Conclusion of an EU/Georgia association agreement

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an initiative report by Andrejs MAMIKINS (S&D, LV) containing a motion for a non-legislative resolution on the draft Council decision on the conclusion, on behalf of the European Union, of the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part.

Members welcomed the signature of the Association Agreement as constituting a significant step forward in EU-Georgia relations and embodying a commitment to the path of political association and economic integration. They stressed that the ratification of the Agreement is not the final goal in itself and that full implementation thereof in as short a timeframe as possible is key.

European perspective of Georgia: Members stressed that Georgia – like any other European state – has a **European perspective and may apply to become a member of the Union** provided that it adheres to the principles of democracy, respects fundamental freedoms and human and minority rights, and ensures the rule of law. They stressed that the Agreement covers the entire internationally recognised territory of Georgia.

They called on Georgia to ensure that reforms are anchored and deeply rooted in the institutional framework in order to build a society characterised by pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men.

Financial assistance: Members welcomed the financial assistance granted to Georgia in 2014 in accordance with the principle of 'more funds for more reform'. They also welcomed the Association Agenda which creates a practical framework to achieve the overriding objectives of the Agreement and should be the guiding framework for the development of EU-Georgia relations. They stressed that both Georgia and the EU should be involved in the implementation of the Agenda, and that the priorities set out therein should receive appropriate technical and financial support so that Georgia has the means to continue its democratic and economic reforms. They called on the Commission and the Member States to coordinate their assistance and to use the priorities of the Agenda as guiding principles when programming financing for Georgia.

Sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia: Members reaffirmed their support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and called for the applicability and benefits of the Agreement to the entire internationally recognised territory of Georgia to be ensured.

They called, in this connection, for the EU to continue to engage actively in conflict resolution, through the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia, co-chairing the Geneva Talks, and through the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM). They encouraged **more decisive efforts as regards the revision of the restrictive aspects of the law on occupied territories** in order to maximise the benefits of the Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA).

For its part, Russia is invited to respect fully the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, as well as the inviolability of its internationally recognised borders, to reverse its recognition of the separation of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and to end its occupation thereof.

Priority judiciary reforms: whilst welcoming the recent reforms in this area, Members reiterated that justice-sector reform in Georgia remains a priority for both Georgia and the European Union. All prosecutions must be transparent, proportionate and free from political motivation. Members stressed the need for the Georgian authorities to seek to bring about national reconciliation and acknowledged that accusations of cases of so-called selective justice have had a negative impact on the country. They called on the Georgian authorities to avoid instrumentalising the justice system as a tool of political retribution and to take the utmost care to avoid accusations in the future, while pursuing a serious fight to rule out corruption and the misuse of public office.

Fight against organised crime and corruption: Members called on the Georgian authorities to continue the fight against organised crime, corruption, fraud, and money laundering at all levels and in all spheres of life. They stressed the importance of the depoliticisation of the public administration in order to make it more efficient and free from political interference. They also highlighted the importance of antidiscrimination legislation in securing equal rights and protection for all minorities, in particular for ethnic, religious and LGBT minorities. They deplored the **violent outbreaks of Islamophobia and homophobia that have taken place in the country** and the failure of the prosecution services and the judiciary to bring the perpetrators to justice in an effective way.

Reform the social sector and combat poverty: Members stressed the need for urgent reforms of the social protection system to reduce the growing social inequalities that affect children in particular, as reflected by the increasing percentage of children who are living below the national poverty line (27 % in 2013 compared to 25 % in 2011) and in extreme poverty (6 % vs 3.9 % among the general population), surviving on less than USD 1.25 per day. They noted positively the adoption of the new labour code, and stressed the need to implement it and to continue improving labour standards and social dialogue in order to comply with the labour rights and standards set out by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Free Trade Area: Members congratulated Georgia on having been able to sustain external pressure, inter alia from Russia, and redirect its exports towards new markets, and encouraged Georgia to continue on this path also in the future; condemns the policy of economic pressure employed by Russia against Georgia prior to and after the signature of the DCFTA in June 2014. They believe strongly that the DCFTA will have a long-term beneficial effect on Georgia's economy and will thus contribute to raising the quality of life of its citizens.

In this context, Members called on the **P**arliaments of the Member States to ratify the Association Agreement, including the DCFTA, as soon as possible, so that all economic and trade provisions of the Agreement can enter into force in full without delay. They underlined the fact that the success of the DCFTA will be dependent on the thorough implementation by both parties of the commitments set out in the Agreement. They called, in this respect, for the EU to provide Georgia with all necessary assistance, also with a view to alleviating the short-term costs for Georgia.

Secession: Members highlighted the essential role of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia and of **the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in contributing to security and stability** in the areas adjacent to the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and called for the prolongation of its mandate beyond 2016. They called also for the EU to ensure that it is given an adequate budget to carry out its mandate.

Members regretted the lack of substantial progress in the Geneva talks despite the efforts of the Georgian authorities to engage constructively to address all security and humanitarian concerns in the conflict areas. They called for a more effective role for the EU in the process. Members condemned the process of the so-called borderisation along the administrative border line with Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, which has led to the expansion of the area of occupied territories, to the detriment of Georgia.

They supported the positive steps taken by the Georgian Government towards the improvement of relations with Russia and called on Russia, as an important actor in the region, to engage constructively in finding a peaceful resolution to the conflicts.

Russia must guarantee the EUMM full, unlimited access to the breakaway territories of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.

South Caucasus: Members pointed out that the entry into force of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, the likely inclusion of Armenia in the Customs Union, and the fact that Azerbaijan remains outside the main economic blocs, including the WTO, could disrupt traditional economic relations in the region.

Fully supportive of the progressive differentiation provided for within the Eastern Partnership framework, Members consider that a regional approach is essential for the EU to contribute effectively to the stability and economic development of the South Caucasus. Therefore, they called on the Commission to assist the countries of the region in dealing with the possible problems which may arise from such a situation and help Georgia to make renewed efforts to promote new forms of cooperation in the South Caucasus.

In addition, **Members reminded Georgia of Europe's generous solidarity when Russia imposed trade and economic sanctions on the country**. They expect Georgia in consequence not to profit from the current Russian sanctions on the EU.

Environmental and energy issues: Members drew attention to the crucial position of Georgia as regards the development of the Southern Corridor and the transit of oil and gas pipelines that could be of strategic importance for European energy security. They called, in this regard, for EU environmental standards to be fully respected in the construction of energy infrastructure. They stressed, furthermore, the importance of diversifying energy sources and called on the Commission to assist and monitor closely the Georgian authorities in their investment programme for the construction, rehabilitation and reconstruction of hydropower plants, urging them to comply fully with EU standards and norms.

Institutional cooperation: Members stressed the importance of its cooperation with the Parliament of Georgia as a way to monitor the implementation of the Agreement and the Agenda. They believed that the entry into force of the Agreement and the creation of the new institutional framework for cooperation calls for a similar upgrade of the situation at parliamentary level and that it is necessary to create a specific EU-Georgia parliamentary association committee. They called on Georgia to provide comprehensive information related to the Association Agreement and its implementation, including the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.