The 10th Meeting of Platform 2 on Economic Integration and Convergence with EU Policies took place on 24th October 2013 in Brussels and was chaired by DG ENTR (Christos Kyriatzis). It was once again confirmed at the Meeting that the work of Platform 2 touches the core of what the Eastern Partnership is all about – economic integration leading to concrete deliverables for people on the ground. Discussions were very constructive, fruitful and engaging. Partner Countries, Member States present as well as responsible Commission services showed a keen interest in moving the work of the Platform forward. Keeping with the spirit of the Vilnius Summit, the Platform Meeting can be considered a meeting which fully delivered. The participants proposed some changes to the Work Programme for 2014-2017, therefore, its adoption is now foreseen via a written procedure. Final comments can be sent by Tuesday 29th October 2013 (close of business) to the Platform Coordinator (Michaela Hauf; Michaela.Hauf@ec.europa.eu). It should be noted that the work programme is the result of broad consultation launched several months ago involving numerous stakeholders. New comments received are subject to approval by responsible Line DGs.

Following an introduction by the Platform Chair outlining the agenda of the Platform, a brief account on the run-up to and the key deliverables of the Vilnius Summit was provided by Richard Tibbels, Head of the Division for Eastern Partnership, Regional cooperation & OSCE in the EEAS. This was followed by reports from the various DGs on past events. It became evident that the work done within the framework of the Transport Panel was much appreciated by the Partner Countries due to its concrete results connecting Partners with the EU. Colleagues from Line DGs also made the link between past events and follow-up actions under the new Work Programme (e.g. cooperation on climate negotiations, work in the area of information society or the key role of the Trade Panel as regards harmonisation). An important side event to the Vilnius Summit is the Business Forum organised on 28th November 2013 in the Lithuanian capital (event introduced by Mr Minijus Samuila from the Lithuanian EU Presidency). The Platform Coordinator outlined that Partner Countries’ Delegations participating in the SME Panel (to take place on 26th and 27th November 2013 in Vilnius) would also be able to participate in the East Invest Closing Conference and the Business Forum. Participants were also informed by Arjen Vos about events undertaken by the European Training Foundation (ETF) in the past half year leading up to the Regional Conference on “Partnerships for meeting the skills demand in changing economies” (25th October 2013 in Brussels). Another date to be noted was the Ministerial Conference on Agriculture to be hosted in Chisinau on 23rd January 2014 (invitations will follow).

The morning session also saw a joint presentation by DG Trade (Gabriele Lo Monaco) and DG DEVCO (Isabelle Combes) on the implementation of DCFTAs. The presentation (the first in a series of presentations/guidelines to help Partner Countries with the implementation process) outlined the process of implementation citing the example of Ukraine and also gave an overview of assistance tools provided by the Commission. Martin Kahanec from Central European University presented the research study on costs and benefits of labour mobility between the EU and Partner Countries. Its findings factually destroyed the myth of bad effects of economic/labour force migration, pointing to
benefits for both country of origin and country of destination. It was agreed that the results of this study deserve wider promotion.

The afternoon session commenced with a short presentation on the structure and content (objectives, targets) of the proposed Work Programme. Delegations generally appreciated and expressed support for the work undertaken to establish the Work Programme and the varied actions proposed. It was agreed to do a final review of the Work Programme and to adopt it through a written procedure. To make the Platform more inclusive and interactive, Mr Gagik Makaryan from the Republican Union of Employers of Armenia presented the key role of social partners and their mission and activities. The work of social partners is also closely related to the work done on skills matching and entrepreneurship (by ETF).

Within the spirit of exchange of experience, DG ENTR (Ruth Paserman) provided an overview of the Europe2020 Strategy and where the EU stands three years after its implementation started. It was recognised that the Eastern Partnership region was facing many similar problems and that the measures and lessons of the Europe2020 Strategy are of interest and may apply to the Eastern Partnership as well. Subsequently, a brief upshot of the dedicated seminar on COSME (Competitiveness Programme for Enterprises and SMEs) for neighbourhood countries – which took place in September – was provided by Edward Tersmette (DG ENTR). It should be noted that a number of Eastern Partnership countries are seriously considering participating in this Union programme. The Platform meeting closed with a presentation (Daniel Quadbeck and Grégory Lecomte) on upcoming SME projects in the Eastern Partnership region undertaken by the Commission in cooperation with the OECD (the second round of the SBA Assessment and the SME Competitiveness Strategies project). Partner Countries unanimously commended the added value of these projects in order to improve SME policy-making in the countries and thus the business environment.

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