



## EU-GEORGIA CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM

**1<sup>st</sup> meeting, Tbilisi, 16 June 2016**

### **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 1<sup>st</sup> and inaugural meeting of the CSP was held on 16 June 2016 in Tbilisi, Georgia.

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

1. welcome the provisional application of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area between the European Union and Georgia, and look forward to its imminent full application as of 1 July 2016;
2. acknowledge the considerable progress achieved by Georgia since the beginning of the Association process, and call on both Parties to keep their commitment to Georgia's political association and economic integration with the EU;
3. commend the successful EU-Georgia Visa Dialogue, in particularly with regard to the implementation of far-reaching and difficult reforms in the Justice and Home Affairs area, especially pertaining to the rule of law and justice reforms;
4. however, note with regret the recent EU decision to delay the launch of visa-free regime with Georgia notwithstanding the fulfilment of the required benchmarks from the Georgian side; call on the EU Member States to take a decision as soon as possible, taking into account its impact on the public opinion in Georgia;
5. acknowledging the progress made by Georgia in the protection of human rights and the justice sector reform, call upon the Government of Georgia to take rigorous steps to further ensure protection of rights and freedoms, and ensure independence, transparency and accountability of the judiciary, Prosecutor's office and law enforcement bodies;

6. recall that freedom of media is one of the fundamental human rights, and urge the Georgian Government to take the necessary measures in order to guarantee free and pluralistic media environment; furthermore, note that under conditions of hostile propaganda aimed towards weakening the Georgian EU aspirations and discrediting the EU and European values, it is important to support media development to equip it adequately as regards its technical level, and its independence and informative performance;
7. recognizing the importance of free and fair elections, democratic development and approximation of the Georgian legislation with EU standards, call for improving the election code and bringing it to a standard stipulated by the Venice Commission and OSCE ODIHR latest reports;
8. express their unequivocal support to the territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders; recall the 6 point Ceasefire Agreement of 12 of August 2008 brokered by the EU and request guaranteed full access for international organizations and missions, EUMM in particular, to the occupied territories of Georgia, in order to prevent violations of human rights in any possible form;
9. call on both Parties to the Association Agreement to create appropriate mechanisms which would render the benefits of the Agreement available to the people living in the territory of Abkhazia and South Ossetia / Tskhinvali region, Georgia; commit to engage with the CSOs across the administrative boundary lines;
10. welcome the recently adopted UN General Assembly Resolution (GA/11785) Recognizing Right of Return for Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons in Georgia, Regardless of Ethnicity to Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, Georgia;
11. welcome the revival of tripartite social dialogue and call on the Georgian Government to extend it to all levels of industrial relations, and to adopt amendments to the Labour Code in line with ILO standards, as well as to continue efforts to establish a fully-fledged labour inspection system in order to ensure enforcement of all labour rights, in particular respect for freedom of association;
12. welcome the Georgian Government's commitment to involve and consult the civil society organizations in the reform process and the overall monitoring of the Association agenda implementation to ensure transparency and ownership of the Association process; in this regard welcome the Memorandums signed by the Georgian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum with the Government of Georgia and the Parliament of Georgia to ensure wide engagement of the civil society in AA driven reforms;
13. welcome active involvement of Georgian military personnel in EU led peace keeping operations and call for an increased engagement of Georgian professionals in EU led civilian missions and operations;
14. call on the Georgian Government to effectively implement the provisions of the EUs Small Business Act and to develop and set clear benchmarks for medium/long term SME development strategy;

15. call on the Georgian Government to ensure compatibility of adopted strategies and legal acts with the aims and the spirit of the Association Agreement, putting emphasis on their effective implementation, including in such areas as education, SME, R&D, standardization, labour relations and others;
16. recognize the progress made by Georgia in implementing food safety reform; however, taking into account the possible impact of the measures on local agricultural businesses, call on the Georgian Government to adapt the legal approximation process to the needs of small farmers in compliance with best European practices;
17. support the strengthening of the EU-Georgia Business to Business contacts and the internationalisation of business activities in Georgia, in particular through expansion of their relations with European businesses;
18. support Georgia's accession to the European Energy Community (Community) and call upon the Government of Georgia to secure timely compliance with the necessary conditions for the membership; moreover, call upon the EU to consider in good faith Georgia's accession to the Community;
19. invite civil society organizations to monitor the implementation of environmental commitments made in the framework of the Association Agreement and the communication of independent opinions; furthermore, invite the EU civil society organisations to cooperate with the Georgian CSOs in elaboration of performance indicators to measure fulfilment of country's obligations in implementing environmental regulations; invite the European Environmental Agency to share its relevant experience with the Georgian CSOs;
20. recognizing the importance of culture for sustainable economic and social development of Georgia, particularly emphasize the need to preserve and valorise the unique cultural heritage of the country and to ensure transparency in the culture management by consulting local stakeholders before such decisions; call on the Georgian Government to fulfil the commitments made in the field of culture within the framework of the Association Agreement and international conventions;
21. for the purposes of promoting intercultural dialogue and the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences, call on the EU Member States to strengthen their efforts to facilitate mobility on the European labour market, including through bilateral agreements on circular migration between Georgia and the respective EU Member States;
22. call on the EU and its Member States to support the internationalisation process of the Georgian higher education system through enhancing the possibilities for international programme accreditation and development of joint graduate degree programmes;
23. 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;

24. 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.

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