The 11th Meeting of Platform 2 on “economic integration and convergence with EU policies” took place on 13th May 2014 in Brussels. The meeting was chaired by DG ENTR (Christos Kyriatzis and Michaela Hauf) as the coordinating entity of Platform 2.

Mr Kyriatzis appealed to the audience to engage in the Platform activities with a “high level of motivation” in order to keep the momentum – which is of particular importance given recent events in Eastern partner countries. Continuing on this note, Richard Tibbels (EEAS) outlined the EU’s approach to the multi-lateral track following the Vilnius Summit. Whilst all participants agreed that there was a need for greater differentiation between partner countries in order to allow for “different speeds”, unanimity prevailed over the fact that the policy pursued is still “the right one” and that it was ever more so important to keep the multilateral dialogue alive as an important tool for implementing the objectives agreed in the Vilnius Declaration. This commitment was immediately confirmed by the success of the Platform meeting which showed a very high level of participation and unprecedented engagement and interest from all participants (partner countries, Member States, International Organisations, business and Commission services).

As in past Platform meetings, the morning session had the purpose to provide an overview of past and upcoming events. The responsible DGs (DG AGRI, DG ENTR, DG ENV, DG MOVE, DG TAXUD) and partner organisations (European Training Foundation) presented the conclusions of past events and answered any outstanding questions. Upcoming events referred to during the meeting include the following:

- Seminar on Resource Efficiency: 3rd to 6th June 2014, Brussels
- Skills Matching Event: 25th to 27th June 2014, Turin
- Seminar on Women Entrepreneurship: autumn TBC
- Trade Facilitation Training for Young Customs Managers: 8th to 19th September 2014, Poland
- Trade Ministerial: 27th February 2015, Riga (organised by the Latvian EU Presidency)
- Eastern Partnership Business Forum: 23rd and 24th May 2015, Riga (organised by the Latvian EU Presidency)

The Platform meeting also provided a framework to openly discuss ongoing activities and initiatives such as the Study Facility (presented by Przemyslaw Musialkowski from the Kantor Group) or the proposal for a new flagship initiative on harmonising digital markets presented by Belarus. The latter found strong support from fellow partner countries and Member States representatives, although there was a need to further consult and elaborate on this idea. The issue of communication – especially as regards the ‘myths’ around the DCFTAs – and the issue of visibility were also raised and information on relevant documentation provided (as outlined in the presentation by Alicja Krzyzanowska and colleagues from DG Trade).

The afternoon session was specifically dedicated to projects, actions and networks to the benefit of business in general and SMEs in particular. This new format of focusing on a specific topic was tested
for the first time and proved successful. The session was opened with a presentation on the revised approach to the SME Panel including the SME Flagship. Gabriel Blanc (DG DEVCO) and Michaela Hauf (DG ENTR) outlined the envisaged enhanced role of the SME Panel and participants provided some initial comments. This was complemented by short interventions by the OECD (Daniel Quadbeck), EBRD (Valeria Della Rosa) and EIB on their latest activities within the framework of the SME Panel.

Ulrich Benterbusch presented Germany’s bilateral projects in the Eastern Partnership region focusing on the International Manager Training Programme and the German Advisory Group/German Economic Team. This was followed by an intervention from the European Business Association (EBA) Moldova (Mariana Rufa) on how EBA is supporting SMEs and businesses on a daily basis and specifically as regards DCFTA implementation. The afternoon session was closed with a presentation from Dorota Przyludzka (DG ENTR) on the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) with a particular focus on the participation of third countries in the EEN as Business Cooperation Centres and corresponding requirements (call for proposal, funding requirements, establishment of a consortium.).

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