



CSO-s to President of European People's Party

Hon. Mr. Joseph Daul

President of European People's Party

Dear Mr. President,

We, the group of civil society representatives of Georgia, would like to address you with the aim to request European People's Party's (EPP) increased support towards Georgia's European integration path, at this very important moment in our history.

First of all, please, allow us to express our deep gratitude for the support, which the European Parliament, different political groups and particularly the EPP has rendered to Georgia's European aspirations on different occasions. It was with great satisfaction, that we welcomed the European Parliament's resolution adopted on

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January 21, 2016 which “expects the Council and the Member States to proceed to grant Georgia and Ukraine a visa-free travel regime without delay”. We fully appreciate the positive role EPP played in adoption of this resolution and we are immensely thankful for this.

Mr. President,

Integration with Europe has been a historic choice for this country. It has been a dream of several generations of Georgians to reunite with the European civilization and become a part of the European family, resting upon the values of human rights and democracy, which we fully share.

We have never been this close to Europe throughout several hundreds of years, and indeed we believe this is an achievement of the whole of our generation. It is a choice and a result of the diligent work over last decades and several electoral cycles, which is indeed beyond any particular government or a political party.

Indeed, the process of rapprochement of Georgia with the European Union has not been easy. There have been many achievements, including those of the previous government, as you rightly mentioned in one of your recent interviews with Georgian media, but there have also been many mistakes and drawbacks. The job of civil society has been to react on those through increased publicity both, in Georgia and abroad. And we have been doing this, however challenging it might have been. Probably it is because of this, that Civil Society representatives have not been liked by any Government of Georgia, so far. We have been subject to criticism, pressure (mostly verbal), but this has not stopped us from standing for what we believed in, including publicly denouncing those actions of the Government, which, were against the interests of the people of Georgia and undermined the values of human rights and democracy.

We are not among those who usually defend the government, neither we intend to do so now, rather with this letter we would like to make a case in defense of the choice of the people of Georgia, a choice, which we believe, we do deserve.

Here are our two main points:

1. Integration in European and Euro-Atlantic structures is not a mere foreign-policy decision for Georgia, rather, it is an existential choice. An alternative to this is only to

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be with Russia, which, obviously we greatly oppose and fight against. Therefore, everything that brings us closer to Europe enhances our independence and sovereignty. This is the very case with visa-liberalization with EU, which is a very important pillar towards deepening our ties with Europe. Even more, this will benefit the regular people of Georgia and will let our and future generations have a first-hand experience of direct interaction with the peoples of the European Union. Not only will this increase the positive influence of the European culture over Georgia, but also it will greatly undermine the efforts of Russian propaganda which tries to decrease the support towards European idea among Georgians. And it is important to have this decision on granting visa-free travel to Georgians without further delay, because postponing this will only increase the support to pro-Russian forces, who up to now, manage to successfully speculate around past failures, portraying as if the West is not willing to give Georgians anything tangible in response to our desire to integrate closer. This is especially true taking into account that all the technical requirements set for Georgia have been met and the decision to give a green light for the visa-free has been made at all levels of EU institutions, which was inter-alia, supported by your Party

2. As you are aware, the civil society of Georgia remains vigilant against any undemocratic developments in the country. We usually highlight all the drawbacks and try to pressurize the governments, including with the support of the international community, to make relevant actions or achieve certain shifts in state policies. But in this case we would like to use this channel to a different end. Obviously, we are fully aware of the problems which exist in the country, we see and encounter those problems every day and we do not tend to turn a blind eye on them. We have numerously publicized and brought them to the attention of the international community, including European Parliament. Among those, were the particular instances that you, Mr. President, often mention with regards to Georgia – including the politically motivated trials of the former officials, attacks on the free media and civil society leaders.

However, notwithstanding this, we believe, that general tendencies and developments in Georgia are overall positive for the last several years, and the country is still moving forward. We are also confident that getting Georgia closer to Europe will greatly restrict this or any incumbent government against such kind of wrongdoings, and it will be more difficult to anyone in the Office to sway from democratic principles

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of governance.

Therefore, we firmly believe, that it is very important that Georgia gets visa-free travel to Schengen area as soon as possible without putting any additional preconditions on this path.

President Daul, we are confident, that you are a true friend of Georgian people, which you and European People's Party have numerously demonstrated over the recent years. Therefore, we greatly rely on your support in sharing our message across the decision-makers in European capitals to support granting Georgian people the right to travel to Europe more easily. We believe, that it will further improve the attitude of Georgian public towards Europe, it will decrease chances for the success of Russian propaganda and it will straightjacket the Georgian government against undemocratic developments.

We hope for your and EPP continued support in this and other issues that might be critical for Georgia's peaceful and democratic development.

We look forward to our further collaboration.

Respectfully,

Transparency International Georgia

Open Society Georgia Foundation

Georgian Association of Regional Broadcaster

Center of Development and Democracy

The Economic Policy Research Center

Regional Centre for Strategic Studies

Atlantic Council of Georgia

Institute for Development of Freedom of Information

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Studio Re

International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy

Greens Movement of Georgia

Article 42 of the Constitution

Georgia Young Lawyer's Association

Liberal Academy Tbilisi

Baltic to Black Sea Alliance

Civil Development Agency

Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies

Union Demosi (Rustavi)

Siqa-Georgian Association Of Educational Initiatives (Rustavi)

Kvemo Kartli Public Information Center (Bolnisi)

Association "Spectr " (Sagarejo)

Welfare and Development Center (Gori)

Society "Biliki" (Gori)

For the Better Future (Tserovani)

Anti-Violence National Network Mtskheta-Mtianeti Committee (Mtskheta)

Dusheti Development Fund (Dusheti)

Stepantsminda (Stepantsminda)

We For Healthy Future (Tserovani)

Civic Initiatives Association (Akhaltzikhe)

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Kutaisi Education Development and Employment Center (Kutaisi)

Association "Toleranti" (Akhaltsikhe)

Local Democracy Agency Georgia (Kutaisi)

AYEG Imereti Branch (Kutaisi)

Imereti Scientists Union "Spectri" (Kutaisi)

Tkibuli District Development Fund (Tkibuli)

Association "Gaenati" (Zugdidi)

"IMEDI" IDP Women's Movement For Peace (Zugdidi)

Association of Person with Disabilities, IDPs and Women in Tsalenjikha (Tsalenjikha)

Resource centre of Self- government of Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti
(Ambrolauri)

Step Forward (Batumi)

Association "Dea" (Zugdidi)

Bridge of Friendship "Kartlosi" (Gori)

Association "Toleranti" (Akhaltsikhe)

Association "Gaenati" (Zugdidi)

Democratic Development Union of Georgia (Ozurgeti)

In-depth Reporting and Advocacy Center