Thank you very much!

Distinguished Delegates, Dear Colleagues,

I am deeply honored to be here with you today to share success stories and challenges we have faced in moving towards e-governance and easily accessible public services – an essential move, in my opinion, to truly create effective and accountable institutions.

I would like to start by thanking all of you for being here and supporting us in our endeavors to hold such an event. The Agenda for Sustainable Development sets high ambitions, which will require coordination and exchange of lessons that we have learned from all of our experiences. This is why it is so important to take the time to have these discussions and we hope that today's exchange will mark a beginning of an open-ended process to reinvigorate international focus on this important issue.

Our Government has set the implementation of Goal 16, which aims to "build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels", as a priority. It is an integral part of our efforts to meet EU requirements under the Georgia-EU Association Agreement, and it is an area in which I am delighted to say we are making great strides. This is in no small part thanks to the UNDP, whose support and contributions have been invaluable to our efforts.

I am excited to have the opportunity today to showcase some of our success stories. I believe Georgia's experience can provide important lessons to other countries seeking the same development path.

Now on E-governance for economic development

I will start by our most recent project, which we are still working to finalize.
We began by asking ourselves some fundamental questions: (a) what role can e-governance play for the business sector operating in Georgia? (b) How easily can business operators access the services we provide for them? (c) How much will our economy benefit from making the business sector's life easier? (d) How does this relate to the well-being of our citizens?

Our responses led us to launch a new project called Business House.

Business House is a groundbreaking model. It ensures provision of services by various ministries and state agencies in one space, and through one single e-platform. The state through this platform provides more than 600 services to business operators – each service being available in one physical and one electronic space.

Of course, the primary beneficiary of an advanced and modern government should be the country's citizens. This is why we have implemented a series of major initiatives, with the idea that technology should aim to reduce red tape and make their lives easier.

Today, through e-governance we ensure that:
(1) citizens/businesses will provide information to the Government only once - All information about the customer will be exchanged among governmental bodies internally, using Data Exchange infrastructure;
(2) all services by default will be created and utilized in a digital way;
(3) customers will have only one front office for all of government services. This means that 19 ministries, up to 50 agencies will be represented by only one front office and one single web portal;
(4) all services will be available everywhere, in any governmental regional office, throughout the country.

To ensure our modernization efforts touch the country as a whole – referring to Goal 16's inclusiveness – we have also developed tailored initiatives for Georgia's cities, small towns and villages.

Community Centers—it is a public service delivery in small towns and villages.

For large cities, the Public Service Halls ensure fast, efficient and comfortable service delivery under one single roof. This is one place where a big majority of the public services are gathered in one space. Consumers are offered more than 300 quick and simple services in a comfortable and pleasant environment. It aims to issue the documents and render the services on which the government has an exclusive authority.

For Georgia's small towns and villages, the Community Centers aim to ensure that Georgia's regions form an integral part of the country's development. Local citizens through the CCs have access to major services locally, with freely accessible information – they can receive more than 200 public services close-to-home, without having to travel to the municipal center or to the capital.

Crucially, this makes it more easy for citizens to participate in decision-making processes: Community Centers bring together modern technologies, public and private sector services, libraries, free internet and e-library as well as venues for civic engagement in one single area, which allows us to address a number of challenges at the local level.

One of the main goals of the Community Centers project is also to improve the services of Local Government Units. The e-Governance introduction component ensures that rural and remote areas are properly included in the process of digitalization of Georgia's public services,

developing technological solutions as well as skills and capacities within the local government units.

The Municipal Management System incorporates the ten most-demanded services provided by local governments. Its implementation has resulted in an improved quality of service provision for the local population.

Community Centers have thus played a critical role in speeding up the flow of information between government and citizens, and changing the way they interact.

Allow me to give you two final examples of Georgia successfully harnessing e-governance project.

E-request of public information

The first concerns provision of information.
We want our citizens to have as free access to information as possible. To achieve this aim, we have launched an electronic communication service called Citizens' Portal. This service allows citizens to interact with Government electronically. It allows individuals to submit requests for public information to 60 public organizations, track the request sent and receive replies automatically.

E-government Commission

The second concerns knowledge and expertise sharing among governmental bodies.

We have established the e-government commission, which will (a) support development and coordination of E-Governance in the country; (b) ensure information and cyber security and (c) establish an integrated data exchange system to ensure access to information resources.

We have established the **e-government commission**, which will (a) support development and coordination of E-Governance in the country; (b) ensure information and cyber security and (c) establish an integrated data exchange system to ensure access to information resources.

Importantly innovation through e-governance and effective public service delivery brings the government, private sector and citizens together. As a result, we have more and better tools to improve the economy.

This is exactly the key message we want to deliver today– achieving the SDGs is not easy, especially Goal 16, but it is certainly not impossible. What is needed in my opinion is a clear plan: a national blueprint, developed by transparent governmental agencies, which guarantees respect of the rule of law and human rights.

This is Georgia's chosen approach to building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, and for Georgia we are pleased to say – it is working.

Georgia's national blueprint was adopted in January under current Government's four-point reform agenda, which seeks to further modernize our economy. A key part of this is to foster open governance and modernize the delivery of public services, by cutting red tape, increasing efficiency, ensuring a higher level of transparency and encouraging public participation in legislative processes and decision making. This is where all the projects I have just presented come into play.

We are ready to share our experience with interested parties, as I strongly believe that there is much to be gained in bringing together the donor community and recipient countries. South-South cooperation could be one of the platforms that could be further explored to this end. Georgia can and already does help with expertise and human resources in South America and Africa. And Georgia itself has been helped by Estonian experts to support and contribute towards its own e-governance development.

We look forward to working constructively towards coordination of Goal 16 under Georgian chairmanship of the Open Government Partnership, which will start in 2017. The 2030 agenda rests on core OGP principles and its objectives are complementary to those of OGP's. The Partnership is therefore one of the most flexible and innovative platforms to implement these Goals.

Let me leave you in closing with Georgia's core message from today: achieving universal goals to create effective and accountable institutions requires unprecedented and coordinated efforts from the international community, but also national ownership. We are all learning by doing, but we should learn together and do together. This is why events like this are so important, and I would like to thank you all for participating in this very important event.

Thank you.