

PRESS RELEASE**Private sector business organisations from Eastern Partnership countries demand better business climate for SMEs**

21 June 2017, Kiev

More than 100 business support organisations (BSOs) representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and the EU Member States gathered in Kiev today for the final conference of the EU funded East Invest project. Participants discussed private sector's engagement in policymaking across the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries and showcased East Invest success stories/achievement for SMEs and BSOs across the region.

Business representatives notably endorsed a regional position paper with recommendations for the six Eastern partner countries' policy makers and the wider donor community to improve the business environment for the SMEs sector. Specific topics identified by the stakeholders as having the biggest impact on the activities of the SMEs included the business climate, innovation, SMEs access to markets, finance and skills as well as taxation and customs procedures. The wider use of digital solutions in all these areas was underlined. The regional position paper will be the contribution of the East Invest2 business organisations network to the 4th EaP Business Forum that will take place in Tallinn in October 2017.

At the opening session of the conference Mathieu Bousquet from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations said *"East invest, launched in 2010 successfully enabled the creation and empowerment of a wide network of EU and Eastern Partnership private sector representatives. This network succeeded today in the consolidation of a regional position paper which conveys to their governments but also the wider donor community, including the EU, both their concerns and their recommendations to improve the business climate. Improving conditions for economic growth as well as market opportunities for the private sector is a key priority of the EU in the EaP region as confirmed in the last Eastern Partnership Summit Declaration as well as in the ["20 deliverables for 2020"](#). We are confident that this position paper will provide useful guidance to policy makers on the way forward at the next EaP Business Forum, the Eastern Partnership Summit this autumn 2017, and beyond"*.

Dirk Vantghem from EUROCHAMBRES and Luc Hendrickx from UEAPME recalled that improving the business climate is vital for developing a strong private sector in each of the EaP countries.

In closing the conference H.E. Ambassador Hugues Mingarelli, Head of the EU Delegation to Ukraine, highlighted: *"EU funded East Invest project has helped Business Support Organizations in the EaP region to become viable interlocutors for the national governments. We will continue to support various activities within EU4Business initiative in order to improve business climate throughout the region."*

Background

East Invest2 was launched in September 2014 and it is an EU funded project within the EU4Business initiative. Its general objective is to support the development of a conducive economic environment and competitive private sector in Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine), while enhancing trade flows and investments within the region and with the EU.

East Invest2 works with Business Support Organisations and SMEs from the six Eastern Partnership countries.

The process of drafting of a Regional Position Paper (RPP) with recommendations for policy makers was launched at the East Invest2 Annual conference in October 2016 using the draft declaration prepared in the frame of the East Invest PPD activity for the Kiev informal ministerial meeting in July 2016. The process was continued in the period November 2016 - May 2017 through the East Invest2 Public private Dialogue activities in which about 200 Private Sector Organisations (Business Associations) supported by the national facilitators for PPD and experts from both the EU and the EaP countries.