STATEMENT BY THE CHAIR OF THE DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH THE SOUTH CAUCASUS, MEP Marina KALJURAND

on the 11th meeting of the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Association Committee

Tbilisi, 21 September 2022 – “The European Parliament and the Parliament of Georgia held the 11th meeting of their Parliamentary Association Committee (PAC) today in Tbilisi.

This meeting took place against the background of the European Council’s decision of 23 June to recognise Georgia’s European perspective. As Chair of the EP Delegation for relations with the South Caucasus and Co-Chair of the EU-Georgia PAC, I welcomed wholeheartedly this historic milestone in our relations. Yet, many of our Georgian friends were disappointed by the fact that their country, unlike Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, was not granted EU candidate status at this stage. There is one simple reason for this semi-success: tangible signs of backsliding, when it comes to democratic standards and the rule of law, have been observed in past years.

As a consequence, our Georgian partners must do their utmost to tackle the twelve priorities highlighted by the European Commission. They also need to realise that the European Union is much more than an area of economic growth and prosperity, or a compass for technical, legal approximation – it is, above all, a community of values.

We have noted with great satisfaction, during our visit, that support for EU integration remains very high among Georgians and across party lines. This is already a solid working basis. Therefore, we called on all the Georgian political forces to put their party interests aside and to work together, in a spirit of depolarisation, to meet their citizens’ expectations, in accordance with the agreement brokered by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, on 19 April 2021. To facilitate this process, we reiterated the European Parliament’s readiness to offer a wide range of democracy support activities, first and foremost a Jean Monnet Dialogue for Peace and Democracy, as a way to foster constructive cooperation between political parties in the Parliament of Georgia.

We welcomed the establishment of thematic working groups within the Parliament of Georgia. We invited all parliamentary groups and factions to join the parliamentary process, and asked the ruling party to ensure that said working groups and subsequent work in committees are transparent and inclusive, giving proper consideration to the views of the opposition parties, allowing their input on substance, and to the expertise of key civil society actors.

As our PAC meeting took place two weeks after the 7th meeting of the EU-Georgia Association Council, we welcomed the renewed commitment by both sides to further strengthen their relations by fully exploiting the potential of the Association Agreement, including the Deep and
Comprehensive Free Trade Area and by implementing the Association Agenda for the period 2021-2027 thoroughly.

We also underlined that significant progress was still needed - both in spirit and in action, when it comes to the rule of law, the independence, integrity and accountability of the judiciary and of security agencies, de-oligarchisation, media freedom and human rights - including gender equality and the rights of minority and vulnerable groups. The Georgian authorities need to address all these issues without further ado to show that they are serious about their declared intentions to obtain EU candidate status.

Unsurprisingly, we devoted much of our discussions to the consequences of Russia’s despicable, unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine. We were impressed by the solidarity shown by Georgian society, exemplified by massive deliveries of humanitarian aid to Ukrainian villages and cities. We also appreciated the Georgian authorities’ diplomatic support for Ukraine in international fora, notwithstanding regrettable communication mistakes, and invited them to make sure that their country cannot be used by Russian companies to circumvent sanctions.

Once again, we reiterated our unwavering support for Georgia’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, and condemned the illegal steps taken by the Russian Federation resulting in the further deterioration of the security and human rights situation in the occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali / South Ossetia. We expressed our full support for the EU’s endeavours to foster a peaceful resolution of the conflict via the activities of its Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia and of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia. In this respect, we insisted that none of Georgia’s Western partners has ever sought to draw the country into some kind of “second front” against Russia. We made clear that those who relay such nonsense do so either by naivety or ignorance, or because they play along with the Kremlin’s propaganda playbook intentionally. Conversely, we commended the Georgian authorities for their pragmatic ‘A Step to a Better Future’ peace initiative and emphasised the importance of people-to-people contacts and confidence-building between the communities divided by the conflict.”

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