



EU-GEORGIA CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM

4th meeting, 22 November 2018

JOINT DECLARATION

The EU-Georgia Civil Society Platform (CSP) is one of the bodies set up under the Association Agreement between the European Union and Georgia. It enables civil society organisations from both sides to monitor the implementation process and draw up recommendations for submission to the relevant authorities.

The fourth meeting of the CSP was convened on 22 November 2018 in Brussels. The members of the CSP discussed the state of play regarding the implementation of the Association Agreement, held a debate and adopted reports on EU-Georgia cooperation in combating climate change, and on renewable energy sources and energy efficiency in Georgia.

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

1. welcome the positive assessment by the European Parliament of overall progress in implementing the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, in strengthening democracy, democratic institutions and the rule of law; calls on both Parties to maintain their commitment to bringing about Georgia's political association with and economic integration into the EU;
2. welcome the first high-level meeting on EU-Georgia sectoral dialogue; express their hope that this will help further the sectoral integration of Georgia into the EU and its further convergence with EU policies;
3. are pleased with the effective implementation of the deep and comprehensive free trade area (DCFTA) and point out that the EU is Georgia's largest trading partner and represents the largest source of foreign direct investment;
4. call on the EU and its Member States to recognize Georgia's European perspective, in conformity with Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, as stipulated in the European Parliament Resolution of 18 December 2014 on the Association Agreement between the EU and Georgia;
5. express their unequivocal support for the territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders; are concerned over the intensified human rights violations, including kidnapping of the peaceful population, continued discrimination on the ground of

ethnic origin, including depriving people of the right to education in their mother tongue in both breakaway regions of Georgia; express their concern over the continuous process of “borderisation”, conducted by occupational forces along the dividing line between the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia and the rest of Georgia;

6. recall the joint declaration of the third meeting of the CSP, in which it asked to 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 sectoral sub-committees which have been set up;
7. express their concern regarding the draft amendments to the Organic Law on the Georgian Prosecutor's Office of public prosecutor, which does not provide for the independence of public prosecutors from political influence;
8. advocate extending judiciary reform to guarantee transparency, notably in terms of the selection, appointment and promotion of judges, as well as disciplinary proceedings pertaining to them;
9. welcome the intensified efforts of some Member States, the Georgian Government and civil society organisations, namely business sector representatives, to support the strengthening of cooperation on temporary legal migration (in the areas of expertise, research, designing circular migration schemes, signing agreements, etc.) under the Mobility Partnership between the EU and Georgia signed in Brussels in 2009;
10. welcome the opening of the first Eastern Partnership European School in Tbilisi in September 2018, an example of a successful follow-up to the Eastern Partnership Summit 2017;
11. welcome the peace initiative of the Georgian Government, "A Step to a Better Future", whose aim is to enhance educational opportunities for citizens on both sides of the dividing line and to facilitate trade and mobility;

On EU-Georgia cooperation in combating climate change, the CSP members:

12. take note of the Presidency Conclusions of the Second Eastern Partnership Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Change on 9 October 2018 in Luxembourg;
13. welcome the ratification of the Paris Agreement by Georgia and the adoption of a series of laws on the environmental assessment of strategies, plans and investment projects, in line with the 20 deliverables of the Eastern Partnership Summit 2017;
14. call for sustainable management and protection of forests, pointing out that forests are crucial for curbing erosion, preserving biodiversity and preventing devastating landslides;

15. recommend investing in drought-resistant and higher-yield crops/cultures, as well as rural agricultural crop diversification, and introducing modern soil tillage technologies in order to deal more efficiently with droughts, expected to become more frequent, intense and severe;
16. believe that the climate change-related decrease in fresh water resources, generally affecting world freshwater stock, also affects Georgian water resources; note, with regret, that the Georgian Government is focusing on river hydro resources and not prioritising resources such as solar and wind energy; call on the Georgian Government to put in place the legal framework required to do this; welcome the support of the European Investment Bank in this area;
17. point out that the Georgian Black Sea coastal area is very vulnerable to climate change, with several mangrove areas and wetlands located in Kolkheti Valley. The rising level of the Black Sea might submerge the lowlands and cause losses of a big part of the land in Western Georgia. The CSP therefore urges the Georgian Government to, firstly, stop issuing permits for the construction of big hydropower plants, which reduce the accumulation of gravel on the Black Sea coast, causing degradation, before a technical solution to this issue is found, and to propose legislation for mitigation of, and adaptation to, the impact of climate change on Kolkheti Lowland;
18. call for the adoption of changes in the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) by the Parliament of Georgia, changes initiated by the Ministry of the Environment and Agriculture of Georgia in order to promote harmonisation of the changes in the MSFD by the countries of the Black Sea Basin;
19. emphasise the need for better awareness-raising of the possible impacts of climate change; advocate integrating adaptation to and mitigation of climate change into the general and higher education curricula. A special effort should be made to engage vulnerable communities, by providing them with informational and educational material and putting other awareness-raising measures in place;
20. applaud the development of a concept, indicators and methodology for monitoring the impact of climate change on the most vulnerable sectors and groups (internally displaced persons, the elderly, etc.) and call for corresponding adaptation measures; underline the importance of involving civil society in these actions in order to benefit from the knowledge and experience civil society organisations have acquired in this field;

On renewable energy sources and energy efficiency, the CSP members:

21. believe that the energy priorities beyond 2020 in Georgia are unclear, because there is no policy document for the next decade; urge the Georgian authorities to develop a solid national energy strategy;
22. underline the importance of involving local communities in projects to improve energy efficiency, so that the profits from energy generation stay within the communities and support

their development. This is because being the owners of renewable energy facilities increases communities' acceptance of new infrastructure and their tolerance of potential nuisances;

23. point out that the right regulatory conditions and favourable policy framework lead to an increased willingness to use renewable energy sources and to seek business opportunities that keep incomes within local communities;
24. encourage Georgia to make decentralised renewable energy production by citizens an explicit priority for support, and to devise long-term strategies and stable policy frameworks to this end. Grants, loans or production support schemes should be designed, to acquire the investments needed for Georgia to reach its renewable energy targets, by providing a stable framework for investments;
25. recommend that the EU Structural and Cohesion Funds earmark the funds required to reach the 2020 climate and energy targets, thereby ensuring that progress on renewables is not slowed down due to grid limitations. Better network management at different geographical levels, and coordination among transmission system operators, are crucial for the successful mass deployment of renewables. Enormous investments are needed to expand, modernise, and adapt the grid to the challenges posed by decentralised and intermittent production;
26. call for a transparent public debate on energy costs and prices. Clear and comprehensive information should be provided on the costs associated with subsidies for renewables, fossil fuels and nuclear energy; underline that renewables help mitigate climate change, create jobs and make local livelihoods sustainable, increasing energy security and reducing dependency on imports from unstable regions;
27. call for a national strategy to be put in place and closely coordinated, with a renewable energy deployment policy in order to ensure a smooth transition, provide the new job skills needed and address in a targeted way any negative social impacts on jobs and socially weak households. The Georgian Government should take responsibility for managing the socioeconomic impacts of the transition to a low-carbon economy, to the ultimate benefit of all sectors of society;
28. underline that Georgia, with its great potential in the field of renewable energy, must develop a new, up-to-date, user- and environmentally friendly energy supply, involving civil society in the process;

On labour rights, the CSP members:

29. note that in the the tripartite social dialogue, after three months of intensive discussions, all three parties (government, employers and trade unions) agreed on a list of hard, harmful and hazardous jobs, to which labour inspectors will have unconditional access, to examine and study labour safety conditions. However, labour inspectors are not entitled to check the state of labour rights, which is of the utmost importance;

30. note that there are still problems with the persecution of employees on the basis of their membership of trade unions, especially those working in companies in which the state is a shareholder, such as the Georgian Railway and the Georgian Post; urge the Georgian Government to ensure full protection of the fundamental rights and freedom of association of workers, as defined in the International Labour Organisation Conventions;
31. point out that there has been no progress in Georgian labour law regarding the implementation of legal regulations and mechanisms that provide equal pay for equal work; call once again on the Georgian Government to develop a methodology for measuring the work performed on the basis of objective criteria and make changes in the law, for equal pay for equal work for women and men;
32. welcome the fact that the mediation institution has started functioning in Georgia, but the problem of implementing mediation agreements in collective disputes remains unresolved;

On education policy, the CSP members:

33. welcome the readiness of the Georgian Government to make sure that it achieves the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda Goal 4, promoting inclusive and quality education for all: “lifelong learning” with the support of the development and implementation of innovation policy, in particular a regulatory framework and infrastructure for a healthy, safe, non-violent, inclusive teaching/learning environment;
34. point out the intensified work with social partners, as well as in partnership with the whole school community, such as parents, families and local bodies, to support the work of educational staff in the learning environment;
35. call on the government to ensure the right to education for all children and young people, including those with special educational needs, and to take further steps to promote inclusive primary and secondary education;
36. call on the government to ensure a sustainable increased supply of teachers, including with permanent teacher training programmes/in-service training courses, and by raising the social status of teachers, in close collaboration with social partners and other relevant stakeholders; incorporate inclusive teaching and the teaching of democratic values and active citizenship as part of the initial and continued professional development of educational staff;

On harmonising digital markets, the CSP members:

37. reiterate that Georgia made a commitment to implementing the provisions of Article 129-133 of the sub-section liability of intermediary service providers within two years of the date of entry into force of this agreement, but unfortunately it hasn't done so yet. Call on responsible Ministry of the Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia to put said provisions into effect, as envisaged in the annual action plan of implementation of DCFTA 2018;

38. call on the Ministry of the Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia to help set up a national digital skills & jobs coalition, using as a basis the EU's digital skills & jobs coalition model, and to develop and implement a national digital skills strategy, in line with similar EU strategies.

On the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the CSP members:

39. call on the Georgian Government to intensify work in order to implement Article 301 of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, with regard to the long-term goals of inclusive growth and green growth. Concrete instruments and programmes for SME support should be designed and introduced, eco-inovative and eco-efficient models should be developed and adopted, and innovative entrepreneurship should be encouraged and financially supported;
40. call on the government to involve women entrepreneurs (especially those from rural areas) in the integrated management of natural resources. This will increase their awareness of the green economy, give them access to modern technologies, help create a favourable environment for their business activities and promote gender equality.

On food safety reform in Georgia, the CSP members:

41. and once again, welcome the government's efforts to develop the nation's food safety system, in order to ensure safe food and good health for the citizens of Georgia; note that the necessary reforms have not been implemented in a number of areas that need more attention. They are: the traceability of unsafe food, the identification of the sources of its contamination; initiating the collection of data for assessing food-related risks, as well as fully informing consumers when unsafe products are identified on the market; a clear timeline for adopting hazard analysis - critical control point requirements for the production of all types of food (except primary production and traditional products).
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