



## EU-GEORGIA CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM

2<sup>nd</sup> meeting, Brussels, 16 February 2017

### JOINT STATEMENT

The EU-Georgia Civil Society Platform (CSP) is one of the bodies set up within the framework of the Association Agreement between the European Union and Georgia. It enables civil society organizations from both sides to monitor the implementation process, and prepare its recommendations to the relevant authorities.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the CSP was held on 16 February 2017 in Brussels.

With regard to the **implementation of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement** the CSP members:

1. welcome the overall progress achieved in implementing the EU-Georgia Association Agenda, strengthening democracy and the rule of law, and call on both Parties to keep their commitment to Georgia's political association and economic integration with the EU;
2. commend the successful EU-Georgia Visa Dialogue, and invite the Council to formally approve the legislation, so that the visa requirements for Georgia citizens travelling for a short stay to the Schengen area can be lifted;
3. express their unequivocal support to the territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders; recognize the contribution of the EU Monitoring Mission to stabilizing the situation and increasing safety and security of citizens along the Administrative Boundary Line between occupied territories/breakaway regions and the rest of Georgia, and call on the EU institutions and Member States to continue their support to the territorial integrity of Georgia; underline that any elections conducted or planned in the breakaway regions, including a referendum to change the name of the region are *per-se* illegal;
4. urge to stop any provocations from the side of the Russian occupational forces, in particular through moving wires and fences deep into the Georgian controlled territories, kidnapping of peaceful civilians, capturing arable lands, destroying cultural heritage sites, depriving the local civilian population of the right to teach and learn in schools their native language;

5. are pleased that the 2016 parliamentary elections were fair, generally well-administered and respectful of the fundamental freedoms; however, stress the need to strengthen the regulation of political advertisement and ensure equal media accessibility for all parties during the election cycles;
6. welcome the Georgian government's commitment to involve and consult the civil society organisations in the reform process and the overall monitoring of the Association agenda implementation to ensure transparency and ownership of the Association process; are pleased that the Georgian government involved CSOs in the revision process for the Association Agenda 2017-2020; welcome the Georgian Parliament's readiness to engage civil society organisations in the law-making process;
7. note the adoption of new Human Rights Action Plan (2016-2017), and urge the Government to ensure its effective implementation, paying particular attention to the minorities and vulnerable groups;
8. call on the EU Member States to actively employ opportunities provided by the EU-Georgia Mobility Partnership signed in 2009, stimulating legal circular labor migration from Georgia to EU; furthermore, call on the government of Georgia to strengthen efforts to facilitate growth of economic opportunities at home by means of various assistance programmes and initiatives for migrants coming back to Georgia from a number of EU countries, as well as on the EU Member States to support Georgia in this endeavour;
9. note with satisfaction the European Commission's efforts to expand the participation of Georgia in EU's research and innovation programs, including Horizon 2020, innovative SME support programs, and innovative clusters support activities, as well as the involvement of Georgian experts into the European expert community, establishing contacts with the major innovation oriented European industry associations; in order to effectively use the new opportunities, call on the EU to strengthen the expert assistance to Georgia aimed at improving the institutional setup of Georgian research and innovation system;
10. acknowledge the support of the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development and, considering Georgia's commitment to adopt integrated rural development policy, note the importance of harmonization of policies and laws to strengthen self-governance on local level in order to ensure effective and region specific development; call on the Georgian government to adopt European best practices and undertake comprehensive reforms with the participation of wider public;
11. recognize that proper land tenure system is the basis for agricultural development; consider that the current land tenure legislation is weak, thus leading to problematic land registry, land degradation, underdeveloped land categorization system, centralized privatization excluding participation of local self-government, granting of improper tenure rights, limited access to land for rural population and conflicts over land; therefore, call on the Georgian government and the EU to support programmes for Georgia to adopt European best practices and undertake comprehensive reforms with the participation of wider public;

12. call on the Georgian government to effectively implement the provisions of the EU's Small Business Act and to develop and set clear benchmarks for medium/long term SME development strategy;
13. deem it necessary to support and strengthen EU-Georgia Business to Business contacts and stimulate internationalisation of business activities in Georgia, in particular through expansion of their relations with European businesses;
14. call on the EU and its Member States to recognise Georgia's European perspective in conformity with the TEU art. 49, as stipulated by the European Parliament Resolution of 18 December 2014 on Association Agreement between EU and Georgia;
15. recall that the Platform shall be informed of the decisions and recommendations of the EU-Georgia Association Council, and look forward to regular contacts with representatives from the Parliamentary Association Committee and the Association Committee, including the created sectoral Subcommittees; to this end, request Platform members to be given opportunity to attend Subcommittee meetings, where relevant.

**On media freedom** the CSP members:

16. recall that freedom of media is one of the fundamental human rights and note the positive developments in this area in Georgia in the past years; however, stress the need to continue efforts to further develop media freedom in the country and raise the standard of journalistic quality, objectivity and ethics, based on lessons learned and by utilizing all available capacities, including strong and engaged civil society, and deepening cooperation with the EU, its Member States and likeminded neighbouring countries;
17. note the need to further raise the awareness of Georgian civil servants about media freedom and advantages of independent media by linking Georgian officials to their counterparts in the EU Member States and by supporting the civil society in its efforts to react and report on the cases of interference in the work of media;
18. call on the Georgian public institutions to increase their internal cooperation by supporting an internal revision of existing and missing capacities and preparing an action plan for strategic communication; urge the Government to invest into developing communication capacities of the Georgian officials and public relation specialists via trainings and experience exchanges with the EU institutions and Member States; to this end, invite the EU Member states to delegate EU communication specialists to Georgian institutions to help implement innovative approaches and assist the Georgian officials in applying the skills gained during trainings;
19. urge the relevant authorities to strengthen the position of the Georgian Public Broadcaster by increasing the appeal of its channels to the general public and by ensuring objective and informative news coverage of national and international events, spreading tolerance, equality, respect of the human rights and democratic ideals, as well as representing all layers of the society, including ethnic minorities;

20. are concerned with the publicly declared intention of general director of the Georgian Public Broadcaster to suspend almost all programs for an indefinite term for the purposes of reorganization; stress that by stopping the most important telecasts and by such unprecedented dismissal of employees, the management of the company would contradict its crucial function determined under the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting; therefore, request the reform introduced by the GPB to be consistent, in line with the requirements of the law and directed to the protection and promotion of interests of the wider public;
21. are also closely following the court proceedings related to the ownership of TV Company Rustavi 2 and stress the importance of an objective decision by the court for the purposes of development of media and democratic development of the State;
22. recommend the Georgian government to support regular monitoring of subversive propaganda coming from third countries ; invite the EU institutions and Member States to make funds available for supporting the governments in EaP countries so they can build their own strategic communications capacities, e.g. by earmarking funds for purchasing media monitoring tools, providing external experts for improving their capacity, advancing cross-government coordination and training on practical implementation of campaigns;

**On equal opportunities in labour market the CSP members:**

23. note with regret the lack of sensitivity to gender inequality issues that is entrenched in public attitudes in Georgia, as well as the inadequate institutional capacity to deal with this matter; stress that consolidation and coordination of efforts are needed to ensure equal opportunities for women and men on the Georgian labour market, and urge the Government and the local authorities to promote gender equality more vigorously and aim, in cooperation with CSOs, especially the social partners, to create the conditions necessary for bringing women's opportunities into line with those available to men, including encouraging women entrepreneurship and assuring equal pay for equal work as well as fighting horizontal and vertical segregation;
24. emphasize that all Government projects must be accompanied by an equal opportunities impact assessment; gender equality must be mainstreamed in government action plans and policies; equal opportunities need to be ensured in education and vocational training; access needs to be provided to services enabling the reconciliation of work and family life; universally accessible and affordable childcare needs to be ensured and any kind of workplace discrimination, harassment or violence needs to be prevented;
25. note that despite amendments in Labor Code in 2013, a fully-fledged enforcement of the law as well as application of the labor standards represent a serious challenge to date; also, point out to the low efficiency of courts, high attorneys' and state fees on labor cases as well as the long protraction of labor suits (commonly 3 years); call on the Georgian government to intensify efforts to remedy the situation;
26. with regard to labour inspection mechanisms, call on the Georgian government to carry out its transformation so as to comply with international ILO standards, inter alia mandating it to monitor the gender dimension of labour relations, provide it with the necessary financing, as well

as consider the possibilities of including the social partners in the activities of the inspection mechanism;

27. note that cases of violation of freedom of association and collective bargaining rights are of systematic scenery in the country; moreover, independent trade unions are persecuted while establishing `yellow` unions under the employers control is a common practice, predominantly in state owned enterprises (Railway, Post, etc); call on the Georgian government to address these issues with urgency;
  28. in order to ensure continuous work on labour issues at national level, urge the Government to guarantee effective work of the Trilateral Commission of the Social partnership.
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