



## EU-GEORGIA CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM

**9th meeting  
28 June 2022, Tbilisi**

### **JOINT DECLARATION**

The EU-Georgia Civil Society Platform (CSP) is one of the bodies set up under the Association Agreement between the European Union and Georgia. It enables civil society organisations from both sides to monitor the implementation of the agreement and draw up recommendations for submission to the relevant authorities.

The ninth meeting of the CSP was convened on 28 June 2022 in Tbilisi. The members of the CSP discussed the state of play regarding the implementation of the Association Agreement and focused on the EU candidate status for Georgia.

#### ***The members of the CSP:***

1. condemn in the strongest possible terms the full-scale aggression against independent, sovereign and democratic Ukraine by the Russian Federation and highlight the role played by civil society organisations dealing with the humanitarian, social, economic and environmental impact of the war;
2. condemn the numerous cases of abuse of human rights by the occupying Russian forces against the civilian population of Ukraine, the forced deportations, as well as the intensive missile and artillery attacks, and the bombing of civilian objects causing thousands of civilian casualties, in violation of international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions;
3. condemn the violation of human rights and freedoms in the occupied territories of Georgia by the Russian occupation regime and the so called de facto governments, including illegal kidnappings of Georgian citizens, maltreatment in detention centres, the prohibition on the education of ethnic Georgians in their mother tongue, restrictions on and barriers to the free movement of people, and the deprivation of the right of internally displaced people to safely return to their homes – a right that has been recognised and championed in numerous resolutions of the UN General Assembly;
4. are pleased to see that the European Council confirmed the European perspective for Georgia;
5. take note of the issues raised and the conditions specified in the Commission's opinion on Georgia's membership application, issued on 17 June 2022, which need to be tackled by the Government of Georgia; call on the Government of Georgia to show willingness and readiness

to resolve these issues and to undertake the necessary reforms without any delay aimed at securing Georgia's candidate status;

6. in line with the Commission's opinion, call for an independent person to be given preference in the process of nominating a new Public Defender (ombudsperson);
7. urge the authorities to respond to the Commission's recommendation on guaranteeing the full functioning of all state institutions, strengthening their independent and effective accountability;
8. underline the need to design a clear roadmap, agreed and approved by EU institutions, in particular the European Commission, based on the points raised by the latter and aimed at designing a short-term agenda for fundamental reforms in line with the plan to monitor the Commission's recommendations by the end of 2022 and beyond;
9. in this regard, stress that Georgian civil society has accumulated invaluable expertise and know-how over the past three decades and is ready and committed to share its knowledge and ready-made proposals with the Georgian authorities;
10. welcomes the massive mobilisation of citizens and civil society in expressing their full backing for the European future of Georgia and point out that public support for EU membership has been traditionally very high;
11. stress the need to guarantee the independence of the judiciary and call for pursuit of the reforms to the judiciary and the modifications of the legal provisions related to the election of the judges to the Supreme Court, in line with EU international norms and the recommendations of the Venice Commission and emphasise that this is crucial for a well-functioning justice system, as well as for the country's broader development and for building public trust. Furthermore, judicial independence is essential for political pluralism, a functioning business environment, fighting corruption, delivery of public goods, ensuring effective access to justice in the case of human rights violations, etc.;
12. point out that civil society should continue their expert involvement in reform and decision-making processes and also monitor implementation;
13. underline the need to respect the freedom of pluralistic media and express concerns regarding serious backsliding by Georgia in this area; in this regard, call for increased media sensitivity to hate speech and fake news; note and condemn the fact that the organisers of a massive violent attack on media representatives during the 5 July 2021 events have not been duly prosecuted;
14. point out that Georgia's legislation against hate speech is limited in scope and does not ensure effective accountability for hate speech in public, while hate speech against specific groups, including women, Roma, LGBTQI+ people, and persons with disabilities remains widespread;
15. stress the need to design a national accessibility plan in a timely manner with maximum involvement of people with disabilities and organisations working on their issues in the process

to ensure that the plan sets reasonable deadlines for the fulfilment of obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;

16. call on the Government of Georgia, civil society – including trade unions, business organisations, and grassroot and specialised non-governmental organisations – and the EU to work together on post-pandemic resilience-building and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals; stress the need to enhance investments in governance, social protection, the green economy and digitalisation, as well as the importance of reviewing lessons learned from the pandemic and monitoring public policies;
17. call for the integration of gender issues into policies to assess progress in gender mainstreaming, support the empowerment of women, and combat violence against women, in line with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention;
18. underline the need to improve conditions for MSMEs given that they were hit hard by the pandemic, to continue to support MSME development, especially in the form of small grants, and to reinforce measures to encourage female entrepreneurship and opportunities for vulnerable groups;
19. emphasise the role of social dialogue and of collective bargaining in achieving quality jobs, decent work and health and safety in the workplace and reiterate that prevention is the best way to minimise accidents in the workplace.