



April 1, 2013

STATEMENT

Georgia's EU Integration Challenges and Cohabitation

The Georgian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum welcomes the steps taken by Georgia's executive and legislative branches of government towards European integration, chiefly: successful ongoing talks on a European Union Association Agreement, the adoption of the action plan for visa liberalization with the EU, and the unanimous passage in the Parliament of a resolution on Georgia's general foreign policy direction.

Despite the progress achieved, the dissemination of false information about the challenges accompanying the cohabitation process as well as the inappropriate manner in which this information is being reported abroad is problematic and can have a negative effect on prospects for bringing Georgia closer to the EU, including on the Association Agreement process.

A good example of this is the opposition United National Movement's attempts to manipulate the European integration issue to achieve its party's concrete goals. While on the other hand, the executive branch of Georgia's government and the ruling political power's public debate with the European People's Party and the discussions surrounding it are gradually exceeding the boundaries of constructiveness. The escalation of confrontations could become harmful to the country's image and interests.

We can take the challenges of post-election cohabitation and the restricted functionality of Georgia's foreign missions as one of the main reasons for the manipulation of European integration issues; the offering of incorrect and incomplete information to a whole slew of European structures, which creates the impression that there is a serious political crisis in the country; as a result, unjustified criticism directed against the new government is heard periodically.

An example of this is the fact that with the many problems in Georgia's media sector, the wrong interpretations in connection with the reformation of the Public Broadcaster were described in the Resolution 1920/2013 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). It is unfortunate that PACE did not check the facts with civil society representatives. As a result, such unobjective

criticism diminishes the people's trust in European institutions, diverts the international community's attention away from existing problems and limits opportunities to uproot them effectively.

We think that it is important for all branches of Georgia's government to pursue direct and intensive communications with European structures and European political parties, by offering accurate and detailed information, so that the Association Agreement process between Georgia and the EU is not hindered at the Vilnius Summit. On this matter, we express our preparedness to provide objective information to all sides involved in the process.

We think that broad public debate about the issue of European integration is necessary as it will help establish appropriate expectations ahead of the Vilnius Summit and help stop the manipulation of the European integration issue for achieving internal political goals.

According to EU Commissioner Stefan Fule's statement, Georgia unambiguously demonstrated its European aspirations, but that now it is necessary for Georgia's government to come together to prove that cohabitation will not be a hindering factor in the European integration process. "We are aware that this is a big challenge for a country which has for the first time in its history, succeeded in changing its government through free and peaceful elections. But it is important, and this is required of both sides, that they place the interests of the country above personal or party interests."

European integration is the strongly expressed desire of a large majority of Georgia's population and the democratic course does not have an alternative for the country's security and stable development. It is necessary for politicians to take all possible steps for the realization of the country's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

Signatory Organisations:

1. Association "Green Alternative"
2. Georgia Press Association
3. Penal Reform International
4. European Initiative - Liberal Academy Tbilisi
5. Transparency International Georgia
6. Open Society Georgia Foundation
7. Eurasia Partnership Foundation
8. Georgian Young Lawyers' Association
9. The Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia
10. Georgian Red Cross Society
11. Human Rights Centre
12. Association "Woman and Business"
13. Foundation "Multi- Ethnic Resource Centre on Civic Education Development"

14. Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters
15. Women's Initiatives supporting Group
16. International Fund of Sustainable Development
17. Levan Mikeladze Foundation
18. International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy
19. The European Law Students' Association
20. Caucasian University Women
21. Public Advocacy
22. Healthy World
23. International Business and Economic Development Centre
24. The Greens Movement of Georgia
25. Association for the Farmers' Rights Defence
26. International Organization of Human Rights protection and Prisoners social welfare
27. Union "Article 42 of the Constitution"
28. International Centre on Conflict and Negotiation
29. Institute for Development of Freedom of Information
30. Association and Radio "Green Wave"
31. Coalition for Independent Living
32. Studio "Re"
33. Association "MERKURI"
34. Energy Efficiency Foundation
35. Local Democracy Agency
36. United Public Movement "Multinational Georgia"
37. Institute of Democracy
38. International Centre for Civic Culture
39. Teachers' Union "Education and Universe"
40. Samtskhe-Javakheti Regional Association "Toleranti"
41. Kutaisi Education Development and Employment Centre
42. Youth for Justice - Georgia
43. Community Foundation GENIUS LOCI
44. International Foundation "LEA"
45. Youth center – Georgia
46. Institute for Policy Studies
47. Youth Alternative
48. Caucasus Institute for Economic and Social Research
49. Association European Studies for the Innovative Development of Georgia
50. Association "Atinati"
51. Georgian Trade Union Confederation
52. Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Georgian National Committee