***DRAFT –***

***Joint conclusions***

***6th Joint Meeting***

 ***of the European and Georgian Domestic Advisory Groups***

 ***under the EU-Georgia Association Agreement***

**Brussels (online), 2 December 2021**

The representatives of the European and Georgian Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs), set up under the Trade and Sustainable Development chapter of the Association Agreement between the European Union and Georgia, held their sixth joint meeting on 2 December 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting took place online.

The participants expressed their commitment to fulfilling the mandate laid down in the Trade and Sustainable Development chapter of the Association Agreement to monitor the implementation of the chapter and to provide advice to the parties to the agreement.

The two DAGs discussed the following issues:

* labour
* the environment
* the economic pillar of sustainability

They agreed that these issues would remain high on the agenda of the DAGs as long as the necessary measures had not been taken in Georgia to regulate the situation in a satisfactory manner and in accordance with international and European standards.

They also expressed their concerns as regards the evolution of the political situation in Georgia and the fact that this escalation risked jeopardising the broader reform agenda in the country and, consequently, the effective implementation of the Association Agreement and the DCFTA.

With regard to ***labour-related questions***, they specifically:

# welcome the fact that the scope of the labour inspection has been enlarged, but note that it is facing challenges in its full-fledged implementation; in this regard, considering the labour inspection’s new role, to inspect compliance to COVID-19 regulations, they call for an increase in the number of labour inspectors; call for ratification of ILO Conventions 81, 155 and 129;

# considering the increasing scale of non-standard employment in gig economy and the large share of informal employment in Georgia, call for labour inspection to inspect such employment places and develop respective policies for recognizing labour relations in it;

# call for freedom of association and collective bargaining to be promoted at national, sectorial and company level;

# reiterate that the minimum wage remains extremely low, and requires legislative amendments for the minimum wage to be increased on national level and call for enhanced efforts of collective bargaining in this regard;

# call for the increase of parental leave assistance amount on national level and call for the improvement of social care systems for encouraging women labour force participation;

# stress the importance of collective bargaining in the post COVID-19 recovery process and social partners involvement in building recovery policies;

# call on the Government to make the process of designing the Social Code more transparent, democratic and more inclusive in line with international standards; in this regard, they reiterate their call for the ratification of the ILO Convention 102;

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# stress that high proportion of the population is not covered by adequate social protection (included the fact that the country does not have unemployment benefit system in place); point out that unemployed people and parents on parental leave and with family responsibilities as well as workers in non-standard or informal economic relations remain particularly vulnerable in this regard;

# call for social dialogue to be promoted at all levels, and stress that effective social dialogue is needed to improve labour rights and ensure occupational safety and health;

# note that only moderate progress has been made towards eliminating the worst forms of child labour, which are sometimes the result of human trafficking. The issue still remains a systemic problem that must be addressed with both practical and legislative measures;

With regard to ***environment-related issues***, the DAGs:

# stress importance of the good environmental governance and integration of environmental protection in other sectors of economy through environmental assessment tools;

# encourage use of modern technologies in forestry with the aim of better monitoring timber transfers and of assisting forest management and supervision bodies in conducting effective state control over forest use and forest protection;

# call for a policy to be designed that would respond to the rising demand for timber in the domestic economy and for the export of local wood products to other markets by preserving the ecological, social, protective and other functions of the forests;

# welcome the updated Nationally Determined Contribution, an initiative which reiterates Georgia's commitment to Paris Agreement and call on the Government to start its prompt implementation;

With regard to the ***economic pillar of sustainability*** under the provisions of the TSD chapter,

# call for specific programmes to be designed to encourage businesses to modernise infrastructure with sustainable technologies as a measure to achieve a green transition;

# welcome the approval of the Law on Environmental Liability, expected to come into force in 2022, and stress the need to involve the private sector and civil society in finalising the legislation;

# encourage Georgian businesses to adhere to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights as this can facilitate interactions with European markets and enable Georgian businesses to take full advantage of the DCFTA opportunities;

# finally, as regards the post COVID-19 recovery, welcome the assistance provided by the European Union to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on the economy and society of Georgia, and emphasise that this assistance must be transparent, discussed and implemented in cooperation with the social partners.