Conclusion of an EU/Georgia association agreement

2014/2816(INI) - 18/12/2014 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 491 votes to 84, with 63 abstentions, 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.

Parliament 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. It 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: Parliament 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. It stressed that the Agreement covers the entire internationally recognised territory of Georgia.

It 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: Parliament welcomed the financial assistance granted to Georgia in 2014 in accordance with the principle of 'more funds for more reform'. It 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. It 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. The resolution 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: Parliament called on Russia 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, and to reciprocate the commitment to the non-use of force vis-à-vis Georgia. It condemned, in this regard, the conclusion of the 'alliance and strategic partnership' treaty between the occupied territory of Abkhazia and Russia. It viewed this as a step taken by Russia to **conclude the full annexation of Abkhazia**. Parliament expressed further concern that a similar 'treaty' may be concluded with the occupied territory of Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia as well. In this regard, it called on the Russian Federation to withdraw the so called 'treaty' and comply with its obligations under the 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement.

Parliament 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).

Priority judiciary reforms: whilst welcoming the recent reforms in this area, Parliament 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. Parliament 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. It 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.

Parliament acknowledged that accusations of cases of so-called selective justice have had a negative impact. It called on the Georgian authorities to avoid instrumentalising the justice system as a tool of political retribution. In an oral amendment adopted in plenary, Parliament welcomed the OSCE/ODIHR 'Trial Monitoring Report Georgia' issued on 9 December 2014 and called on the Georgian government to seriously undertake efforts to meet the shortcomings identified therein.

Fight against organised crime and corruption: Parliament 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. It stressed the importance of the depoliticisation of the public administration in order to make it more efficient and free from political interference. Members 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. They also took note of the steps taken by Georgia against Islamophobia and homophobia, in line with its international commitments.

Free Trade Area: Parliament 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. It condemned the policy of economic pressure employed by Russia against Georgia prior to and after the signature of the DCFTA in June 2014. It believed 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, Parliament called on the Parliaments 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. It 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. It 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.

Parliament 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. It 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. It 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: Parliament 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 considered 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, **Parliament reminded Georgia of Europe's generous solidarity when Russia imposed trade and economic sanctions on the country**. It expected Georgia in consequence not to profit from the current Russian sanctions on the EU.

Environmental and energy issues: Parliament 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. It called, in this regard, for EU environmental standards to be fully respected in the construction of energy infrastructure. It stressed, furthermore, the importance of diversifying energy sources with regard, in particular, to renewables, and of aligning climate-change policies and targets with those of the EU.

Institutional cooperation: Parliament stressed the importance of its cooperation with the Parliament of Georgia as a way to monitor the implementation of the Agreement and the Agenda. It 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. It called on Georgia to provide comprehensive information related to the Association Agreement and its implementation, including the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.