



Opinion on the EU membership application by Georgia

Brussels, 17 June 2022

INTRODUCTION

Since its independence, Georgia has clearly expressed its European aspirations. This European ambition is included in the Georgian Constitution, and is supported by the people of Georgia (83% of Georgians approve joining the EU^[1]) and across the political spectrum. This has been a driver for a number of key reforms founded on European values and standards. Georgia's commitment to progress on its European path was underlined by the Government's initial intention to submit an application in 2024.

Application for membership

In this Opinion, the Commission assesses Georgia's application on the basis of its capacity to meet the criteria set by the European Council in Copenhagen in 1993, as well as in Madrid in 1995, notably regarding the country's administrative capacity. The Opinion also takes into account Georgia's efforts in implementing its obligations under the Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The Commission will assess the impact of Georgia's accession on the EU policy areas at a later stage.

Overall, as regards the **political criteria**, Georgia has a foundation in place to reach the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, even if recent developments have undermined the country's progress.

As regards the **economic criteria**, Georgia has achieved a good degree of macroeconomic stability with a track record of sound economic policy and a favourable business environment. In order to improve the functioning of its market economy, further reforms and investment are needed to ensure long-term inclusive growth and external competitiveness. In order to reinforce the capacity of the country to cope with competitive pressure in the EU, Georgia needs to strengthen in particular its human capital (particularly through education reform) to ensure skills for the labour market and innovativeness, strengthen physical infrastructure including renewable energy generation and transport infrastructure, as well as access to global value chains.

As regards the **capacity to fulfil the obligations of membership**, Georgia has worked since 2016 on the implementation of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA/DFCTA). These agreements already capture an unprecedented amount of the EU *acquis*. Georgia has gradually approximated to substantial elements of the EU *acquis* across many chapters. It has an overall positive track record of implementation, while in some sectors the country is more advanced than in others. Overall Georgia has established a solid basis for further alignment.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Commission therefore recommends to the Council that Georgia should be given **the perspective to become a member** of the European Union.

The Commission recommends that Georgia be granted **candidate status**, once the following priorities will have been addressed:

- address the issue of political polarisation, through ensuring cooperation across political parties in the spirit of the April 19 agreement;
- guarantee the full functioning of all state institutions, strengthening their independent and effective accountability as well as their democratic oversight functions; further improve the electoral framework, addressing all shortcomings identified by OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe/Venice Commission in these processes.
- adopt and implement a transparent and effective judicial reform strategy and action plan post-2021 based on a broad, inclusive and cross-party consultation process; ensure a judiciary that is fully and truly independent, accountable and impartial along the entire judicial institutional

chain, also to safeguard the separation of powers; notably ensure the proper functioning and integrity of all judicial and prosecutorial institutions, in particular the Supreme Court and address any shortcomings identified including the nomination of judges at all levels and of the Prosecutor-General; undertake a thorough reform of the High Council of Justice and appoint the High Council's remaining members. All these measures need to be fully in line with European standards and the recommendations of the Venice Commission.

- strengthen the independence of its Anti-Corruption Agency bringing together all key anti-corruption functions, in particular to rigorously address high-level corruption cases; equip the new Special Investigative Service and Personal Data Protection Service with resources commensurate to their mandates and ensure their institutional independence;
- implement the commitment to “de-oligarchisation” by eliminating the excessive influence of vested interests in economic, political, and public life;
- strengthen the fight against organised crime based on detailed threat assessments, notably by ensuring rigorous investigations, prosecutions and a credible track record of prosecutions and convictions; guarantee accountability and oversight of law enforcement agencies.
- undertake stronger efforts to guarantee a free, professional, pluralistic and independent media environment, notably by ensuring that criminal procedures brought against media owners fulfil the highest legal standards, and by launching impartial, effective and timely investigations in cases of threats against safety of journalists and other media professionals;
- move swiftly to strengthen the protection of human rights of vulnerable groups, including by bringing perpetrators and instigators of violence to justice more effectively;
- notably consolidate efforts to enhance gender equality and fight violence against women;
- ensure the involvement of civil society in decision-making processes at all levels;
- adopt legislation so that Georgian courts proactively take into account European Court of Human Rights judgments in their deliberations;
- ensure that an independent person is given preference in the process of nominating a new Public Defender (Ombudsperson) and that this process is conducted in a transparent manner; ensure the Office's effective institutional independence.

The Commission will monitor Georgia's progress to address these priorities and report on them by the end of 2022.

The accession process remains based on **established criteria and conditions**. This allows any country in the process to progress based on own merits but also means that steps towards the EU can be reversed if the underlying conditions are not met anymore.

Timeline / key dates

On 3 March 2022, Georgia presented its application for membership of the European Union. The application was tabled in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. On 7 March 2022, the Council of the European Union requested the Commission to submit its opinion on this application. EU Heads of State and Government endorsed this decision at the informal leaders meeting in Versailles^[2]. Georgia received questionnaires on 11 April 2022 on the political and economic criteria and on 19 April on the EU *acquis* chapters and provided its replies on 2 May and on 10 May.

[მეზობლებთან ერთად \(memo\): საჯარო ვერსია](#)

^[1] According to the January 2022 National Democratic Institute (NDI) survey.

^[2] [20220311-versailles-declaration-en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

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Press contacts:

[Ana PISONERO-HERNANDEZ](#) (+32 2 295 43 20)
[Zoï MULETIER](#) (+32 2 299 43 06)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)