



**EUROPEAN UNION**

DELEGATION TO GEORGIA

JE/Dec 09

**EPF workshop on  
Possible future Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with  
the EU: Food Safety-Sanitary and Phyto-sanitary Measures**

December 14, 2009  
Sheraton Metechi Palace  
Salkhino Hall

**Opening Remarks**

**Robert Liddel**

**Minister Counsellor, EU Delegation**

It is a pleasure for me to address you today with the occasion of this important meeting on food safety, a matter which is of the outmost importance for Georgia and for its process towards closer trade and economic links with the European Union. I would like to start by congratulating the Eurasia Foundation for organizing today's event.

As we all know, preparation for the negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the EU is an essential element of the current agenda of the EU-Georgia relations. One of the key requirements that Georgia will have to comply with in order to be able to start and engage effectively and efficiently in negotiations on the DCFTA is to demonstrate serious commitment to and achieve substantial progress in the establishment of a food safety, sanitary and phyto-sanitary system (or SPS) compatible with the international and EU standards. Food safety is regarded by the EU as a key priority for negotiations of and subsequent proper implementation and functioning of a future DCFTA.

Let me briefly share with you a few words on the importance that the EU gives to food safety. Well, the central goal of the European Union's food safety policy is to ensure a high level of protection of human health and consumers' interests in relation to food, whilst ensuring the effective functioning of the internal market. The EU guiding principle, primarily set out in its White Paper on Food Safety is to apply an integrated approach from farm to table covering all sectors of the food chain.

Currently, the lack of proper compatibility between the EU legislation and procedures and the SPS systems in place in Georgia severely restricts the capabilities of Georgian food products to be exported to the EU market. Only those products that do not require official health certification and for which the exporting industries in Georgia could ensure that they meet EU food safety criteria are currently exported to the EU, most importantly wine and hazelnuts.

As you all also probably know, in recent years Georgia has undertaken some substantial steps in order to improve its SPS standards. In 2005 the Law on Food Safety and Quality was adopted. Development of the Law was strongly supported by the EU and other Donors. The new Law addressed several important principles set out in the EU legislation and placed the focus of inspection on the process, established responsibilities for food safety, and conditions for internal controls and traceability. In 2006 the National service for Food safety was created. Georgia has also taken steps towards its integration with the EU's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed and has finalised an action plan for risk analysis for food and feed.

But the overall picture of the SPS sector in Georgia is not as rosy as it may look. In particular, the core articles of the Food Safety Law were suspended shortly after the entry of the Law in force, therefore this crucial piece of legislation has never been properly implemented as it should be.

In October 2008 the EU carried out a fact-finding mission to Georgia in order to assess Georgia's preparedness for a possible future DCFTA with the EU. The mission report includes a number of recommendations related to food safety on which Georgia will need to achieve substantial progress before the launch of DCFTA negotiations will be possible. In short, the report has concluded that there are serious unresolved SPS issues in Georgia which, if not properly addressed, would lead to the effective exclusion of agriculture and food products from the benefits of an FTA. In particular, the deferral of SPS controls and inspections severely restricts the capacity of Georgian products to be exported to the EU market.

According to this fact-finding mission, animal health is also a matter of great concern. The 2007 outbreak of African swine fever was an example of Georgia's vulnerability regarding animal health safety. Unfortunately, in Georgia there is neither legislation nor controls in place for animal identification and traceability, nor obligation for animal holdings or food establishments to be registered, nor monitoring of movement of animals.

Another area which would require urgent attention is laboratories. Georgia would need to review the national laboratory network and identify national reference laboratories in the SPS sectors.

But I do not want to exhaust now the list of themes related to SPS where improvements are necessary. You will have the time during the course of the morning to discuss this matter in depth. Just let me add that the key recommendations in the SPS area made on the basis of the fact-finding mission are that **Georgia should (i) start implementing the suspended food safety legislation and (ii) prepare a comprehensive strategy of establishment of a solid food safety system.** The strategy, which should include a clear and realistic time schedule and financing plan for its implementation, will serve as a guiding document and framework for completing and streamlining the food safety legislative framework and building an institutional system able to implement this legislation, thus ensuring establishment of a solid food safety system in Georgia.

The Government of Georgia has recently prepared and presented to the EU a first draft of the strategy on food safety. I will not go into details as this issue is mainly addressed in the framework of the EU-Georgia bilateral relations. But I would like to say that while the draft strategy covers almost all the necessary aspects, it needs to be reviewed and revised thoroughly and fundamentally in a number of matters. Ensuring a unified concept and coherence throughout the strategy is also of vital importance to make it fully coherent with the international and EU standards.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The European Union is committed to supporting the improvement of the Sanitary and phyto-sanitary systems in Georgia. During the last years the EU has been constantly providing advice and technical assistance to the Government of Georgia in the areas of food safety, veterinary and plant protection. Currently, EU experts are working hand-to-hand with the Department of Agriculture and with the National Service for Food Safety in order to help these services to harmonize the SPS legislation with the international and EU regulations. The EU-assisted GEPLAC has also proactively involved in assisting Georgia on SPS-related issues. Two weeks ago, for instance, GEPLAC organized a very successful workshop on SPS Official Controls.

Let's face the reality as it is: Due to the persisting serious lack of basic legislation and its proper implementation in the SPS area, it is likely that it will take quite some time before Georgia is able to achieve the international and EU standards. The approximation process will require a clear and strong political

will translated into concrete actions. In particular **it is of the utmost importance to start the implementation of the suspended articles of food safety legislation shortly. In this context, the EU regrets deeply** that the Georgian authorities have just decided to postpone this implementation once again, as it happened several times before in recent years. We cannot but understand this decision as a **negative signal demonstrating a lack of commitment in the area of food safety.**

Ladies and gentlemen,

When we talk about food safety, ultimately we are talking about human health, and also about trade opportunities for the Georgian farmers. We are talking about integration in the international market, modernization of production, rural and industrial development and, ultimately, fighting poverty. It will require strong commitment and political will and a lot of hard work on Georgia's side to achieve convergence with the international and EU's food safety requirements. I want to believe that these elements will be in place soon.

I wish you a fruitful debate today. Thank you very much.