

# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

## EU-GEORGIA PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION COMMITTEE

### EIGHTH MEETING

#### MINUTES OF THE MEETING

12 September 2006

TBILISI

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#### **Annex:       Lists of attendance**

The meeting was opened on 12 September 2006 at 1h15.

Co-chairs David BAKRADZE (National Movement – Democrats, Georgia) and Mrs Marie Anne ISLER BEGUIN (Greens, France) opened the meeting and welcomed the delegations. Also present were Mr George BARAMIDZE, State Minister on European Integration and Mr Valeriy CHECHELASHVILI, Deputy Minister of the Foreign Affairs, representing the Georgian Government, Mr Christian PERNHORST, Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the German Embassy to Georgia, representing the Finnish Presidency 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. The agenda was adopted.
2. The minutes were adopted.

3.

Mr David BAKRADZE, co-Chairperson of the PCC, opened the meeting and conveyed a warm welcome from Ms Nino BURJANADZE, Chairperson of the Parliament of Georgia, who was prevented by illness from participating in the meeting.

Mr Giorgi BARAMIDZE, State Minister of European Integration, gave a short overview of Georgia's progress in political and economic reforms, its relations to Russia and the current status of EU-Georgia cooperation. He drew attention to favourable rankings inter alia in World Bank assessments of the business climate ('better than in Italy and Spain') and anti-corruption efforts. Mr BARAMIDZE claimed that Russia supports separatism and seeks to prevent, by all means, peaceful resolution of the South Ossetian and Abkhaz conflicts. He stressed the importance of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Action Plan for Georgia including a possibility to start negotiations on a free trade agreement as well as measures to facilitate peaceful conflict resolution.

Mr Valeriy CHECHELASHVILI, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, focused his address on the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and on Georgian-Russian relations. He assured that the Georgian government had no plan to invade South Ossetia and that it is fully committed to the peace plan earlier presented and to backing up this plan with financial resources. He affirmed that Russia cannot play the role of honest broker in the conflicts, but nevertheless accepted to continue talks in existing formats. As regards rejection of violence, Mr CHECHELASHVILI stated that Georgia will be ready to sign bilateral agreements on the non-use of force when Russian peace-keepers (whom Georgia regards as partial) have left the region.

Ms Marie-Anne ISLER BEGUIN, co-Chairperson of the PCC, expressed concern in relation to the internal conflicts and underlined that military options are unacceptable.

Mr Christian PERNHORST, Chargé d'Affaires of the German Embassy to Georgia, representing the Finnish EU Presidency, stated that all parties have failed to honour their responsibilities and that harsh declarations were not helpful. Georgia and Russia had to form a new relationship and the EU had always supported the territorial integrity of Georgia.

The Head of the Commission Delegation to Georgia, Mr Torben HOLTZE, highlighted progress in Georgian reforms, but drew attention to the fact that free media are not flourishing, as could be expected. Neither was investment taking off. Mr HOLTZE asked how increased defence expenditure could be justified when education, health care and other needs are so great and noted that inflammatory rhetoric drove public opinion in the wrong direction.

Before proceeding to the next point on the agenda, co-Chairperson BAKRADZE informed journalists present in the room that there would be a press conference at the end of the day, but that they could not be present during the continuation of the working session.

4.

Co-Chairperson BAKRADZE considered that this point was superfluous, since the issues dealt with in the recommendations adopted in the previous PCC meeting would all be discussed under other points on the agenda. There was no objection to this proposal and Mr BAKRADZE therefore proceeded to the next point.

5.

Mr BAKRADZE noted that the negotiated ENP Action Plan had already been approved informally by both sides. He gave an overview of its contents. He noted that the negotiations had not always been easy, but that the most difficult process was still to come: the implementation. He emphasised Georgia's commitment.

Co-Chairperson ISLER BEGUIN drew attention to the importance of avoiding a widening gap by the rich and the poor. Mr BAKRADZE reacted to this by arguing that the extent to which the population would feel that they derived practical benefits from the Action Plan would be a measure of its success. Responding to a question by Mr Hannes SWOBODA, Mr BAKRADZE, as well as Mr HOLTZE, confirmed that wordings on Georgia's territorial integrity had not been controversial during the negotiations.

6.

Ms Khatuna GOGORISHVILI spoke about a new law on the **freedom of expression** guaranteeing inter alia protection of journalists' sources. She also criticised the Georgian media, accusing them of biased coverage, sensationalism, a 'nihilistic attitude' when reporting about crime and a lack of attention to positive phenomena in the Georgian society. Georgian journalists are not familiar with ethical rules, she claimed.

Mr Tadeusz ZWIEFKA requested explanations in relation to a strike at the Rustavi 2 TV station and the attitude of the authorities in relation to the media coverage of the murder of the banker Sandro Girgvliani. Ms GOGORISHVILI replied that Rustavi 2 was a private TV station and that dismissals there had economic rather than political motives. Mr BAKRADZE described the Girgvliani case as a test for the freedom of the media. He assured that media had questioned the authorities' handling of this case in a very active way and that he himself had been put in quite tough situations when appearing in three different talk-shows to discuss this matter.

Ms ISLER BEGUIN asked about a meeting to which the Minister of Defence had reportedly called journalists to teach them to do their job better. Mr BAKRADZE replied that he had never heard of that meeting.

Turning to **judicial reform**, Ms GOGORISHVILI gave a very comprehensive presentation of current efforts and mentioned that these were being carried out in cooperation with many international organisations. Mr Hannes SWOBODA considered that the reforms are going in the right direction, but that there were grounds for concern in relation to the independence of the judiciary. He focused on the procedure used in connection with the dismissal of judges at the highest level and noted that their replacements were very young and lacked experience. Ms GOGORISHVILI defended the procedure and argued that when it comes to the appointment of new judges, the authorities are faced with a dilemma: older judges are experienced, unfortunately also in corruption; young candidates lack experience.

8.

Mr Irakli GVARAMADZE opened the debate on the internal conflicts in Georgia by assuring that Georgia keeps following a peaceful path. As to the recent action by Georgian government forces in the Kodori Gorge, in Abkhazia, Mr GVARAMADZE argued that it had been carried out in response to provocations. A number of Georgian state agencies would soon be present in the Kodori Gorge. Mr GVARAMADZE declared that Georgia was capable and ready to restore order in the breakaway regions.

Mr DUKA-ZOLYOMY regretted that there had been no positive movement in relation to the internal conflicts since the last PCC, in Brussels. He agreed with the Georgian view that the composition of the Joint Control Commission (JCC) for South Ossetia (notably Georgia, South Ossetia, North Ossetia and Russia) needed to be changed and described the UN and the OSCE as experienced and reliable.

Mr SWOBODA recalled that Deputy Foreign Minister CHECHELASHVILI had made clear that as long as Russian peacekeepers are present, Georgia was not ready to enter into an agreement on the non-use of force. Mr SWOBODA described it as dangerous to reserve the right to use force and asked under what conditions Georgia considers that it can do this. He also asked what was the Georgian reaction to the Russian President Putin's argument that the possible independence of Kosovo must be regarded as directly connected to that of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Mr GVARAMADZE referred to recent arrests carried out by Georgian law enforcement officers in parts of South Ossetia which the de facto South Ossetian authorities claim to control. He stated that force was only used in 'concrete, specific operations with concrete, specific objectives' and that criminals must be punished. He also claimed that Georgian forces were strong enough to deal with the South Ossetian leadership and that the Roki tunnel, connecting South Ossetia with the Russian Federation, could easily be blocked. South Ossetia is surrounded by other parts of Georgia on three of four sides, he mentioned.

Mr BAKRADZE argued that the non-use of force was a means to peaceful settlement, but that there was also a balance between these two elements that could not be wrecked. An agreement on the non-use of force should also provide for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. According to Mr BAKRADZE, Georgia is not interested in violence, not least because it would be bad for investment and growth of the Georgian economy and that any instability would hit Georgia's strive to gain NATO membership in a painful way.

Mr BAKRADZE also said that there is a fundamental contradiction between Russia's claim that its troops in South Ossetia and Abkhazia act as peacekeepers on the one hand and the policy of granting Russian citizenship to inhabitants of these regions and acting as defender of its citizens on the other hand. He found that Russia could, however, take part in a wider peace-keeping force.

Ms ISLER BEGUIN asked what had been done since last year to build confidence and warned against developing ideas on 'reasonable' use of force. She said that by arming itself, Georgia also sends a signal and pointed to the need for a withdrawal of Russian troops to be carefully prepared. Ms ISLER BEGUIN noted that EU Member States were not prepared to send peacekeepers.

Mr BAKRADZE drew attention to the facts that a peace plan for South Ossetia and a donors' conference had been held. He called it a real threat that Georgia would be provoked, but assured that Georgia would be able to keep cool. While it was true that the military budget was now five times as big as before, it had to be noted that it used to be only € 40 million.

7.

Mr Levan METREVELI introduced this point, stressing inter alia progress in the fight against corruption. According to him, corruption was totally eliminated from the higher levels of government and greatly reduced on lower levels.

The Head of the European Commission Delegation to Georgia, Mr HOLTZE, noted that the social budget had increased by 41 percent since the Rose Revolution, but that entire budget had at the same time tripled.

Responding to remarks concerning the upcoming local elections, Mr BAKRADZE insisted that the announcement of the day for these elections conformed to the law, which prescribed a 40 day notice. He assured that these elections would be free and fair.

Mr Johannes BLOKLAND emphasised that it was necessary to deal with environmental problems, not least in relation to the military sites which would soon be vacated by the Russian troops.

9.

Mr Irakli KAVTARADZE gave an account of Georgia's cooperation with NATO in the framework of the Partnership for Peace programme. With 850 troops in Iraq, Georgia was making the biggest contribution to the forces there, in per capita terms. Georgia saw NATO as a force for stability in the region. Mr BAKRADZE considered that NATO guarantees that reforms in Georgia are irreversible.

Mr SWOBODA noted Russia's concern about Georgian NATO membership and its unwillingness to accept the idea that Russia and the EU has a common neighbourhood. He found that Russia needed to change its attitude towards the cooperation ambitions of states in the region.

10. The recommendations were adopted.

11. There was no other business.

12. The 9th EU-Georgia PCC was set for 2007 in Brussels.

The meeting ended at 18h15 followed by a press conference.

# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

## EU-GEORGIA PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION COMMITTEE

EIGHTH MEETING  
10-13 September 2006  
TBILISI

### Members of the Delegation

#### Members:

Ms Marie Anne ISLER BÉGUIN <i>Chairman</i>	Greens/ALE	France	Environment, Public Health and Food Safety
Mr Árpád DUKA-ZÓLYOMI <i>2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-Chairman</i>	EPP-ED	Slovakia	Human Rights
Mr Johannes BLOKLAND	IND/DEM	Netherlands	Environment, Public Health and Food Safety
Mr Hannes SWOBODA	PSE	Austria	Foreign Affairs; Security and Defence; Alleged use of European countries by the CIA for the transport and illegal detention of prisoners
Mr Tadeusz ZWIEFKA	EPP-ED	Poland	Legal Affairs

#### Secretariat of the Delegation:

Ms Aneta POPESCU-BLACK (Belgium), Administrator, responsible for the delegation  
Mr Dag SOURANDER (Sweden), Administrator, Policy Department  
Mr Thomas GRUNERT (Germany), Head of Unit  
Ms Elke SCHMUTTERER (Germany), Assistant  
Ms Esther MAASS (Germany), Secretary

#### Secretariat of the Political Groups:

Mr Marek HANNIBAL (Czech Republic), Group of the European People's Party/European Democrats  
Mr Paolo BERGAMASCHI (Italy), Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance

#### Interpreters:

*Georgian booth:*

Ms Nana CHKOIDZE (Georgia)  
Ms Mary GOGOLADZE (Georgia)  
Ms Tinatin MILORAVA (Georgia)

*French booth:*

Mr Jean-Jacques PEDUSSAUD (France) - *team leader*  
Ms Michelle COUEDIC (France)

#### Others:

Ms Gaelle LEGROUX (France), Assistant to Mrs Isler Béguin  
Mr Marcin LITOWCZENKO (Poland), Assistant to Mr Zwiefka  
Mr Attila LANCZ (Slovakia), Assistant to Mr Duka-Zólyomi

#### Abbreviations :

EPP-ED	European People's Party/European Democrats	GUE/NGL	European United Left/Nordic Green Left
PSE	Party of European Socialists	IND/DEM	Independence/Democracy Group
ALDE	Alliance of Liberal and Democrats for Europe	UEN	Union for Europe of the Nations Group
Verts/ALE	Greens/European Free Alliance	NI	Non-attached

6 September 2006/es

## Members of the Parliament of Georgia

### Delegation to the EU – Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee

**1. Mr. David BAKRADZE**, MP, Chairman of the Delegation  
Faction “National Movement – Democrats”

**2. Mrs. Khatuna GOGORISHVILI**, MP  
Faction “National Movement – Democrats”

**3. Mr. Irakli GVARAMADZE**, MP  
Faction “National Movement – Democrats”

**4. Mr. Zurab TKEMALADZE**, MP  
Faction "Right Opposition, Industrialists, News"

#### Substitutes

**1. Mr. Zurab JGUBURIA**, MP, substitute  
Faction “National Movement – Democrats”

**2. Mr. Irakli KAVTARADZE**, MP, substitute  
Faction “National Movement – Democrats”

**3. Mr. Levan METREVELI**, MP, substitute  
Faction “National Movement – Democrats”

**4. Mr. Nikoloz CHUBINISHVILI**, MP, substitute  
Faction “National Movement – Democrats”

**5. Mr. Kakha GIUASHVILI**, MP, substitute  
Faction “Right Opposition, Industrialists, News"

Nana Chkoidze  
Secretary of the Delegation

22 August 2006/es