Protocol of the 5th Session of the Georgian-Austrian Joint Commission for Bilateral Foreign Economic Relations

The 5th Session of the Georgian-Austrian Joint Commission for Bilateral Foreign Economic Relations (hereinafter "the Commission"), established in accordance with Article 13 of the "Agreement between the Republic of Georgia and the Republic of Austria on Bilateral Foreign Economic Relations", signed on 24 May 1994 in Vienna, was held in Tbilisi on 18 May, 2017.

The Commission was co-chaired by Mr. Genadi Arveladze, Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia and Ms. Bernadette M. Gierlinger, Vice-Minister for Foreign Economic Policy and European Integration in the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy of the Republic of Austria.

The composition of the Georgian and Austrian Delegation are listed in Annexes I and II respectively.

In parallel of the Joint Commission, the Georgian-Austrian Business Forum, organized by the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry was held in the Marriott Tbilisi Hotel.

The 5th Session of the Georgian-Austrian Joint Commission was held in a warm and friendly atmosphere of cordiality and mutual understanding, reflecting the desire and determination of both countries to find feasible and efficient solutions for further developing and intensifying bilateral relations in different sectors of their economies.

During the Commission's session, various issues of mutual interest were discussed and the results of the deliberations are summarized as follows:

1. Approval of the Agenda

Both Sides approved the Agenda, attached as Annex III of this Protocol.

2. Economic Overview in both Countries

Both Sides exchanged information concerning the current economic situation of their respective countries and agreed on further intensification of bilateral trade relations in various economic sectors.

Both Sides welcomed the official opening of the Austrian Embassy in Tbilisi in September 2016.

Both Sides emphasized the importance of the Austrian-Georgian business for for enhancing bilateral economic relations.

3. Status and Development of Bilateral Trade and Economic Relations

Both Sides reviewed the development of bilateral trade and acknowledged that recent bilateral trade volume does not reflect the real economic potential. With that regard, both Sides agreed that further efforts should be exerted in order to fully utilize the benefits of the EU-Georgia DCFTA, through business and trade missions, fairs, showcases organized by chambers of both Sides.

Therefore both Sides agreed to:

- exchange a list of competitive export products for distribution to interested businesses and to share information about companies interested in trading Georgian and Austrian goods;
- recommend potential Austrian business for exchanging their lists of trading products through the internet portal of the Enterprise Georgia www.tradewithgeorgia.com;
- contribute to further intensifying contacts between enterprises, organizations, companies and other economic entities of the two countries in accordance with their national legislation;
- support activities for promoting products of their national producers and in their markets as well as in third country markets;
- strengthen cooperation to increase the supply of Georgian agricultural products including hazelnuts, wine, mineral water, non-alcoholic beverages, juices, canned fruits and vegetables, herbs, citrus (tangerines), tea products and other agricultural products as well as industrial products;
- strengthen cooperation to increase the supply of Austrian products including machinery equipment, of know-how for the tourism, energy, infrastructure and education sector among others;
- establish a kind of ombudsman (arbitrator) to solve short-term problems between Austrian companies and Georgian authorities;

Both Sides outlined the importance of continued cooperation to promote business and investment opportunities in both countries.

The Georgian Side underlined the importance of developing start-ups financially enabling young people with innovative ideas. In this context the Georgian Side mentioned the innovative business development support state program "Startup Georgia".

Both Sides agreed to cooperate in developing startups through:

- organizing B2B meetings between startups and other companies of both countries;
- supporting Georgian startups and innovators to enter the Austrian market and vice versa;

 exchanging experience in the field of innovation and technology entrepreneurship and science-technology based development in both countries;

Both Sides encouraged Enterprise Georgia and relevant institutions which are responsible for the business and investment promotion in their respective countries to continue active cooperation.

Both Sides welcomed possible cooperation in the following fields:

- organizing trade missions, business fora, and fairs etc. for the purpose of supporting bilateral co-operation between Georgian and Austrian entrepreneurs;
- sharing experience, knowledge and information in the fields of trade and entrepreneurship, including participation in local or/and international exhibitions and events organized in both countries;
- providing information on private sector support programs available to entrepreneurs in both countries;
- establishing new training programs or utilizing existing programs for managers/entrepreneurs (especially SMEs);

Enterprise Georgia welcomed the possibility of close cooperation with agencies responsible for export and private sector (SMEs) promotion in Austria.

Both Sides agreed on the importance of a good business environment for investment resulting in great opportunities for bilateral cooperation and exchange of information in the fields of high value added manufacturing and outsourcing centers, R&D (Research and Development), transport and logistics, information technology, agriculture, hospitality, energy and construction.

Enterprise Georgia and the Austrian Promotion Agency (ABA - Invest in Austria) agreed on continuous cooperation and sharing of experience.

Both Sides informed each other about ongoing business projects. In this context, the Austrian Side handed over respective memoranda of the following companies (see Annex IV):

- → Andritz & bitmedia e-solutions GmbH
- → bit media e-solutions GmbH e-education
- ightarrow bit media e-solutions GmbH eduation and e-solutions, e-government
- → IL AG
- → ILF Consulting Engineers Austria GmbH
- → Kapsch TrafficCom
- → MUT
- → TBM
- → Tiroler Rohre GmbH

The Austrian Side kindly asked the Georgian Side to consider the above-mentioned memoranda. The Georgian Side expressed its readiness to convey the memoranda to the relevant authorities.

Both Sides welcomed the efforts made for the settlement of the dispute between the Austrian Raiffeisen Bank International and the Government of Georgia.

The Georgian Side expressed its interest in sharing experience in the field of vocational education: implementation of work-based/dual educational system, teacher's professional training, development of educational programs, social partnership, establishing contacts between state vocational education institutions of the two countries.

The Austrian Side stated its readiness to organise a bilateral expert meeting in order to discuss success factors of work-based learning, involvement of the private sector and transferability and bilateral cooperation possibilities in Austria.

The Austrian Side expressed its interest in actively contributing in bilateral cooperations and projects in the field of development of educational programs and vocational training (Between the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and the Georgian Chamber of Comerce and Industry). Financing should be clarified in advance.

The Georgian Side emphasized its interest in sharing Austrian experience in the creative industries through the exchange of creatives and analysing model cases, as well as seminars organized by the economic chambers of both countries and relevant institutions.

4. Cooperation in Different Sectors

Both Sides commented that the economic situation in Georgia and Austria is favorable for developing bilateral trade and investment and agreed to expand cooperation in a number of sectors, such as tourism, energy, environment, agriculture, infrastructure, transport and logistics; communications, information technologies and innovations; higher education, science and research; intellectual property and metrology.

In this light, both Sides agreed on the following:

4.1. Austrian Development Cooperation

Both Sides stressed the importance of the development cooperation and acknowledged the effective operation of ADC (Austrian Develoment Cooperation) programmes in Georgia and the mutually beneficial relations between the two countries. In this context, forestry, agriculture and governance had been identified

as priority areas of the mutually agreed country strategy for Georgia (2012 - 2020), whereby poverty reduction would remain the overarching goal.

The Austrian Side stated that a Mid-Term Review of the "Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) – Georgia Country Strategy 2012 - 2020" will be conducted during 2017. Furthermore, the Austrian Side reaffirmed its readiness to operate projects on a needs basis via delegated cooperation with the European Union.

The Government of Georgia expressed sincere gratitude to the Government of Austria and Austrian Development Agency (ADA) for contributing to the development of the Georgian agricultural sector.

The Austrian Development Agency (ADA) is currently implementing the project "The Capacity Development of the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia" (project duration from December 5, 2013 until November 30, 2017) providing the MOA with technical guidance to support the implementation of the Strategy of Agricultural Development. The capacity building is vitally important for MoA and the Georgian Side asked the Austrian Side to support the continuation of the project.

The Austrian Side informed about the visit of a high level delegation of the Development Bank of Austria (OeEB) in 2016 to Georgia and the substantial Austrian support to Georgia through the bank in the field of renewable energy and energy efficiency as well as private sector development, especially SMEs; and through a major soft loan to develop the Goderzi Pass Tourism Infrastructure Development, thanks to the support of the Austrian Kontrollbank (OeKB).

Furthermore, the Austrian Side expressed the interest of the Development Bank of Austria to continue providing support to private sector projects in Georgia. OeEB provides long-term financing for private sector entities, equity and funding for technical assistance. Sustainability from an economic and developmental point of view is a prerequisite of such projects. Georgia is within its focus regions.

Both Sides expressed their willingness to deepen the existing cooperation in the field of regional development, with special emphasis on the development of mountainous regions.

The Austrian Side also reported on a study visit of a high level Georgian delegation to Austria in June 2016 to learn more about mountainous regions development, regional development policy and spatial planning to support further the strategy building process for mountain policy implementation and regional development in Georgia. An Austrian expert mission for disaster prevention visited Tbilisi in April 2016 to advise and assist Georgia in preventing disasters like the terrible flood in Tbilisi in June 2015.

Both Sides reaffirmed their willingness to cooperate regionally, via Austrian Development Cooperation, around the Black Sea in the field of wine making and vocational education and training (VET), considering the similar wine farming conditions in both countries.

4.2. Tourism

Both Sides highlighted the importance of the tourism sector in their countries and informed on its development.

Both Sides confirmed their willingness to further intensify the cooperation in the field of tourism and agreed to exchange information on tourism development, tourism statistics, researches, promotional material on tourism product of the country.

Both Sides would welcome the organisation of press and info tours for the representatives of media and travel industry.

The Georgian Side expressed its interest in receiving contact information of the leading tourist companies and tourism associations of Austria to establish business relations with the Georgian counterparts.

The Georgian Side would highly appreciate sharing Austria's knowledge and best practices in the following areas:

- innovative initiatives in the tourism sector undertaken by the government of Austria and their positive outcomes
- main target markets for Austria and marketing tools applied to attract travellers
- sharing information regarding tourism products in greatest demand
- experience of Austria in development of Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Events MICE tourism

Both Sides welcomed the cooperation of Austrian companies in the mountain tourism sector and expressed their satisfaction with the implemented projects and future development plans, mainly, regarding new ropeway installation and renovation of the existing ones.

Herewith, both Sides indicated new opportunities in the area of the mountain tourism especially mountain resorts of Georgia, such as access and control systems as well as new products and services.

The Austrian Side handed over a folder on the tourism sector in Austria.

The Austrian Side recalled the success of the already implemented Twinning project between Austria (AEI) and the Georgian National Tourism Administration as well as the cooperation projects between Austrian tourism education institutions and Georgian schools/universities.

The Austrian Side congratulated Georgia on the newly elected Secretary General of UNWTO as proposed by the Executive Council of the Organization.

4.3. Energy

Both Sides emphasized the importance of and their interest in cooperating in the field of energy as well as in the field of renewable energy and energy efficiency and agreed to boost cooperation in these areas.

The significant and effective reforms with a consistent restructuring agenda make Georgia a desirable destination for investment in the energy sector in general and hydro power development in particular. In this regard, the Georgian Side welcomed and expressed its interest in deepening the existing cooperation with Austria regarding the hydropower-plant construction in Georgia and sharing the best practices in the energy sector.

Against the background of past fruitful cooperation between the national regulatory authorities of Georgia and Austria, both Sides agreed to deepen and to continue cooperation between the Georgian National Energy and Water Supply Regulatory Commission (GNERC) and the Austrian E-control. The Georgian Side expressed its willingness to establish cooperation between the countries' transmission system operators.

The Austrian Side informed about a project of the Austrian Energy Agency (AEA) in cooperation with UNIDO. The project "Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions through Improved Energy Efficiency in the Industrial sector in Georgia" is being implemented by UNIDO in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, the Ministry of Energy, and the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection, with the financial support of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management. The project's duration is 3 years, from December 2016 till November 2019. Within this project, the AEA is supporting the optimization of measures in the field of energy efficiency policy in the Industrial Sector of Georgia as well as institutional framework conditions and conducts awareness raising for relevant stakeholders.

AEA is also willing to offer its expertise in supporting Georgia with the implementation of the EU Energy Efficiency Directive (EED).

The Austrian Side emphasized that further activities by Austrian Energy Agency (AEA) in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energies would be welcomed.

4.4. Environment

Both Sides highlighted the signing of the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding in the field of environmental protection in 2015 as framework for future cooperation in areas of mutual interest and benefit and expressed their intention to initiate soon its implementation. In this context the Austrian Side invited the Georgian Side to outline priority areas, also related to implementation of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement in the environment sector.

Both Sides valued the already existing bilateral cooperation and ongoing projects, especially within the field of sustainable forest management supporting the implementation of forest reform in Georgia and the development of integrated biodiversity management.

The Austrian Side expressed its readiness to inform Georgia about its know-how in the field of environmental technologies in order to strengthen the cooperation of both countries for their mutual benefit.

Both Sides highlighted the importance of deepening the dialogue on environmental technologies and information systems, waste water treatment and waste management, to further develop the institutional, technical and entrepreneurial cooperation in these fields.

The Austrian Side appreciated the active role of Georgia as member of the Transport Health and Environment Pan European Programme (THE PEP) Bureau and under THE PEP Partnership in the field of cycling.

Both Sides welcomed the active role of Austria in leading EU Member States contributions to the regional "European Water Initiative +" Programme and to the Shared Environmental Information System project led by the European Environment Agency. They agreed to follow up on commitments from the Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Batumi (e.g. on air quality monitoring and information) and on previous twinning co-operation e.g. in the waste management sector.

4.5. Agriculture

Both Sides agreed to expand cooperation in the field of agriculture based on the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management of the Republic of Austria and the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia in 2015.

The Georgian Side asked the Austrian Side to continue the capacity building of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Cooperative Development Agency (ACDA) through promoting farmers' organizations and farmer cooperation.

Austria is well known for its institutional framework of extension systems and its support for Information Consultation Service centers, which are decentralized MoA offices in the regions developing the extension systems in the country.

The Georgian Side asked the Austrian Side to assist in elaborating developing and implementing policies for environmentally friendly agriculture based on Georgia's Rural Development Strategy. Furthermore, the Georgian Side expressed its interest in sharing Austrian experience in sustainable models for rural development in mountainous areas and specifically in disadvantaged areas.

With the purpose to enhance cooperation in the agricultural sector, both Sides agreed that the emphasis could lie in the following areas:

- Rural development practices in highland area;
- Modern agricultural technologies;
- · Organic farming;
- Animal husbandry, especially mountainous cattle and sheep breeding;
- Animal identification and introduction of farm registry systems;
- · Dairy production and processing;

4.6. Infrastructure, Transport and Logistics

The Georgian Side expressed its appreciation for the Austrian support in the field of regional development and local self-governance, focused on Development of Mountain Regions and is committed to continue and deepen partner relationship in terms of technical assistance such as expert support, study visits, workshops, seminars, etc.

Both Sides discussed:

- possible future cooperation and exchange of experience in solid waste management field
- with relevant Austrian companies to participate in upcoming waste management consulting and construction biddings

The Georgian Side informed the Austrian Side about plans to develop modern logistics centers in Georgia. As part of the East-West Highway Corridor Improvement Project financed by the World Bank, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia (MoESD) carries out a feasibility study for the creation of logistics centers. After finalising a study, the MoESD shall select the investor for developing logistics centers based on public private partnership. To this end, the Georgian Side invited interested Austrian companies to participate in the selection process.

Both Sides expressed their interest in the silk-road-initiative and agreed on the great potential of this project. Herewith, the Georgian Side informed the Austrian Side about holding the second forum – Tbilisi Belt and Road Forum in November 2017 and extended cordial invitation. The Georgian Side expressed hope for high-level participation of the Austrian Side.

The Austrian Side highlighted the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the field of infrastructure technology between the Federal Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology of the Republic of Austria and the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia on the 19 May 2015 in Tbilisi.

The Austrian Side emphasized its interest in a further bilateral cooperation especially in the "Kutaisi Wastewater project".

Both Sides took note of the existing cooperation in the transport sector and expressed their desire to further deepen bilateral relations between the countries. Considering the positive trend in use of exchanged permits by road carriers, Georgian Side asked the Austrian Side to consider concluding the Agreement between the Government of Georgia and the Government of the Republic of Austria on International Road Transport on intergovernmental level.

Moreover, the Georgian Side expressed its interest to further strengthen aviation ties with Austria welcoming Austrian companies to launch direct flights between the two countries.

4.7. Communications, Information Technologies and Innovations

Both Sides agreed on strengthening the cooperation in the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding concerning cooperation in modern and efficient administration in the field of technologies between the Federal Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology of the Republic of Austria and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia on the 19 May 2015 in Tbilisi.

The Austrian Side emphasized its interest in assisting the Georgian Side in projects in the field of technologies in e-education.

Both Sides agreed:

- to exchange experience for developing broadband and e-government systems, e-commerce legislation and platform;
- to continue close cooperation and mutual support in sector specialized International organizations (ITU, UPU);

The Georgian Side emphasized that international telephone, telegraph and postal services with Abkhazia (Georgia) and Tskhinvali region / South Ossetia (Georgia),

shall be provided in accordance with international law and relevant international Acts of International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and Universal Postal Union (UPU).

The Georgian Side appreciated the joint work with the Austrian Side, elaborating e-learning pilot project for the grant program and based on the importance of implementation the project, envisages finding other sources for financing of the project jointly with the Austrian Side.

The Georgian Side expressed its interest in further expanding partnership opportunities with the Austrian Side, specifically in the field of start-up support programs, business incubator and acceleration programs for Austrian and Georgian start-ups and supporting both start-ups entering Georgian and Austrian market.

4.8. Higher Education, Science and Research

Both Sides will encourage their higher education and scientific institutions to establish new direct contacts to strengthen the existing cooperation.

Both Sides emphasized their interest in enhancing cooperation between Georgian and Austrian institutions (universities, research centers, SMEs, research-driven industries) with regard to participation in EU Framework programme for Research and Innovation – Horizon 2020, including Maria Sklodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA). Georgia as an Associated Country is willing to host Austrian Researchers in the framework of Sklodowska-Curie Actions individual fellowships and/or ERC grants. Georgia, as a new-comer to Horizon 2020, stressed the importance of sharing Austria's best practice in terms of participation in the Program.

Both Sides stressed the importance of deepening cooperation under the European Union program "Erasmus+".

The Georgian Side welcomed the cooperation between Quality Assurance Agencies of the two countries in order to bring Austrian experts, professors and scientists in external evaluation process of educational programs.

The Austrian Side welcomed the good co-operation between the University of Applied Science Joanneum and Caucasus University in Tbilisi. This partnership was established in 2014 with a Cooperation Agreement that defines exchange for undergraduate and graduate business students, exchange of teachers, cooperation in research projects, training and exchange of teaching material. Meanwhile, an additional agreement with the "L.E.P.L Apollon Kutateladze Tbilisi State Academy of Art" in the field of study of architecture has been established. Both activities are funded by Erasmus+ KA107 International Credit Mobility. The Austrian Side is looking forward to further increasing cooperation in this area.

Both Sides highlighted the good cooperation between the Austrian Academy of Sciences and Georgian Research Institutions.

The Austrian Side particularly confirmed the readiness of the Austrian Academy of Sciences to further promote and support the bilateral cooperation in the field of Botany. The Institute of Botany of the Ilia State University has expressed its interest in this regard.

4.9. Intellectual Property

Both Sides welcomed and appreciated the reported activities based on the Cooperation Agreement between the Austrian Patent Office and the National Intellectual Property Center of Georgia – Sakpatenti – especially in regard to capacity building of Sakpatenti patent and trademark examiners and encouraged both offices to continue and even expand this cooperation for the benefit of protection of industrial property.

The Georgian Side expressed its interest to cooperate in the field of intellectual property, especially of geographical indications and appellations of origin within the framework of the EU-Georgia Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement", in order to ensure effective enforcement of the rights protected under this agreement.

4.10. Metrology

Both Sides agreed to exchange information on systems of technical regulation in the field of metrology and metrological activities to discuss the possibility of cooperation between the relevant authorities taking into account, in particular, European and international legislation.

5. Multilateral Relations - EU-Georgia

Both Sides stressed the importance of further intensifying relations between Georgia and the EU and highlighted their commitment to promote this process, particularly through full exploitation of opportunities and perspectives offered by the Association Agreement and the Eastern Partnership multilateral formats.

Both Sides agreed that within the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Eastern Partnership has been a useful tool to boost and strengthen the relations between the European Union and the six partner countries, contributing to the development and stabilisation of the latter.

Both Sides confirmed the significance of the upcoming Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels on 24 November 2017, which is expected to deliver political and practical results for the Eastern Partnership countries.

Both Sides welcomed that the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), entered fully into force on 1st of July 2016, thus providing additional opportunities for further political association and economic integration of Georgia with the EU, as well as that the DCFTA provides a stable framework for the development of trade and economic relations between Georgia and the Republic of Austria.

Both Sides welcomed the entry into force of the visa-free regime for the holders of Georgian biometric passports as of March 28th, 2017, which will facilitate people-to-people contacts and strengthen business, social and cultural ties between the EU and Georgia.

Both Sides expressed their hope that the EU-Georgia Association Agenda 2017-2020, which is to replace the EU-Georgia Association Agenda 2014-2016, will be adopted soon.

The Austrian Side acknowledged the significant progress achieved by Georgia in terms of implementation of the Association Agreement including a DCFTA. The reforms implemented by the Government of Georgia were positively assessed by the EU at the EU-Georgia Association Council meeting, held in Brussels, on 2 December, 2016. The strong pro-European stance of the Georgian government and people is a solid base for Georgia's continued progress in implementing reforms and to foster sustainable and inclusive growth as well as economic and societal resilience also in its regions, to enhance the sustainable management of resources, good governance and the consolidation of rule of law.

The Georgian Side stressed the importance of administrative cooperation like EU financed Twinning projects as a very effective institution building instrument. Austria as an experienced Twinning partner has been successfully involved in nine projects in various sectors such as civil aviation, waste management, environment protection, tourism, energy and water supply regulatory services, e-governance and revenue services as well as on one TACIS Partnership project. As one of the most successful Twinning providers, Austrian institutions remain committed to providing public sector expertise to enhance administrative capacity development in Georgia.

The Georgian Side expressed its interest in sharing Austrian experience in successfully implementing projects of the EU program "Creative Europe".

The Austrian Side recalled that the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia as well as the EU Monitoring Mission are visible and substantial signs of the EU's commitment to remain engaged in the stabilization and conflict resolution efforts in Georgia.

The Georgian Side informed on ongoing efforts with regards to the strategic communications on the implementation of Association Agreement between Georgia and EU.

6. Any Other Business

Health and Safety

Both Sides agreed to share experience in developing employment support services and in the field of occupational health and safety.

Statistics

The Georgian Side asked the Austrian Side to share the following information between the National Statistics Office of Georgia and the Statistics Office of Austria:

- external trade statistics data between Georgia and Austria by 4 digit levels according to the HS 2012 classification on a quarterly basis;
- statistical data on foreign direct investment between Georgia and Austria and a list of Austrian companies with direct investment in Georgia on a quarterly basis;

The Austrian Side took note of the request and agreed to provide contacts of the relevant institutions in Austria (Statistics Austria and the Central Bank of Austria).

7. Closing Date and Venue of the next (6th) Session of the Joint Commission

Both Sides agreed that the 6th Session of the Joint Commission for Bilateral Foreign Economic Relations between the Republic of Austria and Georgia will be held in Austria, on a date to be determined through diplomatic channels.

This protocol was signed in Tbilisi, on 18 May 2017, in two originals in English, both texts being equally authentic.

Mr. Genadi Arveladze

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Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia Ms. Bernadette M. Gierlinger
Vice-Minister for Foreign Economic
Policy and European Integration in
the Federal Ministry of Science,
Research and Economy of the
Republic of Austria