

PRESS RELEASE
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Joint Press Release following the first Association Council meeting between the European Union and Georgia

The European Union and Georgia held the first meeting of the Association Council on 17 November 2014. The Council is the highest formal institution established under the EU-Georgia Association Agreement to supervise the implementation of the Agreement.

The EU and Georgia acknowledged Georgia's European aspirations, its European choice and the common objective to promote building a democratic, stable and prosperous country. In this context, the Association Council assessed Georgia as one of the front-runners of the Eastern Partnership. The EU and the Government of Georgia agreed to continue to work together towards a further deepening of Georgia's political association and economic integration with the EU.

The Association Council welcomed the provisional application of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement with its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area as of 1 September 2014 and highlighted the importance of timely ratification of the Association Agreement by all EU Member States in accordance with their national procedures.

The Association Agreement will be the basis on which Georgia proceeds with its reform agenda in the years to come. Acknowledging progress achieved thus far, the Association Council agreed it is crucial for Georgia to take steps to sustain the positive results of reforms in accordance with the common values set out in the Association Agreement: democracy, good governance, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.

Both sides agreed on the importance of consolidating Georgia's democracy. The EU underlined the need to improve the political climate by avoiding political retribution and polarisation while ensuring the space for opposition and cross party dialogue in the interest of political pluralism and inclusiveness. The EU particularly emphasised the importance of ensuring that criminal investigations and prosecutions are evidence-based, transparent, free of political motivation, impartial, and adhering strictly to principles of due process.

The Association Council welcomed in particular that the Council of the European Union concurred today with the European Commission's second progress report on the implementation by Georgia of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP), which concludes that Georgia meets the first-phase requirements of the visa dialogue and that the second implementation phase of the VLAP can therefore now proceed.

The Association Council welcomed the substantial EU assistance provided to Georgia, which has significantly increased in the period 2014-2017, with up to €410 million available to support the ambitious political, judicial and economic reforms envisaged in the Association Agreement and the Association Agenda.

The EU reiterated its firm support for the territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders. The Association Council expressed concern regarding a so-called "Draft Treaty on Alliance and Integration" currently being discussed between the Russian Federation and the Abkhaz de-facto authorities. Reports on a similar undertaking with the South Ossetian de-facto authorities are equally disconcerting as they go against the territorial integrity of Georgia and do not contribute to de-escalation in the region. The EU will continue to raise the issue in its bilateral contacts with the Russian Federation.

The EU reiterated its commitment to peace, stability and conflict resolution efforts in Georgia, including through the co-chairmanship of the Geneva International Discussions by the EU Special Representative and the deployment of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia. The Association Council agreed that the relevant policies of the EU and Georgia should respectively send strong signals of engagement towards the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.

The EU expressed appreciation for Georgia's contribution to EU-led crisis management operations notably in the Central African Republic and Mali, as a concrete demonstration of the shared commitment to promote peace and security.

The EU welcomed Georgia's active participation in the multilateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership and its initiative to host the Civil Society Forum in Batumi on November 20-21, 2014.

The Council was chaired by High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms Federica Mogherini. The Georgian Delegation was headed by Mr Irakli Garibashvili, Prime Minister of Georgia. Mr Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations also participated for the EU. Mr. Giorgi Kvirikashvili, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development and Vice Prime Minister, Ms. Tamar Beruchashvili, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms. Tea Tsulukiani, Minister of Justice, Mr. Paata Zakareishvili, State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, Mr. David Bakradze, State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and other members of the Government of Georgia participated on the Georgian side.
