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EBRD and EU increase support to SMEs and women entrepreneurs in the Eastern Partnership countries

*Programmes to improve access to finance and advice
for SMEs in six countries*

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Union (EU) are extending renewed support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and women entrepreneurs in the Eastern Partnership countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Support to the SME sector is one of the strategic priorities of the EBRD under its [Small Business Initiative](#), launched in July 2014.

Trade promotion and competitiveness

The European Union is providing €8 million to support the extension of business advice to SMEs from the six countries, in a multi-year continuation that enables small businesses to access advice through local consultants and international industry advisers in a wide range of areas such as strategy, marketing, ICT, energy efficiency and beyond.

Forty per cent of the advisory projects in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine will be related to helping small businesses unlock new opportunities available under the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). Business advice will serve to improve SME competitiveness, ease their access to finance, seize new trade opportunities and promote compliance with new food safety, technical and quality standards, as well as with environmental protection measures.

Approximately 550 SMEs are expected to benefit directly under this second phase of the programme, creating over 2,500 jobs. Many more will benefit from awareness raising and market development activities.

Businesses like Geo-Flower Ltd, a Georgian producer of dried wild fruits and berries. After a project in the first phase of the programme to introduce internationally recognised quality management and safety certifications, the company has gained new export clients in the European Union, increasing exports by 40% and turnover by over 250% within a year.

Women and growth

The European Union is also providing €5.035 million to the EBRD's Women in Business Programme in the Eastern Partnership countries. The Women in Business Programme provides women-led SMEs with access to finance and business advice through credit

lines, risk management support and technical assistance to local partner banks who work with women-led SMEs and business advisory services, training and mentoring to women-led SMEs directly. The contribution of the European Union will support risk management and technical assistance activities under the Programme, which is also funded by the Government of Sweden and the Early Transition Countries Fund.

“SMEs in these six countries account for over 95% of all enterprises but contribute an average of only 30% to GDP,” said Claudio Viezzoli, EBRD Managing Director for SME Finance and Development. “We believe that a vibrant SME sector is a vital part of a well-functioning economy and that, with the right support, the strong entrepreneurial spirit we see in this region can reach its full potential. I am very pleased that we can continue to partner with the European Union in this work.”

The EU and EBRD cooperate also on DCFTA-related activities in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, which have signed Association Agreements with the EU. These activities are part of the larger DCFTA Facility for SMEs, which will unlock new investments for small and medium-sized enterprises in the three countries, largely from new loans by international financial institutions, such as the EBRD and the European Investment Bank (EIB).

The European Union pays special attention to the support of the private sector, especially smaller businesses, stimulating economic growth and jobs creation in the Eastern Partnership countries. The European Union supports activities in the areas of business advice, access to finance, or policy dialogue.

The EBRD has invested over €8.84 billion in the Eastern Partnership countries through partner financial institutions, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, energy efficiency, women entrepreneurs and other priority areas. The Bank has also enabled almost 4,000 SMEs to access advice in the region, thanks to donor funding from the European Union, Sweden and other donors.

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The EBRD is a multilateral development bank, committed to furthering progress towards market-oriented economies and the promotion of private and entrepreneurial initiative in [more than 30 countries](#) from Morocco to Mongolia and from Egypt to Estonia. The EBRD is owned by 65 countries, the EU and the EIB. Follow us on the [web](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

The European Union is made up of 28 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of 60 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.