



Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

Travel Report

15th Batumi International Conference "Georgia's European Way"

Batumi, Georgia

14-15 June 2018

An Comhchoiste um Ghnóthaí an Aontais Eorpaigh

Tuarascáil Taistil

An 15ú Comhdháil Idirnáisiúnta in Batumi "Bealach na Seoirsia chun na hEorpa"

Batumi, an tSeoirsia

14-15 Meitheamh 2018

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BACKGROUND

In April 2018 the Chairman of the Joint Committee, Mr Michael Healy-Rae TD, was invited by the Vice Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Georgia, Mr Mikheil Janelidze, to attend the 15th International Conference "Georgia's European Way", in Batumi on 14-15 June 2018. At the meeting of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs of 9 May 2018, it was agreed that **Senator Gerard Craughwell** would travel to Batumi to represent the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs at the Conference.

The objective of the Conference was to discuss priority topics in European Affairs relevant to the Georgia, including cooperation between the EU and the members of the Eastern Partnership. The Conference focused in particular on the conclusions of the March 2018 European Council Summit and EU Enlargement Policy, as well as economic issues and regional trade, transport and energy projects.

JOINT COMMITTEE ENGAGEMENT WITH GEORGIA

The Joint Committee on European Union Affairs maintains active engagement with the Georgian Embassy in Dublin. The Georgian Foreign Ministry takes a proactive approach to its engagement with Oireachtas Committees, issuing a weekly newsletter for the attention of Members and regularly sending representatives to observe meetings.

In 2017 the Chairman of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, Mr Michael Healy-Rae TD, held three bilateral meetings with Mr George Zurabashvili, Chargé d'Affaires of the Georgian Embassy in Dublin. At these meetings, the Chairman and Mr Zurabashvili discussed Georgia's goal of acceding to the EU and NATO, ongoing security concerns in the region, and the proceedings of the European Partnership Summit. Mr Zurabashvili expressed the wish to deepen ties between Ireland and Georgia, as part of Georgia's policy of European engagement.

On 28 March 2018, the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs met with a Georgian Parliamentary delegation led by Ms Sophie Katsarava, Chairperson of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Georgian Parliament. Ms Katsarava is also the Chair of the Ireland-Georgia Friendship Group, which was launched on the same day by the Ceann Comhairle at an event in Leinster House. Joint Committee on European Affairs members Senator Gerard Craughwell and Senator Neale Richmond are members of the Ireland-Georgia Friendship Group.

GEORGIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

GEORGIA'S BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH THE EU

Georgia has stated that its goal is to become a full Member State of the European Union. The EU supports close ties with Georgia and strives for political association and economic integration. Georgia's bilateral relationship with the EU has progressed steadily over the last 10 years, with notable developments in the last two years; Georgia entered an Association Agreement with the EU in July 2016, which included the establishment of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, and a regulation on visa liberalisation for travel in the Schengen Area for Georgian nationals was adopted in February 2017.

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

Georgia is a member of the Eastern Partnership alongside Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. The Eastern Partnership was established in 2009 as a coherent policy framework to support regional cooperation and EU relations with Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, and is an important part of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The Eastern Partnership allows for both multilateral and bilateral relations. An Eastern Partnership summit is held every two years, and is attended by representatives of the Eastern Partnership countries, the EU institutions and the Member States of the EU.

The 5th Eastern Partnership Summit was held in Brussels in November 2017. The Partnership summit was attended by Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Simon Coveney. At this conference a joint declaration was signed, which included a framework of "20 Deliverables for 2020" with five priority areas of (i) cross-cutting deliverables; (ii) economic development and market opportunities; (iii) strengthening institutions and good governance; (iv) connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change and (v) mobility and people-to-people contacts.

As part of the joint declaration, the European Union aspirations of partners who signed Association Agreements with the EU (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) were acknowledged.

Towards a stronger Eastern Partnership



EUROPEAN UNION MONITORING MISSION (EUMM)

Following the ceasefire of the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) was deployed to Georgia to oversee stability and normalisation of relations in the region. The EUMM's work on establishing stability in the region is ongoing. The EU, the UN and the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe) co-chair the Geneva International Discussions, a format which was established in 2008 to monitor conflict resolution in Georgia.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

On 14 June 2018, the European Parliament passed a Joint Resolution stating that it strongly supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders, and condemning the illegal Russian occupation of the Georgia territories of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.

PROCEEDINGS: 14 JUNE 2018

The conference was opened by

- **Mr Giorgi Margvelashvili**, President of Georgia
- **Mr Mikheil Janelidze**, First Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs
- **Mr Irakli Kobakhidze**, Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia
- **Mr Zurab Pataradze**, Chairman of the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara

SESSION 1 - EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AFTER THE BRUSSELS SUMMIT – OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE COOPERATION

The first panel discussed Georgia's progress within the Eastern Partnership and its ambitions to exceed the requirements of its Association Agreement. The panellists also discussed the experiences of Moldova and Belarus with the Eastern Partnership.

Mr Christian Danielsson, Director General for the Directorate General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations in the European Commission

Mr Danielsson discussed the progress made by the Eastern Partnership countries. He commended Georgia in particular on the progress it has made, describing it as "the front runner" of the Eastern Partnership countries with an economy that has grown on average by 4.5% per year, since 2009, and economic strong reforms. He noted that further work was still needed to fully implement the "20 Deliverables for 2020" as agreed at the Eastern Partnership summit.

Mr Thomas Buchsbaum, (Moderator), Special Envoy for the Eastern Partnership for the Republic of Austria

Mr Buchsbaum outlined the work which would be carried out by the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU to support the progression of the Eastern Partnership, as the Eastern Partnership was an external relations priority for the Austrian Presidency, and a number of official and informal events would be held.

Mr Mikheil Janelidze, First Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

First Vice-Prime Minister Janelidze explained that Georgia has achieved all of the targets set for it under the Eastern Partnership policy, and has succeeded in establishing three of the freedoms of the internal market; (i) the movement of goods, (ii) services and (iii) capital. Having been granted visa liberalisation to the Schengen area in 2017, he stated that Georgia was "half-way" to the fourth freedom, the movement of people.

He reminded the conference that Georgia's ambition was full membership of the EU, and that the Georgian government had decided to go beyond what was required from the Association Agreement, and to make unilateral steps towards establishing an accession roadmap. The First Vice-Prime Minister expressed the view that the EU should establish a more ambitious policy for Eastern Partnership countries, enabling more integration for those who were willing to do more. As a European country, he believed that Georgia was entitled to a perspective of EU membership under the terms of the European treaties. Regarding Georgia's choice to align itself with the EU, he expressed the view that the EU respected the individual choices of its partners, while Russia tended to impose the policies it wanted on its neighbours.

Ms Daniela Morari, State Secretary responsible for Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Republic of Moldova

State Secretary Morari stated that Moldova was pragmatic yet ambitious regarding its European ambitions. She outlined some of the benefits Moldova had seen from its membership of the Eastern Partnership, such as an increase in trade, visa liberalisation, consumer and data protection legislation and participation in education programmes such as Erasmus+.

State Secretary Morari emphasised the importance to Moldova of continuing to meet the targets and goals of the Eastern Partnership and of its bilateral Association Agreement with the EU. She also highlighted the importance of multilateral cooperation with other members of the Eastern Partnership, expressing the view that there should be an extended platform for the three members with Association Agreements (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) to work more closely together on priority issues, such as the development of digital, transport and energy policies.

Mr Valery Voronetsky, Chairman of the Permanent Commission on International Affairs, National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus

Mr Voronetsky expressed the view that the Eastern Partnership had not achieved its goals. He stated that the lack of tangible results from the Eastern Partnership has decreased public support for Europe in Belarus. In addition, Belarus was excluded from many of the programmes available to other Eastern Partnership countries, and is the only country in Europe which has to pay for visas into the EU had.

He stated that as a direct neighbour to EU Member States, Belarus was interested in "friendly and profound" cooperation with the EU. However, he expressed the view that the EU's approach to Belarus has not taken into account the geopolitical situation in the region or the views of its people. Close cooperation between the EU and Belarus would not be possible without a rapprochement between the EU and Russia. He expressed the view that Russia had shown more interest in the political integration of the Eastern Partnership countries than the EU.

SESSION 2 - TOWARDS STRONGER EUROPE - ON ENLARGEMENT AS A POWERFUL FOREIGN POLICY TOOL FOR THE EU

This panel discussed the European Union's Enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans, and how the experience of recent Member States and Candidate countries could be of benefit to Georgia.

Ms Tea Tsulukiani, Acting Minister of Justice of Georgia

Minister Tsulukiani stated that to Georgia, European Enlargement was an impetus for domestic transformation rather than as just a foreign policy priority. She outlined a number of ways in which Georgia was working to approximate the legislative standards of the EU, including: ratifying protocol 16 of the Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, establishing a cooperation agreement with EuroJust and carrying out compliance checks on domestic legislation. In working to approximate the legislative standards of the EU, Minister Tsulukiani argued that Georgia was a "non-member member state", and that by undertaking reforms in the implementation of its Association Agreement, the country in was part of a "de-facto Enlargement" process.

Mr Yuri Sterk, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria

Minister Sterk outlined that while the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union focused on the Enlargement in the Western Balkans region specifically, the process

applied to the Western Balkans could clear the way for extending the European Perspective to the Eastern Partnership countries. However, he noted that there were significant differences between the Western Balkan countries and the Eastern Partnership countries, and that each country should be judged on its own merits. Minister Sterk shared his perspective on Bulgaria's accession to the EU, outlining that accession was not an easy or quick process, but that there were tangible and immediate benefits.

Ms Tamar Khulordava, Chairperson of the Committee on European Integration, Parliament of the Republic of Georgia

Ms Khulordava expressed optimism that despite the challenges faced by the EU, Enlargement was once again on the European agenda, and hope that the EU's Enlargement strategy could be extended to the Eastern Partnership countries. While Georgia had not yet been offered a roadmap to membership, it had seen impressive progress in its transformation goals. Under Article 49 of the Consolidated Treaties any European state was entitled to apply to become a member of the EU.

The Georgian Parliament's Committee on European Integration is responsible for parliamentary oversight of the implementation of Georgia's Association Agreement. Ms Khulordava explained that the implementation of the Association Agreement was a difficult and complicated process, and posed a range of challenges. She outlined that she was grateful for the EU's recognition of Georgia's progress, but that increased financial assistance was needed to assist Georgia in implementing reforms.

Mr Martin Košatka, Junior Deputy Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

Minister Košatka outlined the Czech Republic's support for the Enlargement process and shared his perspective on its accession to the EU in 2004. He stated that the biggest challenge for candidate countries was the process of meeting the accession criteria. Minister Košatka discussed the Czech Republic's advocacy on behalf of the Eastern Partnership, as the first Eastern Partnership Summit was held in Prague in 2009. He expressed the view that establishing the Eastern Partnership as a separate specific instrument for dealing with Eastern European countries sent a message to Russia that the EU cares about Eastern Europe. Minister Košatka emphasised the importance of multilateral relations to the Eastern Partnership, the Western Balkans and the Czech Republic. In the context of multilateral relations within the EU, the Czech Republic has seen benefits from its involvement in the Visegrad group.

In the question and answer session of the panel discussion, **Senator Craughwell** commended the members of the panel for their enthusiasm for Europe. He outlined how there was similar excitement about joining the EU in Ireland in the 1970s. However, he noted that the obligations of EU membership were not always popular with the citizens at national level. Once the excitement died down there could be a feeling at national level of being “told what to do” by Europe. In the context of Brexit, and rising nationalist populism across Europe, Senator Craughwell emphasised the need for strong political will from national governments in supporting the EU, communicating to citizens that “we are doing this because we want to, not because we are being forced to”.

PROCEEDINGS: 15 JUNE 2018

SESSION 1 - BETTER CONNECTIVITY WITHIN THE REGION AND WITH THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

This panel discussed Georgia's goals of international transport and energy connectivity, including approximation of the EU's trading standards.

Mr Genadi Arveladze, Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia

Minister Arveladze outlined the goal to establish Georgia as a transit hub for the region and an integral part of the East-West trade corridor. As part of this strategy, Georgia has prioritised developing infrastructure, decreasing tariffs and reforming border crossing procedures to ensure the smooth transport of goods. Georgia also aims to become a net exporter of energy, with many energy projects ongoing between Georgia and its neighbours, including an energy transmission line with Turkey. Georgia is also involved in the Southern Gas Corridor project, diversifying Europe's gas supply to import gas from Azerbaijan.

Mr Väino Reinart Undersecretary for Economic and Development Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia

Mr Reinart emphasised the importance of international trade, and the benefits of both imports and exports to national economies. He commended Georgia on recently signing a Free Trade Agreement with China, in addition to its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade

Agreement in place with the EU. He also commended Georgia on its commitment to approximating the EU's standards.

Mr Reinart shared his perspective on Estonia's process of approximating EU standards. He explained that Estonia signed its Association Agreement with the EU in 1995, and that it was not offered the perspective of membership at that time. The Estonian government made the decision to start implementing reforms, and to compare its results to the countries who were candidates for EU membership at the time. As a result, Estonia succeeded in being invited to start accession negotiations in 1997. He recommended that Georgia measure its success against the current candidate countries of the Western Balkans, expressing that it would be difficult for the EU to ignore Georgia's progress.

Mr Andreas Peschke, Special Envoy to Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, Federal Foreign Office of Germany

Mr Peschke stated that Georgia has a very important role in Europe's energy security and diversification. However, he expressed the view that connectivity was not possible for Georgia without peaceful resolution of the conflicts in its territory, which pose an obstacle to the development of transport and energy corridors.

Mr Peschke discussed the need for connectivity projects which provide tangible benefits to citizens, such as transport infrastructure. Germany supports these projects both politically and financially, including the development of the Southern Gas Corridor. He outlined the potential for development of transport and energy routes through Georgia, especially the potential for developing railway infrastructure for freight, to provide an alternative to sea freight. He also discussed the potential of the expansion of gas corridors, including the development of a trans-Caspian route from Turkmenistan.

SESSION 2 - SECTORAL INTEGRATION WITH THE EU

This panel discussed the development of the education and science and agricultural sectors in Georgia.

Ms Ketevan Natriashvili, First Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia

Ms Natriashvili emphasised the importance of education and science to Georgia's European ambitions. In order to meet the obligations of the Association Agreement, a comprehensive plan for education and science has been established with the assistance of the European Commission. The Ministry of Education and Science was one of five pilot Ministries in the reform of public administration, and was commended by the EU's monitoring report. Ms Natriashvili informed the conference that funding for education and science had been increased significantly since 2015, and now represents 3% of Georgia's GDP. The Ministry has established programmes to revise national curriculums and invest in vocational education. Georgia is also an active participant in the Erasmus+ and the Horizon 2020 programmes.

Ms Maria Cristina Russo, Director for International Cooperation for the Directorate General for Research and Innovation in the European Commission

Ms Russo emphasised the importance of science and innovation to the European Commission's global strategy. It is the European Commission's position that international cooperation is needed on research into global issues, such as climate change. Horizon 2020 is the world's biggest multilateral research and innovation programme, and Georgia has been a member since 2016. Ms Russo also discussed the European Commission's bilateral support for Georgia's research and innovation goals. Ms Russo expressed the hope that the willingness expressed by the Georgian government to improve the sector would be followed with clear actions.

Mr Nodar Kereselidze, First Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia

Mr Kereselidze emphasised the importance of Georgia's Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade agreement with the EU for improving the quality of the country's agriculture sector. He also discussed the impact of the EU's European Neighbourhood Programme for Agricultural and Rural Development (EMPARD) programme on rural and agricultural development in Georgia. He noted that there was some resistance in Georgia to developing farmers' cooperatives and economies of scale following the country's post-Soviet legacy, but that efforts to overcome this had been successful. He explained that 43% of Georgia's population was involved in the agricultural sector, which accounted for 8-9% of GDP. Georgia's goal was not just to increase GDP, but also to increase trade and exports, and to diversify and develop the sector beyond just primary agricultural activities.

As part of the question and answer session of the panel discussion **Mr Ruairi Quinn**, Chairperson of the Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA), discussed Ireland's experience of modernising its agricultural sector following accession to the EU in 1973. He recommended that Georgia seek advice from EU Member States regarding the development of their agricultural sectors. Mr Kereselidze thanked Mr Quinn for his suggestion, noting that Georgia has formed bilateral relations with Member States, mainly in Eastern Europe, as their experience of modernisation was more recent.

Mr Janos Herman, Head of the EU Delegation to Georgia

Mr Herman expressed the view that relations between Georgia and the EU had a solid basis in the Association Agreement, and that he was confident that now was the time to start planning the next steps. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker visited Georgia in May 2018, and stated his readiness to have a meeting with the Georgian government in the Autumn. The European Commission has an interest in strengthening cooperation with Georgia, and the suggestions of proposed by the Georgian government for a European Roadmap would be discussed with an open mind.

CONFERENCE CLOSING REMARKS

Mr Vakhtang Makharoblishvili, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

In his closing remarks, Mr Makharoblishvili summarised the proceedings of the conference. He concluded that across the panels it was agreed that the Eastern Partnership has been successful for all countries involved, despite their differing aspirations of European integration.

BILATERAL MEETINGS

Senator Craughwell attended a number of brief bilateral meetings while in Batumi with the following delegates;

- (i) **Ms Lela Chikovani**, First Deputy Defence Minister of Georgia

Senator Craughwell and Minister Chikovani discussed the upcoming Batumi Defence Conference, and the situation regarding the Georgian border with Russia.

- (ii) **Mr Vakhtang Makharoblishvili**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

Senator Craughwell and Deputy Minister Makharoblishvili discussed Georgia's EU accession ambitions, and the opening of deep sea ports in Georgia as a means of opening up trade between Asia and the EU.

- (iii) **Ms Tamar Khulordava**, Chairperson of the Committee on European Integration

Senator Craughwell and Ms Khulordava discussed Georgia's integration with the EU

- (iv) **Mr Archil Karaulashvili**, Head of General Directorate for European Integration at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

Senator Craughwell and Mr Karaulashvili discussed Georgia's integration with the EU

- (v) **Mr Mikheil Batiashvili**, Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia

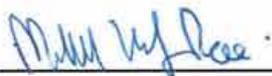
Senator Craughwell and Minister Batiashvili discussed Georgia's participation in exchange programmes, including placement in Irish universities, and the importance of investing in further education and apprenticeships.

- (vi) European Youth Ambassadors from Georgia and Ukraine

Senator Craughwell and the European Youth Ambassadors discussed participation in European exchange programmes and access to Erasmus+.

CONCLUSIONS

Senator Craughwell briefed the Joint Committee on the proceedings of the conference during the Committee's private session meeting on 4 July 2018. He highlighted some of the key themes that emerged from the conference, including the strength of Georgia's European ambitions and the need for continuing cooperation between the EU and Georgia on education, digital, transport and security issues. The Joint Committee plans to continue its active engagement with the Embassy of Georgia in Dublin.



Michael Healy-Rae TD
Chairman, Joint Committee on European Union Affairs
26 September 2018

APPENDIX 1: CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Day 1: Thursday, 14 June 2018

09:30	Registration and Morning Coffee	Hotel Hilton Batumi
10:00	OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE AND KEYNOTE SPEECHES	Hotel Hilton Batumi, Rustaveli Ballroom, 1st floor
11:00	SESSION I: EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AFTER THE BRUSSELS SUMMIT - OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE COOPERATION	Hotel Hilton Batumi, Rustaveli Ballroom, 1st floor
13:00	Lunch	Hotel Hilton Batumi, Restaurant Pelion, Tandila Lobby Caffe, Ground Floor
14:00	SESSION II: TOWARDS STRONGER EUROPE - ENLARGEMENT AS A POWERFUL FOREIGN POLICY TOOL FOR THE EU	Hotel Hilton Batumi, Rustaveli Ballroom, 1st floor
15:30	Coffee Break	Hotel Hilton Batumi
16:00	SESSION III: REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE - ENHANCING PARTNERSHIP AND COOPERATION	Hotel Hilton Batumi, Rustaveli Ballroom, 1st floor
19:00	Cocktail Reception	Hotel Hilton Batumi, Sky bar Nephele, 20th floor
21:00	NIGHT OWL SESSION: THE EUROPEAN UNION'S EASTERN POLICY	Hotel Hilton Batumi, Rustaveli Ballroom, 1st floor

Day 2: Friday, 15 June 2018

10:00	Registration and Morning Coffee	Hotel Hilton Batumi
11:00	SESSION I: BETTER CONNECTIVITY WITHIN	Hotel Hilton Batumi,

	THE REGION AND WITH THE GLOBAL ECONOMY	Rustaveli Ballroom, 1st floor
12:30	Lunch	Hotel Hilton Batumi
13:30	SESSION II: SECTORAL INTEGRATION WITH THE EU	Hotel Hilton Batumi, Rustaveli Ballroom, 1st floor
20:00	Gala Dinner On the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the First Democratic Republic of Georgia (Upon Separate Invitation Only)	

APPENDIX 2: REFERENCES

- [Batumi Conference 2018, "Georgia's European Way"](#)
- [EU Relations with Georgia](#)
- [European Court of Human Rights, Protocols to the Convention](#)
- [European External Action Service, Delegation of the European Union to Georgia](#)
- [European neighbourhood programme for agriculture and rural development - ENPARD Georgia](#)
- ["The Europe We Want", Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Speech, 28 November 2017](#)
- [Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Trade and Defence: Debate 29 March 2018](#)
- [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe \(OSCE\), Conflict Prevention and Resolution](#)
- [5th Eastern Partnership Summit, 24 November 2017, Joint Declaration](#)
- [26 May 2018, Speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the ceremony of celebration of the 100th anniversary of Georgia's First Democratic Republic](#)
- [12 June 2018, European Parliament Joint Motion for a Resolution on Georgian occupied territories 10 years after the Russian invasion](#)
- [14 June 2018, "EU re-affirms commitment to Georgia at "Georgia's European Way" Conference", Press Release, European External Action Service](#)

Conference Proceedings

- [Day 1 \(14 June 2018\)](#)
- [Day 2 \(15 June 2018\)](#)

