



## **EU-GEORGIA CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM**

**10th meeting  
16 December 2022**

### **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 of the agreement and draw up recommendations for submission to the relevant authorities.

The tenth meeting of the CSP was convened on 16 December 2022 in Brussels. The members of the CSP presented the progress in addressing the recommendations by the European Commission in its opinion on Georgia's EU membership published on 17 June 2022 as well as the implementation of chapter 16 of the Association Agreement on Education, training and youth.

#### ***The members of the CSP:***

1. condemn the continuous aggression against the sovereign state of Ukraine, illegal annexation of four Ukrainian regions and Crimea, including Sevastopol, indiscriminate bombarding of Ukrainian cities and destruction of critical infrastructure, numerous abuses of human rights and war crimes; welcomes the active political, humanitarian, financial and military support of the international community, in particular of the European Union and its partners, provided to Ukraine and call on all friends of Ukraine, including Georgia, to continue and increase effective support to Ukraine in trying to withstand the Russian aggression, defend and save its population and recover temporarily lost territories;
2. condemn violation of human rights and freedoms in the occupied territories of Georgia by the Russian occupational regime and the so-called de facto governments, including illegal kidnappings of Georgian citizens, maltreatment in detention centres, prohibition of education for ethnic Georgians in the Georgian language, restrictions and barriers to the free movement of people and deprivation of the rights of internally displaced people to safely return to their homes, as commanded by numerous resolutions of the UN General Assembly;
3. point out that the progress in addressing issues raised and the conditions specified in the Commission's opinion on Georgia's membership application issued on 17 June 2022 by the Government of Georgia has been tangible in some areas but limited in others, especially in

tackling the political polarisation and in enhancing the involvement of civil society in the decision-making processes;

4. in view of the Commission's second opinion on the EU Membership of Georgia to be published in 2023, support upgrading the country's European prospect to EU candidate status (for Georgia to catch up with its Association Trio partners – Moldova and Ukraine) and underline the need to set further clear and measurable benchmarks against which the progress of Georgia will be measured;
5. express concern regarding the attempts to isolate certain non-government organisations and discredit civil society leaders who are critical of the government, which is in contradiction to the Commission's recommendations;
6. in this regard, reiterate their call to the European Commission and to the government of Georgia to logistically and financially support the work of the EU-Georgia civil society platform as sustaining its activities is becoming increasingly challenging for both the EU and the Georgian side; point out, in addition, that the work of the CSP must be further enhanced in view of Georgia's European future;
7. with the end of the mandate of the current public defender on 8 December 2022, reiterate that it is of utmost importance and in line with the Commission's opinion to give preference to an independent person in the process of nominating a new public defender;
8. call on the government to implement the recommendations of the Venice Convention on the draft-law on "de-oligarchisation" once they are published;
9. are worried about the deteriorating health condition of the former President Mikheil Saakashvili and call on the government to take appropriate and quick action, including transferring him for medical treatment abroad, before his condition becomes even more dire;
10. express delight that labour inspections have become more regular but stress the need to grant the Labour Inspectorate a fully-fledged role, to further increase the number of labour inspections, to ensure transparency and to provide public access to all inspection records upon request;
11. warn that the recent dismissals of a considerable number of employees of the Georgian National Museum happened under unclear allegations, were politically-motivated and constitute a serious attack on the cultural sector of Georgia;
12. stress that the war in Ukraine has a negative impact on the economic and social development of Georgia, on its labour and housing market, social security, social and health services and schooling, increases inflation and contributes to further polarisation of the society;
13. stress that female entrepreneurs continue to have limited access to financial resources and to the market, including business and entrepreneurial loans, compared to their male counterparts; in this regard emphasise that financial institutions need to be stimulated to provide gender-sensitive credit lines and ensure that loan officers have gender-sensitivity training;

14. stress that despite some progress in energy reforms, Georgia needs continued EU support in improving its energy security, developing renewable energy and energy efficiency potential. Georgia and the EU have mutual synergistic interests in achieving higher connectivity, increasing the share of renewables and energy savings, and the transit potential of Georgia for transporting hydrocarbons and green energy from the South Caucasus and the Caspian region to the EU;
15. stress the importance of joining the forces of all relevant stakeholders to facilitate public and private investments within the framework of flagship initiatives for Georgia under the EU's Economic and Investment Plan;

***On the implementation of chapter 16 on Education, training and youth with a focus on the NEET component:***

16. stress that the younger generation faces a general lack of jobs accentuated by the fact that many jobs are inaccessible to young people from deprived areas, or with health issues and/or disabilities, including psychosocial disabilities; in this regard, point out that such a situation dramatically changes young people's ability to plan their future;
17. underline that young people need the opportunity to develop their skills and competences which help them find their place in the labour market and in society as a whole; in this regard, stress the importance of investing in creating appropriate conditions for learning, both formal and informal, and for enhancing young people's knowledge, skills and competencies; in this regard, stress that young people need to have access to information on educational programmes and opportunities;
18. underscore that, in the long-term, investments in young people and youth work are essential to boost economic growth, innovations and competitiveness, as well building a diverse, tolerant and inclusive society, promoting peacebuilding and helping to prevent conflict and radicalisation;
19. reiterate that participation is one of the guiding principles of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which express the conviction that young people should be involved in decision-making processes on matters that directly affect them;
20. highlight that in order for young people's participation in decision-making to be as efficient as possible, they must be given the proper tools, such as accessible information and education and access to their rights;
21. stress the need to raise young people's awareness by educating them about global environmental problems such as climate change, biodiversity loss, desertification and impending environmental disasters related to land-based and marine pollution;
22. note that although young people are the core of Georgia's future, they are rarely involved in decision-making processes, including poverty-reduction initiatives, design of education programmes, environmental planning and sustainable development;

23. stress that the education system needs to be gender-sensitive, to drive up both standards and levels of achievement and to encourage the transversal skills needed to ensure young people are able to be entrepreneurial and adapt to the increasingly inevitable changes in the labour market;
24. underline that the prestige of teacher as a profession should be increased via supporting educational start-ups, reforming pedagogical universities, strengthening international cooperation and promoting education as one of the priorities of governmental agenda;

### ***On gender equality***

25. call for stronger measures to protect the rights of vulnerable groups of citizens, including women, in Georgia, inter alia making the judiciary more effective to bring to justice those who commit or order violence;
26. note that despite significant measures to tackle gender-based violence in Georgia, women continue to die as a result of these atrocious crimes; call on the Georgian authorities to design necessary effective laws and legislative measures to ensure compliance with the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention and other international standards and to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls and/or domestic violence, to protect and ensure the inalienable right of women and girls to live a life free from violence and for victims to receive assistance through support services;
27. stress that government entities should consider a consistent and coordinated policy approach towards WED (Women's Entrepreneurship Development) in Georgia; in this regard, note that while governmental institutions are supposed to be primarily responsible for designing policies that support WED, it is imperative that WED programmes are designed and implemented by both state and non-state actors and that the Gender Equality Council takes up a more active role in spearheading legislative initiatives directed towards the popularisation of WED in Georgia; point out that large-scale public-private policy dialogue formats should be encouraged to involve women's associations and especially women-owned SMEs in consultations at the stage of policy design;
28. note that government entities should delve deeper into the latest trends in SME digitalisation and explore avenues to support the transformation, with a focus on building a common understanding of the transformative power of digitalisation, fostering the right SME skills for digital transformation and supporting the digital transformation of SMEs, with the aim of giving female entrepreneurs the opportunity to actively engage in e-commerce;

### ***On labour rights***

29. reiterate their call to revive stalled social dialogue and collective bargaining processes to improve labour rights and ensure decent work, including occupational safety and health;
30. call for the Labour Inspectorate to play a fully-fledged role by increasing the number of labour inspections and by ensuring transparency and providing public access to all inspection records.

They reiterate their call for ratification of ILO Conventions 81, 155 and 129, while underlining the need to enhance the implementation of other ILO Conventions, in particular the fundamental ones;

31. underline the need to promote and implement equal pay legislation; in this regard, encourage the use of gender-neutral job evaluation and classification methods;
32. reiterate that the minimum wage remains extremely low and that legislative amendments are required for the minimum wage to be increased at national level, in compliance with international standards, and call for measures to promote collective bargaining;
33. call for measures to be taken against sectoral and occupational segregation and for improved maternity protection, social care and childcare systems in order to encourage the participation of women in the labour market; call for an increase in parental leave assistance at national level in both the public and private sectors;
34. call on the government to take further steps in designing the Social Code since this process has stagnated, and reiterate their call for ratification of ILO Conventions 102 and 190;
35. call on the government to start taking action on the transition from informal employment to formal employment, based on ILO Recommendation No 204; point out that informal employment in the agriculture sector is at 28.8% and that therefore one third of workers are not covered by labour laws and social rights at work;
36. call for recognition of the gig economy and other non-standard employment and for these forms of employment to be covered by the Labour Code, which would stop the practice of neglecting the labour rights of these workers;
37. call for ratification of ILO Convention 189 regarding domestic workers, who, in the majority of cases, work informally in Georgia; in this regard, point out that the Labour Inspectorate's mandate does not cover informal workers despite the requirements of the ILO principles;

#### ***On media freedom***

38. welcome the activation of the media legislation approximation process to the EC audio-visual media directive; at the same time considers it extremely necessary to take into account the opinions of the broadcasters and professionals employed in the sector so that the changes in respective Georgian legislation are fully in line with the due interpretation of the directive and do not damage the freedom of expression;
39. consider the imprisonment of the director of the opposition-minded TV broadcaster *MTavari Archi*, who according to the Public Defender's report is a victim of politically motivated conviction, as an attack against media freedom.