



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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Declaration by HR Ashton on behalf of the EU on the Georgian strategy on Abkhazia and South Ossetia

The European Union takes note of Georgia's "State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement through Cooperation", endorsed by the Georgian government on 27 January. The EU welcomes Georgia's commitment to solving the conflict only through peaceful means and diplomatic efforts. The EU welcomes the spirit of the initiative as a constructive step towards easing tensions, building confidence and reaching out to the residents of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian regions.

We encourage the Georgian government to conduct consultations with all stakeholders regarding the preparation of an action plan on the implementation of the strategy. The EU welcomes Georgia's intention to elaborate a status-neutral framework for interaction with authorities in control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and calls upon all parties to establish it as soon as possible. A key priority for Georgia will be to ensure that the relevant legislative and administrative framework, including the Law on Occupied Territories and its implementation, is being brought in line with the opinions presented by the Venice Commission on this matter.

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Finally, the EU reiterates its firm support for the security and stability of Georgia, based on full respect for the principles of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity recognized by international law.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Azerbaijan align themselves with this declaration.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

