

Wednesday 14 December 2022

P9_TA(2022)0442

Annual implementing report on the EU association agreement with Georgia**European Parliament resolution of 14 December 2022 on the implementation of the EU Association Agreement with Georgia (2021/2236(INI))**

(2023/C 177/07)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 8 and Title V, and notably Articles 21, 22, 36 and 37, of the Treaty on European Union, as well as to Part Five of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to the Association Agreement (AA) between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part ⁽¹⁾, which fully entered into force on 1 July 2016,
- having regard to the Commission opinion of 17 June 2022 on Georgia's application for membership of the European Union (COM(2022)0405),
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 23-24 June 2022 regarding the membership applications of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia,
- having regard to its previous resolutions on Georgia,
- having regard to its recommendation of 8 June 2022 to the Council and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the EU's Foreign, Security and Defence Policy after the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to the agreement reached between Georgian political forces on 19 April 2021, mediated by the President of the European Council,
- having regard to the 'Association Implementation Report on Georgia' of 10 August 2022 (SWD(2022)0215),
- having regard to the Association Agenda between the European Union and Georgia for 2021-2027, adopted on 16 August 2022 ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to the outcome of the seventh Association Council meeting between the EU and Georgia of 6 September 2022,
- having regard to the Economic and Investment Plan for the Eastern Partnership, as laid out in Annex I of 'Recovery, resilience and reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities' of 2 July 2021 (SWD(2021)0186),
- having regard to the 2022 World Press Freedom Index, published by Reporters Without Borders,
- having regard to the urgent opinion of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission of 26 August 2022 on the draft law on the amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code adopted by the Parliament of Georgia on 7 June 2022, its opinion of 20 June 2022 on the December 2021 amendments to the organic law on common courts, its urgent opinion of 2 July 2021 on the amendments to the organic law on common courts, its urgent joint opinion of 5 July 2022 on the revised draft amendments to the election code, its opinion of 8 October 2020 on the draft organic law amending the organic law on common courts and its urgent opinion of 16 April 2019 on the selection and appointment of Supreme Court judges,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 261, 30.8.2014, p. 4.

⁽²⁾ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2022)0235.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 218, 23.8.2022, p. 40.

Wednesday 14 December 2022

- having regard to the opinion of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of 18 February 2022 on the legislative amendments on the State Inspector's Service of Georgia and its final report of 23 August 2021 on the nomination and appointment of Supreme Court judges in Georgia,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure, as well as Article 1(1)(e) of, and Annex 3 to, the decision of the Conference of Presidents of 12 December 2002 on the procedure for granting authorisation to draw up own-initiative reports,
 - having regard to the opinion of the Committee on International Trade,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0274/2022),
- A. whereas Georgia submitted its application for EU membership on 3 March 2022 in the context of continued strong public support for Georgia's European aspirations, as well as the new geopolitical situation resulting from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine;
- B. whereas in its conclusions of 23-24 June 2022, the European Council recognised Georgia's European perspective and expressed its readiness to grant it candidate country status once the priorities specified in the Commission's opinion on Georgia's application have been addressed;
- C. whereas the Russian Federation continues its illegal occupation of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia in violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, as well as the EU-mediated ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008;
- D. whereas the Russian Federation and its occupation regimes are deliberately hampering the safe and dignified return of internally displaced persons and refugees who were forcibly expelled as a result of ethnic cleansing from the Russian-occupied Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia;
- E. whereas the Russian Federation is continuing its 'creeping' annexation process of Georgia's occupied territories, including through its intention to hold a 'referendum' in the Tskhinvali region on 'joining' Russia, the transfer of the Bichvinta property complex and the surrounding area to the Russian Federation, and the further incorporation of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia into the military, economic, justice, social and other sectors of the Russian Federation;
- F. whereas continued ethnic discrimination and other severe human rights violations against Georgians in the Russian-occupied territories of Georgia, the erection of barbed wire fences and other artificial barriers, the lengthy closure of so-called crossing points along the occupation line and the illegal detentions and kidnappings of Georgian citizens by the Russian occupation forces destabilise the situation throughout the country;
- G. whereas since the launch of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, thousands of Russians have arrived in Georgia to escape Western sanctions and the mobilisation ordered by Putin, as have numerous Belarusians, including those trying to escape persecution;
- H. whereas Russia continues to employ disinformation, cyberattacks and other hybrid methods to undermine Georgia's societal and institutional resilience;
- I. whereas Georgia continues to participate in civil and military crisis management operations under the common security and defence policy (CSDP) and has provided 32 troops to the EU Military Training Mission in the Central African Republic and one officer to the EU Training Mission in Mali;
- J. whereas former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, whose health is continuing to deteriorate according to recent reports, is still lacking proper care, which raises fears for his life;
- K. whereas a toxicology report by Dr David E. Smith, M.D. & Associates concluded that the testing of hair and nail samples from Mikheil Saakashvili had revealed the presence of heavy metals and other agents, among others, mercury and arsenic, and that many of the pathological symptoms displayed by Mikheil Saakashvili are the result of heavy metal poisoning, contributing to his rapidly declining health;
- L. whereas in their AA in force since 1 July 2016, Georgia and the EU committed to promoting political association and economic integration based on their common values and principles of democracy, the rule of law, good governance, human rights and fundamental freedoms;

Wednesday 14 December 2022

- M. whereas Georgia continues to make progress in its implementation of the AA and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) and is continuing to align with the EU *acquis* and EU standards; whereas although the EU is Georgia's key trade partner, the potential of this cooperation has not yet been fully exploited;
- N. whereas a number of crucial laws, including on the functioning of the judiciary and key appointment procedures, procedures for covert surveillance and the disbandment of the State Inspector's Service, were rushed through the Georgian Parliament without the necessary consultations or analysis of compliance with EU or Council of Europe standards, as noted in the Commission's 2022 Association Implementation Report on Georgia;
- O. whereas the 19 April 2021 Agreement, mediated by the President of the European Council, underlined the need to address perceptions of politicised justice through judicial reform in order to increase the independence, transparency and accountability of the judicial system;
- P. whereas selective investigations and prosecutions targeting those critical of the current government undermine public trust not only in judicial institutions, but also in the Georgian authorities;
- Q. whereas the situation regarding the freedom of expression, freedom of media and the safety of journalists, which are cornerstones of a functioning democracy, continues to deteriorate and in 2022, Georgia fell from 60th to 89th place out of 180 in the World Press Freedom Index; whereas the public's trust in media is very low in Georgia;
- R. whereas Nika Gvaramia, the director of the TV channel Mtavari, has been sentenced to three and a half years in prison on dubious charges of money laundering, bribery and document forgery;
- S. whereas anti-Western propaganda and disinformation have recently significantly increased in Georgian media and social networks; whereas members of the ruling party continue to use polarising and hostile language when referring to EU institutions and their representatives;
- T. whereas gender equality remains a challenge, as evidenced by Georgia's slide in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index from 49th place out of 154 countries in 2021 to 55th out of 146 countries in 2022, which indicates deteriorations in the fields of educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment; whereas the issues of gender-based and domestic violence and discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons are still cause for concern;
1. Welcomes the decision of the European Council to recognise the European perspective of Georgia, within its internationally recognised borders; notes that this decision is a strong signal of political support for the European aspirations of the people of Georgia and, therefore, urges Georgia to seize this historic window of opportunity; reiterates that to be granted candidate status, Georgia needs to successfully address the 12 key priorities indicated by the Commission in its opinion on Georgia's application for membership of the European Union and endorsed by the European Council;
 2. Calls on the Georgian authorities to uphold the highest standards of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms and to resolutely pursue the priorities for reform that were set out in the Commission's opinion and that reflect the agreement brokered on 19 April 2021 in order to unambiguously demonstrate their political determination to implement the nation's ambitious European aspirations, as expressed by the application for EU membership that Georgia submitted on 3 March 2022; welcomes the immediate steps taken by Georgia to initiate the working process to address these priorities and encourages the Georgian authorities to lead this process in an inclusive and transparent manner; calls on all Georgian political forces to constructively participate in and contribute to these efforts and calls on Georgian authorities to take into account proposals submitted by civil society organisations, in order to ensure the meaningful and credible involvement of civil society in decision-making processes at all levels, in particular regarding these important reforms; stresses that Georgia's bid for accession to the EU will continue to be assessed based on its own merits and its success in meeting the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership, in particular as regards democratic reforms;
 3. Encourages Georgia to continue its enhanced cooperation with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova at all levels of governance, to exchange best practices on fulfilling the EU membership criteria for the future accession process and to boost regional cooperation in the Eastern Partnership;

Wednesday 14 December 2022

Territorial integrity and security

4. Underlines that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine calls for unity and solidarity on the part of the international community, as this will also be decisive for the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity, which the international community did not defend with sufficient strength in 2008; welcomes the strong response of Georgian society in support of Ukraine; pays tribute to the soldiers of the Georgian Legion in Ukraine who have been fighting against the Russian aggressors since 2014; calls on the Georgian authorities to align with relevant statements from the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative for the Union on Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on behalf of the EU and with Council decisions, in line with the country's European ambitions; calls on the authorities to align with EU sanctions and to ensure that international sanctions related to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine are not circumvented via Georgia;

5. Is concerned by reports that Russian people and entities are allegedly using Georgia to bypass Western sanctions; calls for the EU institutions to further examine these allegations, in particular various reports, including one by the Ukrainian National Agency on Corruption Prevention, about Bidzina Ivanishvili's ties to Russia; should these allegations be confirmed, calls for personal sanctions to be introduced against him and his closest associates; recalls that members of Ivanishvili's family and his close associates have been sanctioned by Ukraine for their links to the Kremlin, which are behind the ambiguous position of the current Government of Georgia towards Russia; welcomes, in this regard, the adoption of the eighth package of sanctions against Russia, which includes a new listing criterion which will allow the EU to sanction persons who facilitate infringements of the prohibition against the circumvention of sanctions;

6. Reiterates its steadfast support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders; calls for the continuation of efforts to achieve a negotiated peaceful resolution of the conflict and an end to the Russian occupation of Georgian territory; while recognising the challenging context, encourages Georgia to further engage in constructive dialogue with the populations of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia in order to build trust and confidence with a view to sustainable conflict resolution; calls for the EU to continue to pursue its engagement for the peaceful resolution of the Russia-Georgia conflict by effectively using all the instruments available, including the Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, the Geneva International Discussions, the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms, the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia, and its policy of non-recognition and engagement; welcomes the extension of the mandate of the EUMM in Georgia until 14 December 2024 in order to allow it to continue fulfilling its tasks to stabilise and normalise the situation and build confidence between the parties in the conflict in an increasingly tense security environment;

7. Strongly condemns the illegal occupation of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia by the Russian Federation and the continued illegal 'borderisation' activities in those regions; expresses concern over the dire security, humanitarian and human rights situation in Georgia's occupied territories, and strongly denounces the discrimination against ethnic Georgians in the Gali and Akhagori districts, the violation of their right to access education in their mother tongue, the illegal detentions, kidnappings and restrictions on the freedom of movement happening along the Administrative Boundary Line, and the violation of the right of internally displaced persons and refugees forcibly expelled from Georgia's occupied territories, including as a result of ethnic cleansing, to return to their homes in safety and dignity; underlines the importance of people-to-people contacts and confidence-building measures between the communities divided by the conflict;

8. Calls on the Russian Federation to fulfil its international obligations under the EU-mediated ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008, notably its obligation to withdraw all its military and security personnel from Georgia's occupied territories and to allow the establishment of international security mechanisms therein, and to allow the EUMM unhindered access to the whole territory of Georgia pursuant to its mandate;

9. Underlines Georgia's role as a reliable security partner of the EU through its significant contributions to EU CSDP operations; calls on the Council and the European External Action Service to further engage with Georgia on the CSDP, particularly in view of Georgia's interest in participating in Permanent Structured Cooperation projects and in developing cooperation with the relevant EU agencies;

10. Calls for increased assistance to Georgia and for enhanced partnership with it in the area of security and defence, as declared in the EU Strategic Compass, including through the European Peace Facility; welcomes the EU's commitment and determination to support Georgia in countering hybrid threats and welcomes its recognition that maritime security in the Black Sea is of key importance for the EU's security;

Wednesday 14 December 2022

Political dialogue and elections

11. Regrets that deep polarisation continues to be the defining feature of Georgia's political environment; calls on all political stakeholders to refrain from any divisive and aggressive rhetoric, and to unite their forces in order to avoid jeopardising their key goal of Georgia's EU membership through the implementation of ambitious democratic, judicial and anti-corruption reforms; emphasises the need to build and increase trust among all political and institutional stakeholders, as well as between them and the Georgian people; underlines, however, that the ruling party holds most of the tools and bears the main responsibility to deliver on that; reiterates that the core provisions of the EU-brokered agreement of 19 April 2021 continue to present a pathway towards strengthening democracy and the rule of law and reducing polarisation in Georgia and are therefore reflected in the 2021-2027 EU-Georgia Association Agenda; regrets the withdrawal of the governing Georgian Dream party from the April 19 agreement and calls on all political forces to honour the commitments made as part of the agreement; notes that the court's decision to convict the leaders of the Lelo for Georgia party, Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze, and the use of the court's verdict to strip Japaridze of his parliamentary mandate are a clear demonstration of politicised justice; stresses that further convictions of political leaders will contradict the declared intentions to reduce polarisation;

12. Calls on Georgian political leaders to stop aggressive verbal attacks against Members of the European Parliament and other representatives of Euro-Atlantic partners, such as the EU or the US, as well as the baseless and harmful rhetoric claiming the alleged intention of international partners to 'drag Georgia into the war'; notes with concern rising anti-Western propaganda, disinformation and rhetoric in Georgia, which are at odds with the undiminished and extraordinarily high public support for the country's Euro-Atlantic integration;

13. Calls on the Georgian authorities to complete the country's electoral reform and address persistent shortcomings in electoral campaigns and the conduct of elections in time for the 2024 parliamentary elections and in line with the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, in particular on pressure on voters and candidates by public officials and electoral contestants and allegations of intimidation, coercion and vote-buying, and on the misuse of administrative resources during the electoral process; welcomes the fact that the Georgian authorities have submitted the draft amendments to the Electoral Code to the OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission for opinion and calls on the authorities to fully implement the forthcoming recommendations from these bodies before the draft amendments are adopted; encourages the Georgian authorities to address the issue of the voting rights of Georgian citizens living abroad; regrets the exclusion of the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy from the parliamentary working group on electoral reform and calls for its inclusion in the process; reminds Georgian authorities of their pledge to lower the electoral threshold for parliamentary elections;

14. Underlines the need to eliminate the excessive influence of vested interests in economic, political and public life as one of the priorities identified by the Commission to be addressed before Georgia is granted candidate status; recommends addressing the excessive influence of vested interests, notably of the oligarch and former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, in a systemic way through structural and regulatory reforms in various areas of the country's political, economic and public life; reiterates its call on the Council and democratic partners to take appropriate measures, including imposing personal sanctions on Ivanishvili and all those individuals enabling and responsible for the deterioration of the democratic political process;

15. Welcomes the consultation of the Venice Commission on the recent draft law on 'de-oligarchisation'; urges the Parliament of Georgia to duly take into account the forthcoming opinion of the Venice Commission and to ensure that any draft law on the matter is in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission when it is adopted and that it is based on the objective of eliminating all excessive influence of vested interests in economic, political and public life through a systemic approach;

16. Expresses grave concern regarding the toxicology report by Dr David E. Smith, M.D. & Associates which concluded that many of the pathological symptoms displayed by Mikheil Saakashvili are the result of heavy metal poisoning, contributing to his rapidly declining health; reiterates that the Georgian Government bears full responsibility for the health and wellbeing of the former President and must be held accountable should anything happen to him; invites the President of Georgia to use her constitutional prerogatives to resolve this issue; calls on the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to become actively involved in securing the release of the former President; reiterates its call on the Georgian authorities to release former President Mikheil Saakashvili and allow him to receive proper medical treatment abroad in accordance with Article 283 of the Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia, on humanitarian grounds and as a means of reducing political polarisation;

Wednesday 14 December 2022

The rule of law, good governance and media freedom

17. Underlines the importance of implementing an ambitious, genuine and thorough justice reform on the basis of a transparent and effective post-2021 judicial reform strategy and action plan through a broad, inclusive and cross-party consultation process; regrets that the reform of the judiciary has stalled and even regressed in several key areas; calls on the authorities to address the shortcomings identified by the Venice Commission in the nomination and appointment of judges at all levels, in particular to the Supreme Court, and of the Prosecutor-General in order to bring the process fully in line with European standards; welcomes the steps to align the appointment of the Prosecutor-General with the Venice Commission's recommendations; calls for a thorough reform of the High Council of Justice, which should be carried out before its remaining members are appointed, the procedure for which should be transparent, merit-based and in line with European standards; underlines the mutually agreed upon 2021-2027 EU-Georgia Association Agenda and the relevant commitments made therein by the Georgian authorities, in particular concerning the High Council of Justice and the Prosecutor-General;

18. Stresses that hasty and non-transparent actions in making key appointments or institutional changes lead to the further politicisation of the judiciary, which should urgently be addressed; regrets in particular, in this respect, that the Supreme Court judges were appointed for life-long terms before the shortcomings in the nomination process identified by ODIHR and the Venice Commission were addressed and despite repeated calls to pause and bring the appointment process in line with European standards; reiterates that the lack of progress on judicial reform meant that the conditions for receiving the EUR 75 million tranche of EU macro-financial assistance by September 2021 were not fulfilled; emphasises that all appointments need to be transparent, fully in line with European standards, and made on the basis of integrity, independence, impartiality and competence;

19. Expresses concern about continued state capture and the stagnation of the fight against corruption; reiterates its call on the Georgian authorities to step up the fight against corruption and organised crime; notes the adoption of the legislative changes setting up a new Anti-Corruption Bureau and calls on the Georgian authorities to submit them to the Venice Commission for opinion and to fully implement the forthcoming recommendations, in particular so that the new Anti-Corruption Bureau can rigorously address high-level corruption cases, and to provide it with adequate means and resources to fully exercise its mandate; calls further on the Georgian authorities to enforce the legislative norms on preventing corruption, on the principles of integrity and on conflicts of interest in public service, and to ensure the detection of any violations thereof;

20. Calls on the Georgian authorities to effectively investigate the massive illegal wiretapping revealed in September 2021, which included the communications of the head of the EU Delegation to Georgia; is concerned about the amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia that increase the number of crimes for which covert investigative actions are permitted and the duration of these actions, which were adopted by the Georgian Parliament on 7 June 2022 and vetoed by the president on 22 June 2022; calls on the Georgian authorities to implement the recommendations of the Venice Commission issued on 26 August 2022, in particular to ensure a transparent and inclusive legislative process by including all relevant stakeholders and civil society;

21. Underlines the emphasis the Commission's opinion put on multi-level governance, the decentralisation process and public administration reforms in order to establish successful European-standard local self-government and prevent the concentration of power at the central level; insists on the important role of decentralised cooperation between the EU and Georgia; stresses the importance of further strengthening administrative capacity at central and local-government level;

22. Expresses serious concern about the fact that, despite Georgia's solid legal framework for guaranteeing freedom of expression and freedom of media, there was a deterioration in the media environment and the safety of journalists in 2021; condemns the cases of intimidation, threats and violence against and persecution of journalists, including an increasing number of criminal investigations against media workers and owners; calls on Georgian authorities to respond promptly to and effectively investigate allegations of illegal interference and abuse of power towards representatives of the media, as well as to bring laws relating to media freedom, such as the Law on Electronic Communications, in line with international standards and recommendations from the Venice Commission;

23. Calls on Georgia to ensure media freedom, which entails editorial independence, transparent media ownership and pluralistic, impartial and non-discriminatory coverage of political views in programming by private and, in particular, public broadcasters, especially during electoral campaign periods, as well as to ensure unhindered access to information that is supposed to be publicly available and the safety, protection and empowerment of journalists and other media

Wednesday 14 December 2022

professionals; calls on all the representatives of the Georgian authorities to refrain from using aggressive rhetoric and discriminatory treatment towards media representatives in Georgia and to advocate for a tolerant approach that is respectful of human rights in their public statements;

24. Calls on the Georgian authorities to stop politically motivated criminal cases and to review the ongoing criminal cases against media workers, owners of media outlets critical of the government, and their close family members; recalls, in this regard, the case of Nika Gvaramia, director of Mtavari TV, and those of the directors and founders of other media outlets, such as Formula TV and Pirveli TV; expresses its deep concern about the fact that on 2 November 2022, the Tbilisi Court of Appeals upheld the sentencing of Nika Gvaramia on dubious charges despite the significant questions raised about the case, in particular its timing and charges; invites the President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, to pardon Nika Gvaramia; recalls the key priorities indicated by the Commission in its opinion of 17 June 2022, including the call on Georgian authorities to ensure that criminal procedures brought against media owners fulfil the highest legal standards; takes note of the statement of the Public Defender of Georgia on 7 December 2022, which calls on the President of Georgia to make use of the pardon mechanism concerning Nika Gvaramia, as the case lacks justification and does not correspond to the fundamental principles of criminal law; expects the European External Action Service and the EU Delegation to Georgia to continue to monitor on the ground all trials in Georgia related to politically motivated cases;

25. Expects the Georgian Government and authorities to take their obligation to provide safety to those sheltering from authoritarian regimes seriously, following reports that non-Georgian journalists have experienced harassment and government interference at the Georgian border;

26. Recalls that Georgia is heavily exposed to Russian propaganda and disinformation campaigns; stresses the importance of continuous efforts to increase Georgian society's resistance against such campaigns and attempts to influence Georgian politics and public opinion, including by protecting the pluralism and independence of the media and improving media literacy; calls for the EU institutions and the Member States to continue strengthening cooperation with relevant Georgian institutions to address Russian disinformation and its consequences;

27. Notes that Russian propaganda uses the totalitarian past and the cult of totalitarian communist leaders as a tool of influence in Georgia; stresses that the glorification of Stalin, including through the erection of new statues, distorts the bloody and cruel legacy of communism and is an affront to the millions of victims of Stalinist terror; commends civil society for countering Russian disinformation, including through initiatives such as the Soviet Past Research Laboratory (SovLab);

Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms

28. Condemns the violence committed against peaceful participants of the Tbilisi Pride march on 5 July 2021 and the journalists covering the event; strongly denounces the lack of diligent investigations into or prosecutions of those responsible for organising the violence; notes that six perpetrators of the violence were sentenced to a maximum of five years in prison in April 2022, but calls on the Prosecutor-General's Office to conduct a comprehensive and effective investigation into all the organisers and perpetrators of the violence in the light of the overwhelming amount of evidence gathered by the media, civil society and the Public Defender of Georgia; notes that the events planned for the 2022 Tbilisi Pride took place indoors and that the police reacted in time to prevent interference and violence by groups opposing the Pride events; urges the Georgian Government to uphold the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, and calls on Georgian authorities to ensure the safety of demonstrators;

29. Calls on the authorities to ensure the protection of human rights, in particular those of women and other vulnerable groups, such as the LGBTIQ+ community and ethnic minorities, and to fully implement human rights and anti-discrimination legislation in practice and effectively combat impunity for all violations of human rights, in particular for serious violations; urges the adoption of the 2021-2030 human rights strategy and action plan; commends the Georgian Government for creating the Interagency Coordinating Committee responsible for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, under the supervision of the Prime Minister; calls on the Georgian authorities to work on its deinstitutionalisation strategy and action plan, in line with the requirements of the Code on the Rights of the Child, as violence against children in a family context and in residential care, foster care and educational institutions remains a significant problem;

Wednesday 14 December 2022

30. Calls on the Georgian authorities to further improve women's representation and equal treatment at all levels of political, economic and societal life to eradicate inequality in the labour market and the gender pay gap; urges the Georgian Government and authorities to adopt and effectively implement legislation against gender-based and domestic violence and femicides, step up support for survivors, and implement rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators and awareness-raising campaigns, in particular at the local community level;
31. Condemns the continued discrimination of LGBTIQ+ groups and persons, including in labour, health, social and economic areas, as well as their targeting by ultra-nationalist hate groups;
32. Reiterates the importance of independent oversight of Georgia's state institutions; expresses serious concern, in this respect, about the dismantling of the State Inspector's Service against ODIHR recommendations and without meaningful prior consultations; highlights the positive role of Nino Lomjaria, the Public Defender of Georgia, in protecting human rights, promoting good governance, strengthening the rule of law, safeguarding media freedom and overseeing the compliance of policies and actions of the executive with international human rights standards; condemns the regular attempts, including by the authorities, to undermine the independence of the Public Defender of Georgia and to cast doubts on the integrity of the office and its staff; welcomes the establishment of an independent board to evaluate the candidates for the post of Public Defender of Georgia and calls on the parliamentary majority to select one of the top three independent candidates put forward by the board without delay;
33. Emphasises the crucial role of civil society organisations in democratic oversight; calls on the Commission and the Member States to provide political, technical and financial support to civil society and independent media and to distribute core funds to civil society to boost capacity-building and expertise;
34. Calls on Georgia to restrict the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation targeting human rights defenders and media representatives and thereby inhibiting their critical and independent work;
35. Expresses concern regarding the number of Georgian asylum seekers in the EU and calls on the Georgian authorities to increase cooperation with their European partners and take further measures to address this issue;

Economic and trade relations

36. Welcomes Georgia's positive track record in approximating its laws and building a fully functioning market economy; calls for the opportunities presented by the Economic and Investment Plan to be used to build a dynamic and resilient economy that is ready to be integrated into the EU single market; further welcomes the fact that the EU is Georgia's leading trade partner, as around 21 % of Georgia's total trade is with the EU; calls on the Commission to review the DCFTA's potential to increase trade volumes between the EU and Georgia through coordinated assistance, with a focus on support for small and medium-sized enterprises and structural reforms, including developing quality infrastructure, such as laboratories in Georgia for EU certification of sanitary and phytosanitary, and technical barriers to trade standards; welcomes Georgia's application to join the Single Euro Payments Area;
37. Encourages the Georgian authorities to boost the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises in the DCFTA, notably by increasing communication about the opportunities available to them, by enhancing access to export facilities and by making the best possible use of the existing Commission programmes ENPARD (European Neighbourhood programme for agriculture and rural development) Georgia and EU4Business;

Sectoral cooperation

38. Reiterates that the AA, the DCFTA and the 2021-2027 Association Agenda provide a solid framework for bringing Georgia closer to the EU through gradual integration into the EU single market and enhanced sectoral cooperation;

Wednesday 14 December 2022

39. Calls on the Commission and the Council to establish enhanced and structured political dialogue with Georgia and other candidate and potential candidate countries in order to advance further economic integration and legislative harmonisation; believes that this dialogue should include meetings on the margins of the European Council with leaders of the relevant countries, that their representatives should regularly participate in the meetings of the European Council working groups and committees on a structured basis, and that these countries should be included as observers in the proceedings of the committees established pursuant to Article 291 TFEU and Regulation (EU) No 182/2011⁽⁴⁾ to strengthen these countries' reform orientation and administrative know-how;
40. Underlines the importance of enhanced transport, energy and digital connectivity as a means of making full use of the geographical and economic potential of Georgia at all levels, especially in small, medium-sized and rural municipalities;
41. Calls on Georgia to improve its energy sector and connectivity, while ensuring environmental sustainability, enhancing its fight against climate change and protecting the environment, in particular by preserving biodiversity and protected sites, including through further legislative alignment with the EU *acquis* and European Green Deal policies, as well as by strengthening Georgia's administration to enable the green transition;
42. Calls on the Georgian authorities to undertake crucial steps to unbundle and certify the electricity and gas transmission system operators in order to accelerate the green transition and avoid energy dependence on Russia, in line with the REPowerEU Plan;
43. Encourages the Commission, the European Network of Transmission System Operators and Georgia to assess the possibility of synchronising the Georgian electricity grid with the European continental grid and of including Georgia in the Continental Europe Synchronous Area;
44. Calls on the Georgian Government to step up its efforts to increase and sustain socio-economic development in order to ensure rising income levels and regional development; reiterates its support for the development of human capital through the strengthening of the private sector's role in managing the vocational education system and addressing skills mismatches to improve employment prospects;
45. Urges the Commission, the Member States and Georgia to increase cooperation on public health resilience, including between public health authorities, on research facilities and on emergency capabilities, as well as to exchange best practice and work with civil society on establishing epidemic strategies focusing on the most vulnerable groups, including the elderly, the homeless, seasonal workers and migrants;
46. Welcomes the adoption of Georgia's overarching national strategy on public health for 2022-2030 and the accompanying action plan, as well as the new mental-health strategy for 2022-2030 and the accompanying action plan;
47. Welcomes Georgia's continued efforts to strengthen its international law enforcement cooperation with the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL), including the signing of a new working arrangement between CEPOL and Georgia on 22 June 2022, which will enhance the sharing of knowledge, expertise, best practices and coordinated approaches to learning;
48. Welcomes the adoption of labour reforms and calls on the Government of Georgia to further improve Georgia's framework for protecting labour rights, including by ensuring an effective labour inspection system with adequate competences, capacities and resources, improving core labour legislation to bring it fully in line with International Labour Organization standards and EU regulations, enacting a minimum wage in consultation with social partners and labour rights organisations, developing effective social protection schemes for workers and creating an action plan for formalising the informal sector;

⁽⁴⁾ Regulation (EU) No 182/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 laying down the rules and general principles concerning mechanisms for control by Member States of the Commission's exercise of implementing powers (OJ L 55, 28.2.2011, p. 13).

Wednesday 14 December 2022

49. Calls on the Commission to support the creation of a common roaming space between Georgia and the EU through coordinated assistance with a focus on gradually reducing international roaming tariffs between Georgia and the EU in line with EU regulations, thus protecting consumers' rights, as well as assisting Georgia to come into line gradually with the EU *acquis* and contributing to Georgia's European integration process;

50. Calls on the Commission to support Georgia's efforts to position itself as a regional hub for digital connectivity and digital services and to promote its digital sovereignty by developing strategic international connectivity and digital transport corridors between Europe and various parts of Asia via Georgia; welcomes the EU assistance programmes in support of digitalisation, such as EU4Digital and EaP Connect, but also highlights the necessity of accessible digital connectivity, notably in rural areas, and the efforts made towards it; welcomes the investment initiative for fast broadband for rural settlements; welcomes the adoption of the 2021-2024 national cybersecurity strategy and action plan; calls on Georgian authorities to work with the EU on strengthening the country's cyber resilience in line with the EU's best practices and legislation, notably the EU Directive on security of network and information systems^(?);

51. Calls on the Commission and Georgia to consider increasing the number of Trans-European Transport Network projects in Georgia; highlights negative security implications of Chinese investments in strategic infrastructure; regrets the continued delays in the development of the Anaklia Deep Sea Port, following the Georgian Government's cancellation of the project contract with the Anaklia Development Consortium in 2020; expresses hope that Georgia will accelerate the port's construction, in line with Georgia's strategic Euro-Atlantic objectives;

52. Welcomes Georgia's association to Horizon Europe, the EU's research and innovation programme for 2021-2027, which opens up new opportunities for the Georgian scientific and innovation community, and welcomes Georgia's commitment to starting the process of becoming an associated third country of the Erasmus+ programme;

Institutional provisions

53. Reaffirms its commitment to supporting Georgia's parliamentary democracy through capacity development; regrets that the European Parliament's offer to the Parliament of Georgia to establish a Jean Monnet Dialogue has not been accepted;

o

o o

54. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the Government and Parliament of Georgia.

^(?) Directive (EU) 2016/1148 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 July 2016 concerning measures for a high common level of security of network and information systems across the Union (OJ L 194, 19.7.2016, p. 1).