



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 966
Vienna, 10 October 2013**

**EU Statement in response to the address by the Minister of
Foreign Affairs of Georgia, H. E. Maia Panjikidze**

The European Union warmly welcomes H. E. Maia Panjikidze, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, to the Permanent Council and thanks her for her comprehensive address.

We acknowledge Georgia as a key partner of the EU and we welcome its commitment to continue to deepen its engagement with us. We congratulate Georgia on concluding the negotiations of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA/DCFTA) and we wish for a substantial outcome in Vilnius, including initialling the Agreement at the 2013 Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius and its signature in due time in 2014. The European Union respects its partners' free, sovereign and autonomous choices with respect to their international relations, and underlines that any undue pressure on its partners is not acceptable.

It is vital that Georgia maintains momentum in its reforms, including strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law. We encourage the authorities to take action on the recommendations outlined by Thomas Hammarberg, the EU Special Adviser on Constitutional and Legal Reform and Human Rights in Georgia in his assessment report.

One clear indicator of the progress achieved will be the conduct of the presidential elections later this month and the EU expects that they will be conducted fully in line with international standards. In view of that we attach particular importance to the work done by the international election observation

missions, especially by the ODIHR. We also expect that a spirit of constructive and pluralistic cooperation will characterise Georgian politics following the elections.

The European Union attaches the utmost importance to the reform of the judiciary in Georgia. Criminal prosecutions should be transparent, respectful of the due process, and apply the rule of law in an impartial way, free of political motivation – including in cases involving high profile political personalities. We call upon all those in authority to uphold the dignity of the legal process, including respect for the principle of the presumption of innocence in their public statements. We welcome ODIHR's trial monitoring mission and look forward to its report upon the conclusion of its work.

The protection of rights of persons belonging to minorities – including those differentiated by their ethnicity, religion or sexuality – should also be promoted throughout Georgia. We are still concerned about the response to the 17 May attack on LGBT activists, and the rise of tensions following the recent removal by force of a minaret in Chela.

Mr. Chairman,

The EU once more recalls its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders and we reiterate our concern about the continuing Russian military and security-related presence and infrastructure reinforcements in the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

We note with profound concern the continued and increasing activities by Russian security forces to erect fences and other obstacles along the administrative boundary lines in Georgia between the territory administered by the government in Tbilisi and regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Such activities – which contravene Georgia's territorial integrity – create significant

hardship for residents on either side of the administrative boundary lines and seriously challenge stability and security in these regions.

We call on the Russian Federation to remove these barriers and to fulfil its obligations under the ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008 and its subsequent implementing measures of 8 September 2008, including providing access to the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) to the breakaway regions. In this context we continue to stress the importance of resuming the effective functioning of the Gali Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meetings. We also remain convinced of the urgent need for a meaningful cross-dimensional OSCE presence throughout Georgia.

Mr. Chairman,

Once more, the EU reaffirms its commitment to remain engaged and involved in the stabilisation and conflict resolution efforts in Georgia, including by continuing its engagement as the leading co-chair in the Geneva Discussions, the efforts of the EUSR, and the continued presence on the ground of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), which plays an active role in the IPRMs within its stabilisation, normalisation and confidence-building mandate.

Finally, the EU firmly believes that the current format of the Geneva Discussions continues to be the only forum to address and resolve the challenges and problems related to the conflict, with the participation of all stakeholders. We call on all actors concerned to show their commitment to the process and to engage constructively in it, including during the next round of the Geneva talks scheduled for 5-6 November 2013.

Mr. Chairman,

The EU wishes to express its appreciation to H. E. Maia Panjikidze, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, for her presence at the Permanent Council today and wishes her well in her future endeavours.

Thank you.

The Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates ALBANIA and BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, as well as the Republic of MOLDOVA align themselves with this statement.

* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.
