



ALLIANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED  
ENTERPRISES FROM MOLDOVA (AIM)

**EMPOWER LOCALS CONFERENCE  
OUTCOMES REPORT**

Chisinau | Moldova

May 2024

## **EMPOWER LOCALS CONFERENCE BY AIM**

### **Outcomes Report**

#### **Overview and Scope**

On April 18, 2024, the Alliance of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises from Moldova (AIM) sponsored a successful Conference entitled “Empower Locals 2024 - Local Business Goes to the European Union” held at the Radisson Blu Leograd Hotel in Chisinau, Moldova for local business environment and other interested stakeholders. The event was carried out by AIM with the support of the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) and the Swiss Government as part of the “Optim Project – Opportunities through Technology and Innovation in Moldova”, implemented by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation.

The conference aimed to educate and inform SMEs on opportunities and trends for 2024 and brought together over 100 in-person attendees. The purpose of the event was to encourage and support local entrepreneurs by encouraging the development of business skills and competitiveness.

At the same time, the event marked eight years of activity for AIM, where small and medium-sized businesses that contribute to the economic development of the Republic of Moldova will be celebrated. AIM was founded in March 2016 and represents over 100 SMEs from various industries and fields of activity. AIM's mission is to contribute to the development of a favorable business environment for small and medium-sized enterprises in our country. In 2022, after a wave of consecutive crises unprecedented for Moldova, AIM noted a considerable increase in members, thus becoming the Community of Optimistic Entrepreneurs from Moldova.

#### **Speakers and Guests**

As indicated in the agenda (Annex 1), welcome remarks were made by AIM’s President, Mr. David Smith. Special guests of the event were Ms. Maia Sandu, President of the Republic of Moldova, Dumitru Alaiba, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Economic Development and Digitalization, David Caro, President of the European Small Business Alliance (ESBA), Guido Beltrani, Director of the Swiss Cooperation Office in Moldova, Onorina Şoric, Program Manager for Moldova, Center for International Private Entrepreneurship (CIPE).

The event was overseen and moderated by AIM’s Executive Director, Ms. Liliana Busuioc. Mr. David Caro, President of the European Small Business Alliance; and Mr. Răzvan Orăşanu, ex-advisor to the Prime Minister, director in the Competition Council, President of the Association "Tine de Noi" made separate presentations and interacted with the audience.

The conference brought together local entrepreneurs, founders of small and medium-sized businesses, AIM members, support organizations, development partners, and government institutions. The general topic of the conference was dedicated to increasing the

competitiveness of local businesses and strategic development in the context of the launch of negotiations with the European Union and the crisis generated by the war in Ukraine.

As Moldova prepares for accession to the European Union, it is important that Moldovan business support organizations collaborate effectively to support SMEs in navigating this complex and critical transition phase. The process of European integration involves an extensive legislative alignment, market adaptation, and digital transformation. The impact on Moldovan SMEs will be profound. From one hand it will offer growth opportunities but also it comes with a lot of challenges related to the entrance into the EU Single Market. Compliance with EU regulations and requirements will become mandatory for the business to be able to operate in the new market. Adapting to EU regulations will entail significant resources of time and costs. SMEs need support to manage these effectively and stay competitive in the EU Single Market.

The role of business support organizations is essential in representing SMEs, sharing best practices, advocating for SME-friendly policies, and facilitating their preparation and integration into the European Single Market. In that regard recommendations of best practices to ensure better support for SMEs in the process of EU Integration are very important.

Mr. David Caro, President of the European Small Business Alliance, shared his recommendations for Moldovan businesses and business support organizations to "Navigating EU Integration." The Business Shaping Strategies session identified a series of priorities that AIM should focus on to ensure its continued success:

- **Advocacy.** It should be developed a roadmap for the Moldovan SMEs on how to fully leverage the EU integration opportunities. In this regard It is crucial to engage with decision-makers in Brussels and gain a comprehensive understanding of how the EU institutions operate through the Alliance of Small and Medium Enterprises (AIM) and EU associations.
- **Public procurement.** It is important to familiarize with EU Support Tools, such as e-Tendering for public procurement, the Ideas Powered SME Fund for IP rights protection, Access2Finance for loans/venture capital, and Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) for advisory services and networking.
- **Financial and advisory support.** Take advantage of the exchange opportunities offered by Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs and the guidance on exporting/importing, including taxes, tariffs, and rules of origin provided by Access2Markets. This will support the SMEs to enter and grow in the EU Single market.
- **Gain an understanding of the EU's business environment.** Gain insight into the EU's regulatory environment, including VAT, customs, product standards, and employment laws, to ensure your operations align with EU standards for a seamless market entry and operation. The Single Digital Gateway, currently under construction by the European Commission, will serve as a single data entry point for all businesses intending to trade across EU borders. This will eliminate the need for multiple data entries in each country you wish to trade in, and it will use AI to streamline the process.

- **Engage with the local and regional authorities to explore the possibility of accessing EU funds.** It is advisable to actively seek out EU funding options through local, regional, or national authorities in order to gain access to financial support and business expansion opportunities beyond local markets. AIM can assist by ensuring that the government and local authorities are held to account in streamlining the application process for funds.
- **General advice and support.** Take advantage of EU programs offering guidance, networking opportunities, and connections to international partners to facilitate business growth and success within the EU.
- **Make Contacts in Brussels:** Form a network in Brussels, the EU's political and economic hub, to gain insights, support, and advocacy opportunities. Participate in EU-focused events and engage with the Enterprise Europe Network to facilitate connections and support in expanding your EU network.

Another session of particular interest was that of Mr. Razvan Orasanu, ex-advisor to the Prime Minister, director in the Competition Council, and President of the Association "Tine de Noi." He spoke about Romania's experience in accessing European funds, highlighting key issues and priorities for consideration in the process of accessing European funds. These include:

- Key resource – Human resources
- Creating strong networks (social partners)
- Elements of culture – cultural clash
- Resilience and Institutional Building
- DGs of the European Commission and European structures
- Mechanisms of European funds
- Budget capacity and European funds

Mr. Orasanu stressed that the middle class and entrepreneurs (especially SMEs) are key to stabilizing the European path of the Republic of Moldova. Economic development is central to the pro-European orientation of the Republic of Moldova. Institution building requires a political pact and strong support from the center of government. Specialists must be stabilized in the sectoral fields and must not be lost either to the private sector or to the services of the European Commission.

Takeaways and next steps for the Alliance of Small and Medium Enterprises from Moldova

**Priority: EU Integration:** EU integration has become a central element in Moldova's public agenda with the acquisition of the candidate country status in 2022. With this status, the government is directing all public policies towards the approximation of legislation and the introduction of EU standards in activities in all fields in Moldova. This process will focus primarily on the entire economic field in its complexity, which implicitly includes the SME sector. AIM, as a business association, is firmly committed to European integration and is dedicated to supporting and assisting all its members in adapting and applying European standards in their small and medium-sized enterprise activities. This includes both members with membership status and those without.

- **Share of experience with other EU countries** - Moldova can benefit from the experience of other countries that have recently joined the EU. The experience of

these countries is a valuable source of experience for Moldova as a country and for the entire SME sector. A thorough analysis of the experiences of Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, as well as their respective practices, can be of crucial importance for the dynamics of the adoption and implementation of EU standards in the SME sector in Moldova. This analysis will be conducted by AIM, which aims to establish regional cooperation with other business associations in the aforementioned states and to cooperate with other entities that can bring added value to the established purpose.

- **Alliance Building:** The construction and establishment of regional and supranational alliances and coalitions is a fundamental priority for AIM in the future effort to promote EU values in the SME sector in Moldova. This will involve the adoption of best practices and the approximation of the legislative and regulatory framework. In this effort, AIM is focused on establishing alliances and deepening cooperation with the European Small Business Alliance, as well as with other organizations, such as SME United. SME United is an association of crafts and SMEs in Europe with around 70 member organizations from over 30 European countries. By establishing and deepening cooperation with this type of organization, AIM will be in a unique position to guide its members in various fields, including but not limited to: AIM represents the interests of SMEs towards the European Institutions and in the Social Dialogue, Networking and capacity building, as well as project implementation.
- **Engagement in social dialogue.** AIM will engage actively in the dialogue platforms and public consultations at a national level and European level. At the national level, AIM will represent the SMEs within all the business-to-government dialogue platforms and working groups launched by the government for EU integration. In its capacity as the Enlargement Candidate member within the European Economic Social Committee and member of the European Small Business Alliance AIM will identify opportunities and ways to represent the Moldovan SMEs at the EU level.
- **A Clear Roadmap:** Following the adoption by Moldova of a new stage in its development and the focus on EU approximation policies, AIM will adjust its activity and advocacy agenda in line with EU accession priorities. In light of these developments, AIM has identified the development and coordination of a clear roadmap as a priority. This roadmap will serve as a guiding document for the organization, outlining the best practices and a plan of action for AIM in its role as a business association and support organization. The roadmap will also outline how AIM will support SMEs in this process over the coming period.

## Annex 1

### Agenda: EMPOWER LOCALS 2024

DATE: April 18, 2024

TIME: 09:00 - 18:00

LOCATION: Radisson Blu Leograd Hotel, Chisinau, str. Mitropolit Varlaam 77

08:30 - 09:15	Registration and welcome coffee	
09:15 - 09:20	<i>David Smith, President of AIM, Greeting</i>	
09:20 - 09:30	<i>Maia Sandu, President of the Republic of Moldova, Greeting message</i>	
09:30 - 09:40	<i>Dumitru Alaiba, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Economic Development and Digitalization, Welcome message</i>	
09:40 - 09:45	<i>Guido Beltrani, Director of the Swiss Cooperation Office, Greeting</i>	
09:45 - 09:50	<i>Onorina Šoric, Program Manager for Moldova, Greeting message International Center for Private Entrepreneurship (CIPE)</i>	
09:50 - 10:00	<i>Liliana Busuioc, Executive Director of AIM</i> <i>Community of Optimistic Entrepreneurs from Moldova - 8 achievements in 8 years of activity</i>	
10:00 - 10:25	<i>David Caro, Președinte the European Small Business Alliance (ESBA)</i>	
10:25 - 11:00	<b>How to prepare for accessing European programs and projects</b> <i>Răzvan Orășanu, President of "Tine de Noi" Association, Romania</i>	
11:00 - 11:15	Coffee break	
11:15 - 12:15	DISCUSSION PANEL	
11:15 - 11:30	<b>Moldova's Global Brand - How Tourists Can Bring Added Value to the Local Economy</b> <b>David Smith, President of AIM</b>	
11:30 - 11:45	<b>2024 - Current global trends in advertising</b> <i>Diana Boico, Founder of Indigo Group</i>	
11:45 - 12:00	<b>Access to foreign markets - tools for business</b> <i>Irina Tolstousov, Head of Country Image Promotion Department within the Investment Agency</i>	
12:15 - 13:15	Lunch	
13:15 - 13:45	<b>Adapting in times of crisis - The impact of the war for business</b> <i>Tetiana Abramova, Founder and CEO LTD "RITO", Ukraine</i>	
14:00 - 16:00	WORKSHOPS	
14:00 - 15:00	<b>Organizational communication and talent management</b>  <i>Natalia Efros, founder of PAROLE</i>  <i>Eliza Frunza, Human Resources Director, Galactic International Moldova</i>	<b>How we prepare business for the international market: adaptation, development and communication</b>  <i>Vlad Vedrașco, Co-founder of Frudova Fruits, Bizmanager.ai, Nanomax.ro</i>  <i>Nata Albot, Founder of Arde Marketing and Klume</i>
15:10 - 16:10	<b>3 Profit maximization techniques</b>  <i>Alina Andriuță, Business consultant, entrepreneur</i>  <i>Dan Dima, Co-founder – DAD Accountant</i>	<b>Exporting - practice and grammar</b>  <i>Sabina Crigan, Gateway &amp; Partners P</i>  <i>Victor Nistorică, Manager and co-ow Bakery</i>
16:20 - 18:00	RECEPTION 8 YEARS OF AIM	