

EU – GEORGIA PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION COMMITTEE

EIGHTH MEETING

12 September 2006

TBILISI

Final Statement and Recommendations pursuant to Article 89 of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

Under the co-chairmanship of Mrs ISLER BÉGUIN (Greens/EFA, France) and Mr David BAKRADZE, the eighth meeting of EU-Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee was held in Tbilisi on 12 September 2006. The Committee exchanged views with Mr George BARAMIDZE, State Minister on Integration into European and Euro-Atlantic Institutions, and Mr Valeriy CHECHELASHVILI, First Deputy Minister of the Foreign Affairs, representing the Government of Georgia, Mr Christian PERNHORST, Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the German Embassy to Georgia, representing the Finnish Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, and H.E. Mr Torben HOLTZE, Head of the Commission Delegation to Georgia, representing the European Commission.

1. Stresses once again that the people of Georgia share a common destiny with other peoples of Europe, and that the integration of the Georgian people and their national institutions into European structures is in the mutual interest of both the EU and Georgia; welcomes Georgia's European aspirations;
2. welcomes the continued efforts since the “Rose Revolution” aimed at the development of democracy, including institutional reform, the protection of human rights, the rule of law as well as economic and social reforms; stresses that the thrust for reforms should continue;
3. welcomes the declarations adopted by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union, on 21 February 2006 and respectively on 20 July 2006, on recent developments in Georgia - Abkhazia and South Ossetia; backs up the European Union’s reiterated support for a peaceful resolution of the conflicts in Georgia, based on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders;
4. is deeply concerned about ongoing tensions between Georgia and Russia; is particularly concerned about the recent closure of the only recognised border crossing between Georgia and the Russian Federation. The closure of the Kazbegi-Zemo Larsi checkpoint for an indefinite period of time translates into a serious violation of the provisions and obligations under the "Agreement on Customs Control and Border Checkpoints" signed between the Government of Georgia and the Russian Federation on 8 October 1993;
5. supports the recent protest expressed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, which insists on the full compliance with the provisions of the abovementioned agreement and demands an immediate release of exact dates for the resumption of the functioning of the checkpoint;
6. under the circumstances, urges the parties to make full use of the existing negotiating mechanisms and to do their utmost to promote stability and peaceful development in the region; calls on the Russian authorities to respect universally recognised norms and principles of international law;

7. stresses, in light of the commitment that the Russian Federation expressed in 2005 on the withdrawal of its remaining troops from Georgia by 2008, that this represents an important and constructive step and calls for the troops withdrawal to be fully implemented within the agreed time scale;
8. takes note of the social and environmental problems which the base removals will cause; calls on the Georgian government to take measures to counterbalance these problems by way of new investments in the areas affected; calls on the Council, Commission and other donors to play an active role in assisting the Georgian government through special rehabilitation, environmental, employment and investment programmes;
9. urges, in this regard, the Commission to provide the expertise, the technical assistance and eventually contribute financially to the cleaning-up and the rehabilitation of the areas of the former Russian military bases;
10. welcomes the inclusion of Georgia in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the progress achieved in the consultations on the ENP Action Plan; stresses the need for Georgian government to focus on the continuation of the political and economic reform process, strengthening the respect for the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, human rights, consolidating a democratic system of government, the development of civil society, media freedom, environmental protection, sustainable development and poverty reduction; calls on the Council and the Commission to take into account the views of the European Parliament during the consultation process;
11. welcomes the appointment of the new EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus region, Ambassador Peter Semneby, and supports his work towards strengthening the relations between the EU and Georgia and the other two countries of the region; calls on the Special Representative to play a more active role in this regard; calls on the European Union to provide the Special Representative with all the necessary resources to make his action effective and visible in securing the EU's policy goals in the region, including a willingness to mediate and help for the resolution of the conflicts;
12. welcomes the increase of assistance to Georgia in the period 2004-2006 from the European Commission; calls on the Council and the Commission to further intensify such an assistance under the ENP Financial Instrument from 2007;
13. supports the efforts of the Georgian authorities to create an independent, unbiased and competent judiciary system; stresses the need to further improve the disciplinary legal procedures and refine disciplinary sanctions, to continue administrative reform through intensive training and continuous education and to provide better social guarantees for judges and court personnel;
14. calls on Georgia to implement fully its pledge to improve conditions for prisoners, notably by implementing the recommendation of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture: calls for allegations of torture or ill-treatment of detainees to be properly investigated and prosecuted; welcomes the progress achieved by Georgia in this field;
15. underlines the importance of continuing the ongoing efforts to fight corruption with the aim of eradicating this scourge through long-term structural measures, in line with the GRECO recommendations and fully respecting the rule of law and human rights;

16. recommends that statistical information on corruption and anti-corruption cases be made public after correct assessment by the competent authorities; also recommends that reports on the results of anti-corruption measures as well as the problems still unresolved be known to the public at large;
17. welcomes the ratification of the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by the Parliament of Georgia; calls on the Georgia authorities to enhance further the protection of minorities and to comply with the Council of Europe's relevant recommendations;
18. underlines the crucial importance of a free and independent media and of the civil society's ability to express criticisms against the government; urges all parties in Georgia to engage in a full and transparent debate on the functioning of the country in order to maintain the momentum of the political and economic reform process;
19. welcomes the progress shown by the Georgian government towards harmonisation of Georgia's legislation to EU legislation; stresses the need to intensify implementation of the national programme on harmonisation;
20. as a result of the embargo imposed by the Russian Federation on Georgian alcoholic beverages, fruit and mineral water in spring 2006, and the serious consequences on Georgian trade in particular and economic situation in general, it welcomes the meeting that took place in June 2006 between representatives of the Georgian government and the European Commission concerning the eventual conclusion of a bilateral agreement on wines and spirits within the EU-Georgia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement; it recommends that such agreement take into account the benefits to both producers and consumers;
21. supports an intensification of the UN-led negotiation process in the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia as a basis for a solution which fully respects the territorial integrity of Georgia and the minority rights; calls on both sides to discuss all subjects, both economic and political;
22. regrets the deterioration of the situation in the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia; calls on all parties to engage actively in the peace process stresses that the demilitarisation of the region, with the exception of the Joint Peacekeeping Force, is a fundamental step for the peaceful resolution of the conflict; backs up the peace initiatives of the Government of Georgia, supported by the OSCE Ljubljana Ministerial Meeting in December 2005 and the statement adopted by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union, on 21 February 2006; calls on the Tskhinvali authorities to examine these initiatives seriously;
23. expresses deep concern that there are still displaced persons as a result of the conflicts in the country; stresses that all refugees and internally displaced persons must have the right to a safe, secure and dignified return to their homes;
24. refers to the resolution of the Parliament of Georgia of July 18, 2006; stresses that neutral, impartial and effective peacekeeping operations are essential for resolving territorial conflicts in Georgia in a possibly near future; asks all parties concerned to refrain from the use of force; calls on the Council and the Commission to step up efforts for the further intensification of the conflict resolution process;
25. expects the Georgian authorities to ensure that the forthcoming local elections of 5 October 2006 take place in a climate of mutual respect and in a free and fair environment;

deems the reinforcement of local democracy and self-governance an effective instrument for modernisation of the territorial-administrative configuration of Georgia;

26. welcomes the substantial assistance granted by the European Commission through the TACIS Programme since 2004 for the reform of the border guards; highlights the setting up of a Border Guard Faculty within the Police Academy, and looks forward to its forthcoming inauguration; also welcomes the renewed assistance from the OSCE in training the border guards;
27. welcomes the opening of the Baky-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline; underlines the importance of ensuring that EU environmental standards are fully addressed in its functioning and all other infrastructure projects;
28. welcomes the basic policy undertaken by the Government of Georgia in the fields of tax and customs reforms, liberalisation of the economic environment and privatisation; draws attention of the Georgian authorities that development of the SMEs and entrepreneurship initiatives creates a basis for Georgia's sustainable development; highlights the importance of the further improvement of the public healthcare system and development of human resources and education policy;
29. supports, in this respect, the establishment of a legislative and structural framework aimed at stimulating an effective interaction between public health care and environmental protection;
30. calls on the Georgian authorities to pay more attention to environment protection, sustainable exploitation of natural resources and prevention of natural disasters; recalls its support to the Regional Environmental Centre as an active player for environmental programmes.

adopted unanimously