC and today's meeting of the Forum are a first step to build the institutions and relationships necessary to start the implementation of the TSD chapter, which aims to ensure that trade goes hand in hand with sustainable labour and environment policies. We look forward to our respective domestic advisory groups as well as this forum's views, comments and engagement in this regard also.