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Press release

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NFA hosted the EU-funded *FinExCoop Georgia Project's fifth Steering Committee meeting.*

On February 22, 2023, The National Food Agency (NFA) hosted the fifth Steering Committee Meeting of the EU-funded “Finance Extension and Cooperative Development for Georgian Farmers” (FinExCoop Georgia) Project. It was organized by Agence Française de Développement (AFD), co-chaired by the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture. The meeting synchronously was executed over the Zoom platform.

The meeting aimed to summarize the achievements and progress of the project’s Phase II and to discuss the next steps planned within Phase III with partners and key stakeholders.

The meeting was opened by Mr Giorgi Khanishvili, the First Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (MEPA), who presented the main highlights in the strategy and organization of MEPA and the developments in Georgian agricultural production. *“Georgian agriculture depends on and correlates with the Georgian economy. If we look at development, important works have been implemented so far. The donors have been supporting us relentlessly reinforcing our faith and we are using every possibility to develop agriculture in our country using CFDA agreements, US government funding, EU funding helping Georgia to become EU member in the nearest future.”* Stated The First Deputy Minister.

In his opening speech, Mr. Georges Dehoux, Programme Manager for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Safety at the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, welcomed the participants and underlined the dynamics and importance of the EU’s support strategy for agriculture and rural development in Georgia. Mr Dehoux emphasised that *“We are reaching a milestone in the implementation of the Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy of Georgia (ARDSG) with 2023 being the last year of implementation of its first action and of its food safety strategic implementing document. The drafting of the new action plan and food safety document, both to cover the period 2024-2027, will require a dedicated reflexion on how to achieve the Government’s ambitions for the sector in the scope of an alignment on EU systems in general and on the EU farm-to-fork strategy in particular. The EU remains committed to support the ministry in that strategic reflexion, along with its development partners such as AFD, and through its projects such as the FinExCoop project. Our aim is the same as the one of the ministry, i.e. to develop an efficient and highly productive agriculture in Georgia that is respectful of inclusiveness, green and consumer-protection principles.”*

AFD delivered the highlights of its strategy and commitment in Georgia, particularly in rural and agricultural development. *“We have finalized the second phase of the project and entering into the third phase. This project should be considered a catalyst for accelerating AFD cooperation with Georgia; now we are engaging in a bigger project in Georgia with other stakeholders, and much has been designed thanks to FinExCoop.”* said Mr Raphael Jozan, Head of the AFD Representative Office for the South Caucasus.

Dr Christophe Cordonnier, Team Leader of FinExCoop Georgia and a Senior Consultant at Frankfurt School of Finance & Management, presented the progress and achievements in FinExCoop at the end of Phase 2. He pointed out that *“In its activities, FinExCoop has systematically combined a strategic approach Think*



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long and a practical field approach -Act short relying on the mobilization of professional experts whose efficiency has been highlighted by beneficiaries to reach modernization of Georgian Agriculture. The experimental work implemented by FinExCoop can be now used for scaling up and sustainability through a strategic partnership with other development stakeholders.”

During the meeting, Mr. Cordonnier also presented the proposed activities within the scope of the third phase of FinExCoop. With EU support, the project plans to work on Policy advice, Holistic demand-driven value-chain development, Capacity building of extensionists, Grassroot cooperative development and support for agri-finance. For all these strategic activities, FinExCoop will sign and implement specific MoUs with partners ensuring that its knowledge will be consolidated and disseminated after the end of the Project.

The EU supports the improvement of access to finance, agricultural extension services and capacity-building for farmers, small farms and cooperatives in Georgia within the FinExCoop project. According to impact assessment survey results conducted by FinExCoop among 92 of its beneficiaries in December 2022: only 13% of the surveyed farmers were aware of the advanced technologies and know-how before the project, 77% of them participated in field pieces of training and benefited from experimental pilots, 98% of the surveyed farmers agreed that training sessions increased their know-how on production and the list goes on.

The Steering Committee event was attended by representatives of the EU Delegation, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, AFD, FinExCoop Georgia, FAO and other partner organizations.

Finance, Extension and Cooperative Development for Georgian Farmers (FinExCoop Georgia) is funded by the European Union (EU) under the NIF Programme with a total budget of EUR 4 million and managed and coordinated by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD). The project aims at improving access to finance and agricultural extension services for small farms and cooperatives in Georgia.

***Agence Française de Développement (AFD)** implements France’s international development and solidarity policy. Through its financing of NGOs and the public sector, as well as its research and publications, AFD supports and accelerates transitions towards a fairer, more resilient world. It also provides training in sustainable development (at AFD Campus) and other awareness-raising activities in France.*

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