Annual implementing report on the EU association agreement with Georgia

2019/2200(INI) - 17/07/2020 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Sven MIKSER (S&D, EE) on the implementation of the EU Association Agreement with Georgia.

The report highlighted the entry into force of its revised Constitution in December 2018 concluded Georgia's transition to a full parliamentarian system. It noted that progress has been made in the implementation of the Association Agreement between the EU and Georgia (AA), including the move to a fully proportional electoral system as of 2024.

Members welcomed the continuous deepening of EU-Georgia relations and the firm support that Georgia' s chosen path of European and Euro-Atlantic integration enjoys across the political spectrum and in society. They reiterated, however, the need to continue implementing and monitoring reforms under the AA and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA).

The report reaffirmed the EU's commitment to continue to contribute to the peaceful resolution of the Russia-Georgia conflict. It strongly condemned the illegal occupation of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia by the Russian Federation. Members stressed that these violations of international law need to be stopped.

Visa liberalisation

Members welcomed the fact that Georgian citizens have made 900 000 visa-free visits to Schengen and Schengen-associated countries since March 2017. They stressed the importance of continuous implementation of the visa liberalisation benchmarks by Georgia and of increased cooperation between the Georgian judicial authorities and enforcement agencies and the Member States for reducing cross-border crime, particularly human trafficking and the trafficking of illegal drugs.

Political dialogue and parliamentary elections

Members welcomed the fact that the Parliament of Georgia started to deliberate on the reforms to the electoral system as soon as the state of emergency was lifted and successfully adopted the amendments to the Constitution and electoral code. They congratulated Georgia for the steps it has taken towards establishing a more representative parliament and depolarising the political environment.

The Georgian authorities and the Election Administration of Georgia are encouraged to ensure a safe environment for the October 2020 parliamentary elections by providing personal protective equipment for election personnel, adapting the voting facilities to guarantee the health and safety of the citizens taking part, and ensuring that the election observers may carry out their work undisturbed.

Rule of law, good governance and media freedom

The committee noted Georgia's progress with its reforms, which strengthen democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms and encouraged the Georgian Government to consolidate the rule of law and to continue to pursue justice reform, the fight against corruption and state capture, public administration reform, decentralisation and good governance.

Members emphasised the importance of a depoliticised judiciary free from political interference and of respect for transparency, meritocracy and accountability in the appointment of judges for the Supreme Court of Georgia and other judicial institutions.

As regards the media, the need for clear provisions regulating free and paid advertisements and for improved transparency of media ownership through strengthened media monitoring was stressed. The Georgian Government is called on to cooperate with EU institutions on best practices against disinformation.

Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms

Members deplored the constant violations by the Russian Federation, which exercises effective control over the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, of the fundamental rights of the people in these occupied regions, who are being deprived of the freedom of movement and residence, the right to property and the right of access to education in their native language. They reiterated its full support for the safe and dignified return home of internally displaced persons and refugees.

Concern has been expressed that the continuous and illegal 'borderisation' process has particularly detrimental effects in the context of the ongoing fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, because the restriction of freedom of movement is depriving people of access to the necessary medical services.

Institutional provisions

The report emphasised the need to improve the political climate and build trust among all political and institutional actors, as well as between them and the Georgian people. The Parliament of Georgia is encouraged to strengthen its capacities to exercise parliamentary control mechanisms, particularly control over the security system.

Economic and trade relations

Members noted that the EU is Georgia's main trading partner, accounting for 27 % of its total trade and welcomed the continued approximation of Georgia's legislation in trade-related areas. They highlighted, however, the need to strengthen the rule of law, by fighting corruption, money laundering and tax evasion and by supporting approximation to EU standards.

Recalling that the EU-Georgia AA/DCFTA aims to gradually integrate Georgia into the single market, Members underlined the importance of structural reforms to further improve the investment climate in Georgia, including for attracting foreign direct investment and ensuring transparency thereof.

On labour legislation, the Georgian Government is encouraged to continue its comprehensive reform so as to ensure better regulation of working conditions, including continued improvements in labour inspections and social dialogue.

Climate change

Members called on Georgia to further enhance its engagement in the fight against climate change and called on the Commission to facilitate Georgia's participation in the European Green Deal and to ensure that the DCFTA does not contradict the environmental objectives and initiatives set out therein. Improvements should also be made in its energy sector.