



EUROPEAN UNION

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Joint statement by High Representative/Vice-President Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Štefan Füle, on EU-Georgia relations and the upcoming elections

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission, and Štefan Füle, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, made today the following statement:

"We wish to reaffirm that Georgia is an important partner for the European Union and we are committed to further deepening our very dynamic relations. The Association Agreement negotiations, including the deep and comprehensive free trade part, as well as the recently opened visa dialogue with Georgia are characterised by good progress. We confirm our commitment to sustain the pace with a view to completing the negotiations on the Association Agreement next year. Regarding mobility, our aim is to table a Visa Liberalisation Action Plan by the end of this year.

Georgia's challenges ahead include consolidation of democracy, the spreading of the benefits of growth, and achieving a broader inclusion of marginalised groups that are key to the sustainable development of Georgian society.

We emphasise the EU's high expectations for Georgia's parliamentary elections to take place on 1 October. These elections will be crucial in terms of the continued democratic development of Georgia and will set the stage for the quality and intensity of our relations in the future.

P R E S S

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We call on both the government and the opposition to continue to ensure a peaceful, enabling and competitive electoral environment and also a healthy media environment in this regard. We are concerned about the growing polarisation and tension in this context - elections should be first of all about political programmes and ideas. We stress the responsibility that lies with both the government and the opposition to ensure a proper conduct and therefore legitimacy of the elections. The electoral law has to be respected, and it must be applied in a way that maintains confidence in the fairness of the electoral process and the rule of law. All parties and candidates should contribute to a calm and conducive election environment, refraining from actions and inflammatory statements that might further escalate an already tense environment and sow doubts about the results. Building democracy needs responsible actors across the political dividing lines.

We wish to reiterate the EU's firm support for Georgia's territorial integrity and express the EU's continued will to remain strongly engaged, including through the Geneva International discussions and the EU Monitoring Mission."
