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PROPOSAL

From:	Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director
date of receipt:	9 March 2022
To:	Mr Jeppe TRANHOLM-MIKKELSEN, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union

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Subject:	ANNEX to the Proposal for a Council Decision on the position to be taken on behalf of the European Union in the Association Council established under the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part, on the adoption of the EU-Georgia Association Agenda
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Delegations will find attached document COM(2022) 103 final.

Encl.: COM(2022) 103 final



Brussels, 9.3.2022
COM(2022) 103 final

ANNEX

ANNEX

to the

Proposal for a Council Decision

on the position to be taken on behalf of the European Union in the Association Council established under the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part, on the adoption of the EU-Georgia Association Agenda

ANNEX

RECOMMENDATION No 1/2022

OF THE EU-GEORGIA ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

of dd/mm/2022

on the EU-Georgia Association Agenda

THE EU-GEORGIA ASSOCIATION COUNCIL,

Having regard to the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part,

Whereas:

- (1) The Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part¹ ("the Agreement") was signed on 27 June 2014 and entered into force on 1 July 2016.
- (2) In accordance with Article 406(1) of the Agreement, the Association Council has the power to adopt recommendations, for the purposes of attaining the objectives of the Agreement.
- (3) Pursuant to Article 420(1) of the Agreement, the Parties are to take any general or specific measures required to fulfil their obligations under the Agreement and are to ensure that the objectives set out in the Agreement are attained.
- (4) Article 11 of the Rules of Procedure of the Association Council provides for the possibility of taking decisions and making recommendations by written procedure between sessions if both Parties so agree.
- (5) The Union and Georgia have agreed to consolidate their partnership by agreeing on a set of priorities for the period 2021-2027 for the joint work towards achieving the objectives of political association and economic integration as set out in the Agreement.
- (6) The Parties to the Agreement have agreed on the text of the EU-Georgia Association Agenda, which will support the implementation of the Agreement, focusing cooperation on commonly identified shared interests,

¹ OJ EU L 261, 30.8.2014, p. 4.

HAS ADOPTED THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATION:

Article 1

The Association Council recommends that the Parties implement the EU-Georgia Association Agenda, as set out in the Annex.

Article 2

The EU-Georgia Association Agenda 2021-2027, as set out in the Annex, shall replace the EU-Georgia Association Agenda which was adopted on 6 November 2017.

Article 3

This Recommendation shall take effect on the day of its adoption.

Done at Tbilisi, [day month year].

For the Association Council

The Chair

ANNEX

2021 – 2027

**ASSOCIATION AGENDA
BETWEEN
THE EUROPEAN UNION
AND
GEORGIA**

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INTRODUCTION

On 27 June 2014 the European Union, its Member States and Georgia ('the Parties') signed an ambitious and innovative Association Agreement (AA), including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The agreement contains binding, rule-based provisions and provides for enhanced cooperation. The DCFTA has been provisionally applied since 1 September 2014. Following the completion of the ratification process, the full application of the Association Agreement started on 1 July 2016.

The subsequent Association Agendas agreed between the EU and Georgia prepare and facilitate the implementation of the Association Agreement. The priorities of the Association Agenda complement the responsibilities of the EU and Georgia to implement in full the provisions of the AA/DCFTA. The fact that the Association Agenda focuses upon a limited number of priorities is without prejudice to the scope or the mandate of existing dialogue under other relevant Agreements or the multilateral track of the Eastern Partnership. The Association Agenda also does not prejudge the implementation of commitments made in the AA/DCFTA since its entry into force, and supports the principle of dynamic approximation.

Furthermore, visa-free travel to the Schengen countries¹ for Georgian citizens holding a biometric passport, which entered into force on 28 March 2017, has provided for a substantial enhancement of mobility and people-to-people contacts between the two sides, in a secure and well managed environment. This updated Association Agenda therefore also aims at ensuring that the conditions for visa free travel are continuously fulfilled, in line with commitments taken under the visa liberalisation process and the recommendations in the regular reports issued by the Commission under the Visa Suspension Mechanism. Mechanism. Dealing with migration-related issues including in the areas of irregular migration, unfounded asylum requests lodged by Georgian citizens as well as public order and security related challenges, remains an important priority for EU-Georgia cooperation in the context of visa liberalisation. Facilitating avenues for legal migration could be further examined.

The present document updates and refocuses the 2017-2020 Association Agenda and sets new priorities for joint work to achieve the objectives of political association and economic integration as set out in the Association Agreement for the period 2021-2027. It distinguishes between short-term priorities (which should be achieved or on which significant progress should be made within 3-4 years) and medium-term priorities (which should be achieved or on which significant progress should be made within 7 years). The Association Council will supervise and monitor the application and implementation of the Association Agreement and periodically review the functioning of this Agreement in the light of its objectives, assisted by the Association Committee and sub-committees established under the Association Agreement.

The present Association Agenda will be applicable from the moment of its adoption until the end of 2027. The Association Agenda may be amended or updated at any time, by agreement of the EU-Georgia Association Council.

PRINCIPLES, INSTRUMENTS AND RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE ASSOCIATION AGENDA

The following common principles will continue to guide the implementation of this Association Agenda:

- Actions undertaken through the Association Agenda should be implemented in full compliance with the AA/DCFTA, including its preamble;
- The Association Agenda should be implemented in full respect of the principles of transparency, accountability and inclusiveness;
- The Association Agenda demands engagement from both sides and dialogue concerning the association-related reforms;
- The Association Agenda aims to achieve tangible and defined results through the progressive implementation of practical measures;
- The Parties recognise the importance of supporting the agreed priorities through appropriate and sufficient political, technical and financial means;
- The implementation of the Association Agenda will be subject to monitoring, annual reporting, including of overall progress, and assessment. Progress made will be reviewed including in the context of the institutional structures set forth by the Association Agreement. Civil society will also be encouraged to focus their monitoring activities on the Association Agenda;
- The European Union will support Georgia in implementing the objectives and priorities set out in the Association Agenda. It will do so through using all available sources of EU support, as well as expertise and advice, best practices and know-how, information-sharing, support to capacity-building, institutional strengthening, and developing new assistance instruments. It emphasises that EU assistance is bound to jointly agreed strict conditionalities related to the progress on reform. The EU will also work with other partners to ensure coordination of support from other partners of Georgia and reinforce the coordinated approach of Team Europe support which combines resources from the EU, its Member States and financial institutions. The relevant EU financial instruments will also be available to help in the implementation of the Association Agenda. Notwithstanding this, the latter is not in itself a financial programming document and does not substitute for the programming or formulation exercises undertaken by the Parties.

Recognising that the Association Agenda is a primary tool for the implementation of the AA/DCFTA, the priorities defined in the Association Agenda also reflect the long-term policy objectives outlined in the Joint Communication on “Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 Reinforcing Resilience - an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all²” and the Eastern Partnership Summit declaration³, which will form the basis of the post-2020 Eastern Partnership priorities. These priorities will underpin the EU assistance to Georgia, as outlined in the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and the corresponding programming documents post-2020. The EU may also provide assistance from other EU instruments. Any support will be provided in full compliance with the implementation rules and procedures governing EU external assistance.

2 JOIN(2020) 7

3 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/12/15/eastern-partnership-summit-joint-declaration/>

PRIORITIES OF THE ASSOCIATION AGENDA

The EU and Georgia consider the implementation of the Association Agreement and the Association Agenda as key priorities to consolidate and promote shared values and principles, as agreed by the EU and Georgia. The Association Agreement provides for accelerating political association and economic integration with the European Union.

Since the signature of the Association Agreement, Georgia has taken steps and carried out substantial reforms towards its effective implementation. Both sides acknowledge the progress made by Georgia towards deeper political association and economic integration with the EU and reiterates that further steps are still needed to make substantial and sustainable progress in order to allow citizens to fully benefit from the EU-Georgia Association Agreement.

Advancing Georgia's democratic and rule of law agenda through ambitious political, judicial and anti-corruption reforms in a broad and inclusive process will be central to EU-Georgia cooperation during the period of this Association Agenda.

The effective implementation of the Association Agreement and its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, linked to the broader process of regulatory approximation and related necessary reforms, contributes to establishing conditions for enhanced economic and trade relations with the EU leading to Georgia's further gradual economic integration in the European Union Internal Market, as envisaged in the Association Agreement.

The EU reiterates its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders, including its policy of non-recognition and engagement in Georgia, as well as its firm commitment to facilitating peace, stability and conflict resolution in Georgia. Furthermore, the EU acknowledges Georgia's significant contribution to the EU Common Security and Defence Policy, including through participation in EU-led crisis management operations. The EU is ready to continue its cooperation with Georgia on security matters with the aim of implementing its strategic priorities in the neighbourhood.

EU-Georgia cooperation, including within the Eastern Partnership, also aims to support the delivery of many global policy objectives, including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals to which they are both committed. The cooperation will strengthen the international rules based order and contribute to building a stronger Europe in the world.

In this context, the following reform actions should be addressed as a matter of priority.

A. Key priorities for action

1. In the field of resilient, sustainable and integrated economies

1.1 Economic development, business and investment climate

The parties will cooperate to boost economic development and economic integration between Georgia and the EU, to the benefit and welfare of Georgian citizens. This will reduce socio-economic and educational inequalities and improve working conditions while at the same

time ensuring progressive decarbonisation and climate neutrality of the economy. Given the circumstances, it will be crucial to address the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic while building short-term and long-term resilience. This should translate in efforts to ensure that a post-COVID 19 recovery is green, and that environmental and climate targets are achieved. Upholding labour protection and promoting decent work will also be critical for a sustainable and equitable recovery.

Improving the business and investment climate, creating a level playing field for all entrepreneurs through rule of law, legal certainty and continuous anti-corruption efforts will be at the centre of attention. This will also include the further development of business-to-business arbitration and enforcement of judicial decisions. It will be important to ensure direct support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – inter alia through the implementation of the SME Strategy – promote entrepreneurship (including women's and youth entrepreneurship), ensure access to finance and strengthen cooperatives in Georgia's rural areas. The implementation of the new Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy for 2021-2027 will contribute to the development of efficient value chains, improve employment in rural areas and support SMEs to increase their competitiveness in selected sectors with high export value. This will also contribute to the further internationalisation of the economy and integration into EU value chains. Work towards joining the Single Euro Payments Area will be a key part of the economic cooperation agenda offering an important incentive for businesses and a tangible benefit for the population of Georgia. Implementation of Regional Development policies shall contribute to a more balanced territorial development, reduce disparities and create the new centres of gravity apart from Tbilisi and Batumi.

At the same time, it is important to continue on the successful path of strong economic and fiscal governance to ensure economic and financial stability and to continue with the modernisation of the financial sector through, for instance, banking sector reform, promotion of capital markets and development of micro-credit.

Further regulatory convergence with EU standards will be important to advance with the full implementation of the commitments under the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area which is a prerequisite for economic integration between Georgia and the EU. Particular focus will be paid to the implementation of technical regulations, market surveillance, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, including food safety and alignment with European standards. Implementation of the strategic framework for customs cooperation, enforcement of intellectual property rights as well the full implementation of the Law on Geographical Indications are key to increasing trade.

The parties acknowledge the initiative of the trio of associated partners to enhance the cooperation with the EU, and take good note of the increased coordination amongst them on matters of common interest related to the implementation of the Association Agreements and DCFTAs, and on cooperation within the Eastern Partnership.

1.2 Strengthening connectivity

The Parties will cooperate to strengthen the (transport, energy and digital) connectivity between the EU and Georgia, in particular via the Black Sea.

In the field of transport, they will implement mutually beneficial strategic projects, including within the Eastern Partnership, and progressively complete the extended indicative TEN-T network and promote multi-modal transport solutions. They will further cooperate towards the implementation of the EU acquis in all transport modes (aviation, road, maritime, railways) with the objective of improving physical connectivity as well as related standards and, regulatory and safety aspects (in particular road safety), while also promoting an increased focus on green transportation solutions.

It will be crucial to implement the commitments stemming from Georgia's accession to the Energy Community, in particular through regulatory reforms and investment in energy security and energy efficiency, reinforcing and developing new energy infrastructure networks and interconnections, as well as improving the transparency and proper functioning of electricity and gas energy markets.

1.3 Education and youth employability, research and innovation

The parties will work together to invest in people, particularly young people, to improve employability, at the same time ensuring decent jobs and effective labour protection. Georgia will improve its education and research performance through comprehensive education and research reform, focusing on the efficiency, equality of access and quality of all levels of education. The Eastern Partnership European School in Georgia can serve as a role model for quality education in line with international standards.

Furthermore, it will be crucial to ensure that the education curriculum corresponds to the needs of the labour market to close the skills gaps and to better match skills and jobs. Better access to the labour market – including for women and persons in vulnerable situations – will be a priority. At the same time, employment policy and employment services will be further improved.

The parties will continue to support the implementation of research and innovation (R&I) policies; will strive to encourage investing in stronger research and innovation ecosystems through policy reforms, increasing gross R&I expenditure; and will foster the green and digital transitions by deploying smart specialisation strategies and technology transfer as relevant.

2. In the field of accountable institutions, the rule of law and security

2.1 Rule of law, justice reform and tackling corruption

The parties will work together to uphold the rule of law principles, with particular attention given to the justice sector and the independence of the judiciary. The full implementation of the third and fourth waves of judiciary reforms will be crucial to strengthen the independence and accountability of the judiciary, including by strengthening the institutional set-up and practices of the High Council of Justice and other key judiciary institutions, enhancing transparency and merit-based selection and promotion processes, in line with the Venice Commission and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights recommendations.

Georgia will undertake further judicial reform, including as a priority of the High Council of Justice, and adopt an ambitious post-2021 judicial reform strategy through a broad inclusive and cross party reform process, including an assessment of the effectiveness of the third and fourth waves of judicial reform. Georgia will continue to work, as a matter of priority, to bring the Law on Common Courts in line with the related Venice Commission recommendations⁴, and apply fully the revised law to all future appointments.

In addition, high quality justifications should be published for judicial appointments and the legislation on publication of judicial decisions adopted.

Georgia will review the appointment process for the Prosecutor-General to strengthen the independence of the office/position of the Prosecutor. To this aim a qualified majority vote in Parliament will be introduced, which is the main Venice Commission recommendation in this respect. This will include an effective anti-deadlock mechanism that enjoys broad cross-party support and is in line with Venice Commission advice. Additional safeguards will be introduced to ensure that the selection and nomination process is transparent and based on criteria of integrity, independence, impartiality and competence.

Accountability and democratic oversight of law enforcement agencies will need to be further strengthened.

Georgia will continue to pursue ambitious progress in the fight against corruption and economic crime, including all forms of corruption, and strengthen corruption prevention mechanisms, including in the field of public procurement.

3. In the field of environmental and climate resilience

3.1 Environment and climate action

The parties will work together towards achieving environmental and climate resilience by promoting – also within post-COVID-19 recovery efforts – a modern, resource-efficient, clean and circular economy leading to the greening of the economy and a more sustainable use of natural resources in line with the European Green Deal. This will be, inter alia, achieved through continuing administrative reforms and building up of administrative capacity to implement the environment and climate action chapters of the Association Agreement. Furthermore, dialogue between the EU and Georgia on environment and climate will be promoted in the framework of existing structures of the Association Agreement. Civil society will be closely consulted in this regard.

Emission reduction and climate resilience objectives in line with the Paris Agreement will be integrated in the overall economic and transport policies to limit the climate change impact and provide benefits to the lives of the citizens. Within this context, Georgia will submit a

⁴ The Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) Urgent Opinion on the Selection and Appointment of Supreme Court Judges of Georgia endorsed by the Venice Commission on 21–22 June 2019; The Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) Urgent Opinion on the amendments to the organic law on Common Courts, endorsed by the Venice Commission on 2-3 July 2021.

long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategy for submission to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and update its National Determined Contribution (NDC) in line with the Paris Agreement.

A greater focus will be put on enabling and promoting sustainable agriculture and fisheries, inter alia in the blue economy framework of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea⁵, and the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems including in the Black Sea area.

Environmental governance will be strengthened through the implementation of legislation on environmental impact assessment, strategic environmental assessment and through the adoption and implementation of the new legislation on environmental liability and through ensuring public access to environmental information and public participation in decision-making. Improving air and water quality as well as better waste management in line with European standards will not only contribute to improving the environment but also have a significant impact on public health. Against this background, cooperation on public health between the parties will be strengthened.

3.2 Public health

The parties will work together to enable the provision of affordable medical care and promote access to people across society, including by improving the coverage of the Universal Health Care Programme and through e-health. Health prevention and tobacco control will be central. Healthcare institutions and their accountability will be strengthened, through establishing quality indicators, value-based purchasing and other quality management processes. It will be key to effectively address communicable and non-communicable diseases, and to overall make the healthcare system more resilient to external shocks such as pandemics.

4. In the field of resilient digital transformation

4.1 Development of digital infrastructure

The parties will work together to enable growth and the sustainable development of Georgia by further promoting the roll-out of digital infrastructure and supporting digital transformation based on the implementation of the National Broadband Development Strategy and in line with EU legislation and best practices, notably regarding the security of digital infrastructures. The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the digital divide in societies and the urgent need to support this digital transformation. Solutions for e-health, distance learning, telemedicine, tracking viruses and preventing disinformation will not only help during the pandemic, but will support the resilience and development of all of the EU's partners for years to come. It will be key to stimulate the digital economy and innovation through appropriate policies, which will boost and further diversify not only the IT industry but also creative industries and strengthen their competitiveness, stimulate the growth and survival of start-ups and digitalise value chains.

⁵ 21 May 2019, Bucharest Ministerial Declaration on a Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea - (Black Sea (europa.eu)).

4.2 E-governance and digital services

At the same time, e-governance and digital services should be further developed to increase the efficiency, transparency and accountability of the public administration. This must go hand in hand with the development of digital skills and e-literacy of the wider population. To this end, people throughout Georgia should have access to internet and other electronic communications services at affordable prices. The parties will work together to further enhance the administrative capacity and the independence of Georgia's national regulatory authority for electronic communications, an essential condition for the proper functioning of the corresponding market. Furthermore, the EU will support the implementation of roaming and spectrum agreements between Georgia and the other Eastern partner countries and, where appropriate, with the EU.

4.3 Cyber resilience

The parties will work together to improve cyber resilience and ensure robust legal, policy and operational cybersecurity frameworks based on EU legislation and best practices, including the EU's cybersecurity certification framework. Within this framework, the parties will continue working on the further approximation of Georgian legislation with the Network and Information Security (NIS) Directive.

The parties will cooperate towards the adoption by Georgia of legal frameworks for electronic identification schemes and electronic trust services, in line with EU legislation and best practices, with a view to a possible mutual recognition agreement for trust services.

5. *In the field of resilient, fair and inclusive societies*

5.1 Mainstreaming human rights and empowering civil society and youth

Both parties will promote good governance, human rights, rule of law, non-discrimination, decent work, as well as fundamental values and humanitarian principles in responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery from it.

Georgia will uphold the freedom, independence and pluralism of the media, respecting EU and international standards, ensuring conditions for a free, professional, independent and healthy media environment. The parties will also cooperate to strengthen cooperation on strategic communication, including fighting disinformation.

Both parties will cooperate to ensure the enhanced implementation of the anti-discrimination law, develop and implement a new National Human Rights Strategy and the subsequent National Human Rights Action Plan and enable media pluralism and independence as well as freedom of assembly. Georgia will ensure the necessary budgetary and human resources allocation in order to effectively and promptly investigate offences alleged to have been committed by law enforcement officers as well as efficiently control personal data processing.

Enhancing gender equality and ensuring equal treatment in social, political and economic life, better integration of and increased tolerance towards persons belonging to all groups in society including persons with disabilities will be key priorities. There will also be a focus on

measures to protect children from all forms of violence. Efforts to ensure a high-level protection of personal data will continue.

The EU and Georgia will also keep a focus on youth participation and leadership through empowerment. The parties will further cooperate to maximise the benefits to Georgia of its association to the Horizon 2020 and the Horizon Europe programmes and further promote its already active participation in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes, and well as other volunteering, cooperation and exchange programmes and initiatives, in accordance with the outcome of the negotiations and the adoption of relevant programmes.

Georgia will continue the development of the youth sector and evidence- and rights-based youth policies with the aim of creating a sustainable ecosystem for youth development, which enables the youth to fully realise their potential and get actively involved in all areas of public life; increases young people's understanding of democratic values and principles and supports them to claim their own rights; as well as to ensure full and equal economic empowerment, protection of health and well-being and equal access to information and resources for all young people in Georgia.

Georgia will further promote an inclusive and enabling environment for civil society organisations' (CSOs) operations, including adaptation of policies supporting their financial sustainability and further development of the Civil Society sector, in particular those working at local level. Georgia will also promote Corporate Social Responsibility and social entrepreneurship aimed at providing solutions to social and environmental challenges, with a particular focus on employment of vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities and strengthening financial sustainability of CSOs.

Georgia will ensure the highest democratic standards throughout the electoral process, a fair, transparent and rigorous handling of complaints and appeals, and it will continue to fully address the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) priority recommendations and make substantial progress in addressing their other recommendations⁶, through an inclusive dialogue. Georgia will also ensure party pluralism and refrain from restrictions that run counter international standards, notably in terms of registration and financing, in line with relevant Venice Commission Opinions⁷.

5.2 Strengthening Public Administration

Advancing Public Administration Reform through open government mechanisms remains an utmost priority. The EU and Georgia will act together to uphold and promote European public administration principles and standards. To this end, parties will unite efforts to foster an accountable, efficient, effective, open and transparent governance, build a merit-based and professional civil service, ensure quality public services and strong local self-government.

The parties will work together to, as a priority, foster an accountable, efficient, effective, transparent, civil-centred public administration, building a merit-based and professional civil

6 E.g. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/4/480500.pdf> and <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/georgia/496309>

7 E.g. Joint Opinion on draft article 791 of the election code of 20 March 2021, Venice Commission Opinion No. 1019/2021/ODIHR Opinion Nr ELE-GEO/407/2020; Urgent joint Opinion on revised draft amendments to the election code of 5 July 2021, Venice Commission Opinion No. 1043/2021/ ODIHR Opinion Nr ELE-GEO/417/2021.

service and ensuring qualitative public services across the territory and strong local self-government.

5.3 Mobility, including visa-free regime

Georgia will take sustained action and address the recommendations of the Reports under the Visa Suspension Mechanism in order to ensure the continuous fulfilment of the benchmarks corresponding to the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan⁸, necessary to uphold the visa free travel to the EU. The annual Reports from the European Commission under the Visa Suspension Mechanism will continue to provide guidance on further actions needed to ensure the sustainability of the progress achieved. Georgia will implement the Migration Strategy 2021-2030 and State Integrated Border Management Strategy 2021-2025.

6. In the field of foreign and security policy

6.1 Peaceful conflict resolution

The parties will maintain effective cooperation to support Georgia in its efforts to achieve progress towards the peaceful and sustainable settlement of the conflict based on principles of international law, and to facilitate lasting peace and security in Georgia. They will further mobilise efforts to promote the issue of peaceful conflict resolution in Georgia, including the implementation of the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire Agreement. Georgia will continue to elaborate a strategic vision towards the peaceful conflict resolution, through leading an inclusive, nation-wide process. The parties will intensify efforts to reach tangible results within the frameworks of the EU, UN and OSCE co-chaired Geneva International Discussions to find durable solutions for security and humanitarian challenges stemming from the unresolved conflict. The various EU actors operating on the ground, the EU Delegation to Georgia, the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia and the EU Monitoring Mission will continue to contribute to stability, normalisation, confidence building and conflict resolution. Appropriate steps will be taken to encourage trade, freedom of movement and economic ties across the administrative boundary lines, including reviewing of legislation, as needed and through the peace initiative “A Step to a Better Future”; fostering people-to-people contacts, confidence building and reconciliation between the divided communities. The parties will continue cooperating and taking preventive efforts to further consolidate the non-recognition policy on the international arena.

6.2 Cooperation in the area of security and defence

The parties will deepen the bilateral dialogue on security and defence issues to address issues of common concern, including conflict prevention and crisis management, counter-terrorism, anti-money laundering and the fight against organised crime and drug crimes. Based on the recommendations of the hybrid threats survey, cooperation on countering hybrid threats will be enhanced. The parties will work together to ensure that security sector reform is implemented and relevant frameworks and procedures are adopted in the areas of cyber resilience and critical infrastructure protection. Cooperation between justice and law enforcement agencies will be further strengthened. The EU will also continue to facilitate

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https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/international-affairs/collaboration-countries/visa-liberalisation-moldova-ukraine-and-georgia_en.

Georgia's participation in EU crisis management operations and in Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)-related training and consultation activities.

B. Short and medium-term priorities of the Association Agenda

1. Democracy, Human Rights and Good Governance

Political dialogue and cooperation towards reforms in the framework of this Association Agenda seek to strengthen respect for democratic principles, such as political pluralism, inclusiveness in decision-making, the separation of powers, cooperation with the opposition, the rule of law and good governance, human rights and fundamental freedoms. This includes the rights of persons belonging to minorities as enshrined in the core UN and Council of Europe Conventions and related protocols, and to contribute to consolidating domestic political reforms, in particular through approximating with the EU *acquis*.

Strengthening the stability, independence and effectiveness of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights, and gender equality includes in particular:

Short-term priorities

- Continuing to ensure the conduct of transparent, inclusive and credible elections, including by addressing all shortcomings identified by the OSCE/ODIHR;
- Ensuring that legislative amendments affecting key components of the rule of law, such as the independence of the judiciary, are subject to comprehensive and inclusive consultations and brought into line with European standards as well as recommendations put forward by international bodies, such as the Venice Commission, GRECO and OSCE/ODIHR;
- Ensuring continuity and effective implementation of the Public Administration and the Open Government Reforms, in harmonisation with European public administration principles and best practices; promoting participation and open dialogue between civil society and the government, strengthening co-creation process and multi-stakeholder engagement in policy-making, monitoring and assessment; fostering innovative approaches through exchange of knowledge and experience, intensified peer-to-peer learning, and steady cooperation both at political and expert level;
- The dialogue and cooperation will also cover strengthening the justice sector through continued justice sector reform, in particular, ensuring the full external and internal independence of judges and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms including through comprehensive cooperation.

Medium term priorities

- Ensuring continuity of strengthening the human rights framework through harmonisation and practical implementation of European human rights practices.

1.1 Justice sector

Short-term priorities

- Effectively implement the third and fourth waves of judiciary reforms in all aspects;
- Effectively implement the 2017-2021 Judiciary Strategy and its action plans in all aspects, and adopt an ambitious judicial reform strategy post-2021 based on a broad, inclusive and cross-party reform process and an assessment of the effectiveness of the third and fourth waves of judicial reforms;
- Strengthen and reform the institutional set-up and practices of the High Council of Justice and other key judiciary institutions so as to effectively increase transparency, integrity and accountability of the norms and decisions they adopt, including on decisions regarding appointments, appraisals, promotions, transfers and disciplinary measures. Submit the reform proposals to the Venice Commission and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for an opinion and implement their recommendations;
- In particular, ensure a transparent and meritocratic legal framework and practice for the appointment and promotion of judges by bringing it fully into line with European standards and Venice Commission recommendations, including appointments to the Supreme Court;
- Publish written justifications for appointments of judges with reference to integrity and competence criteria;
- Improve the training of judicial candidates, judges and courts' staff by implementing the recommendations put forward by the EU and the Council of Europe;
- Modernise the administration of justice by further enabling electronic submissions and communication with courts, and electronic case management; widen the application of random electronic allocation of cases;
- Continue the reform of the Prosecutor's Office and the criminal investigation services at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and other agencies aiming at further ensuring independence and professionalism of prosecutorial and criminal investigative work, free from any undue influence and greater transparency and accountability;
- Georgia will review the appointment process for the Prosecutor-General to strengthen the independence of the office/position of the Prosecutor. To this aim, a qualified majority vote in Parliament will be introduced, which is the main Venice Commission recommendation in this respect. This will include an effective anti-deadlock mechanism that enjoys broad cross-party support and is in line with Venice Commission advice. Additional safeguards will be introduced to ensure that the selection and nomination process is transparent and based on criteria of integrity, independence, impartiality and competence;
- Adopt the reform of the Criminal Code with the objective of the modernisation of the law and ensuring its compliance with the relevant EU and international standards; approximate criminal proceedings with those applied in EU Member States:
 - Review the use of and legal safeguards in the application of plea bargaining;

- Guarantee procedural rights of offenders and victims in criminal proceedings and further enhance the application of principles of restorative justice both for adult and juvenile offenders;
- Further ensure that victims, including victims of hate crime, have effective access to justice and compensation and fully receive support and protection;
- Strengthen the procedural rights and ensure legal guarantees of detained persons in the administrative proceedings;
- Widen access to high quality free legal aid;
- Enhance the use and quality of mediation; address deficiencies in consumer arbitration, and create conditions for increasing the use of business-to-business arbitration;
- Step up implementation of the crime prevention and penitentiary strategy, notably by applying rehabilitation and re-socialisation approaches in the Penitentiary, Crime Prevention and Probation Systems and after release.

Medium term priorities

- Use administrative detention only in duly justified cases. Ensure the procedural rights of an administrative detainee, in compliance with basic principles of the Right to Fair Trial. Amend the Law on Administrative Offences in this regard;
- Modernise legislation in the commercial, civil and administrative areas in line with national strategies and in approximation with the EU *acquis*;
- Ensure inclusive access to justice by an adequately funded and staffed Legal Aid Service;
- Properly separate functions between prosecutors and criminal investigators, and establish balanced cooperation mechanisms in legislation and practice;
- Ensure public order and security while guaranteeing human rights protection.

1.2 Anti-corruption, fight against fraud, public administrative reform and public service

Short-term priorities

- Develop and ensure effective implementation of a new Anti-corruption National Strategy and the relevant Action Plan beyond 2020 to prevent, detect and address all forms of corruption;
- Strengthen integrity-related institutions in their oversight functions: Civil Service Bureau for asset declarations; State Audit Office regarding audits of national and subnational expenditures and revenues; Competition Agency; Parliament oversight and monitoring by improving capacity of sectoral committees; the Anti-Corruption Secretariat under the Administration of the Government of Georgia; Civil Advisory Councils at local level;
- Further address corruption through both repressive and preventive means. e.g. by further strengthening the efficiency and capacity to investigate corruption; stepping up the verification of the asset and income declarations of all relevant officials,

addressing potential conflicts of interest, and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of measures;

- Ensure that there are efficient mechanisms in place to prevent and detect any COVID-19 pandemic related risks and vulnerabilities in the fight against corruption in high risks areas such as public procurement and health;
- Further strengthen the mechanisms for the prevention of and fight against corruption in key risk areas such as:
 - Ensuring open and competitive public procurement processes, with a reduction of direct awards and the establishment of an independent, impartial and transparent public procurement review body;
 - Increasing the accountability and integrity standards in the security sector and strengthening democratic oversight, including by limiting derogations thereof (including on financial reporting) and amending relevant legislation as appropriate;
 - Tax and value-added tax (VAT) fraud as an integral part in the combating of economic crimes, corruption and money laundering, as well as the protection of public finances;
 - Ensure effective cooperation with and assistance to the relevant EU institutions and bodies, including the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) for investigations of fraud and illegal activities affecting the Union's financial interests and the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) for its investigations and prosecutions on crimes affecting the Union's financial interests, in line with the applicable rules and procedures;
- Continue ensuring the approximation of legislation of Georgia to the EU *acquis* in the area of anti-fraud and implement the provisions of EU legislation as envisaged in the relevant Annexes of the Association Agreement;
- Promote citizen's rights and possibilities to access information and participate in governance at national and subnational level, including through civil society and free and safe media monitoring;
- Develop and ensure effective implementation of the new Public Administration Reform Strategy and the relevant Action Plan beyond 2020;
- Foster implementation of the Public Administration Reform both at political and administrative level, including by strengthening coordination, monitoring and reporting of the corresponding Actions Plans;
- Enhance the openness, transparency and accountability of public administration through implementation of open government reforms;
- Elaborate a unified policy for the development, delivery and quality assurance of public services with the aim to improve citizen's satisfaction and trust in government;
- Develop robust communication to raise awareness on positive impacts of the Public Administration Reform;
- Implement the civil service legal framework to ensure a more professional and merit-based civil service;

- Continue the implementation of and progress with rule-of-law and anti-corruption benchmarks as part of the Visa Suspension Mechanism.

Medium-term priorities

- Continue combatting corruption, and ensure effective implementation of relevant international legal instruments, such as the UN Convention Against Corruption, and the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption and its Additional Protocol, as well as of recommendations of the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and the recommendations of the OECD-Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia;
- Continue ensuring an effective investigation of alleged cases of corruption and create an effective system for the prevention of conflicts of interest;
- Foster an accountable, efficient, effective, transparent public administration and build a merit-based and professional civil service, including with regard to the system for selection, promotion and dismissal and specialised needs-based training;
- Improve the quality, efficiency and accessibility of public services in the regions of Georgia;
- Improve management and accountability of public finances, taking into consideration gender aspects in programme-based budgeting, and strengthening medium-term strategic planning and implementation;
- Enhance the engagement and capacity of stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations, local self-governments, youth, academia; provide an effective tool for wider public engagement in decision-making and performance monitoring of the public administration reforms;
- Ensure a reliable, accountable, transparent and result-oriented local self-government, empowered with new functions, responsibilities and resources, in line with European standards.

1.3 Human rights and fundamental freedoms

Short-term priorities

- Develop a new National Human Rights Strategy 2021-2030 and respective Action Plans beyond 2020 incorporating the specific recommendations of UN bodies, OSCE/ODIHR, the Council of Europe, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and international human rights organisations notably in implementing anti-discrimination policies, protecting persons belonging to minorities and private life and ensuring the freedom of religion or belief; implement the strategy and action plans through close cooperation with national and international actors;
- Continue the implementation of the anti-discrimination law to ensure effective protection against discrimination, in the spirit of “leaving no one behind”; contribute to increasing the level of tolerance and reduce the level of violence;
- Continue to strengthen media pluralism, transparency and independence in line with Council of Europe recommendations;

- Strengthen the implementation of measures to protect media professionals and ensure effective and efficient investigations into all cases of violence against media professionals and bring those responsible to justice;
- Develop a new State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and an Action Plan beyond 2020 which aims to ensure equal and full participation of ethnic minority representatives in all spheres of public life and further support of cultural diversity;
- Make progress with the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, the so-called Istanbul Convention by strengthening national institutional capacities in support of issues related to gender equality and gender based violence. Continue enhancing measures to prevent and investigate cases of violence against women and girls, including sexual violence, protect victims and support rehabilitation of perpetrators. Work towards social transformation and changing existing stereotypical attitudes in regards to violence against women and domestic violence;
- Strengthen access to reproductive and sexual health for women of all ages, information and prevention, and continue the fight against harmful practices directed against women and girls, including genital mutilation, child, early and forced marriage and other forms of human rights violations and degrading treatment, with special attention for rural areas. Increase maternal health care assistance;
- Take special measures towards groups belonging to minorities in order to contribute to enhancing greater equality in political, economic and social spheres of life;
- Harmonise legislation with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as well as its Optional Protocol and establish a coordinating body for issues related to the rights of persons with disabilities;
- Step up measures to strengthen the inclusion of persons with disabilities in public and economic life and ensure better access to public spaces. Improve conditions for persons with mental health issues;
- Enhance efforts towards combating violence against children through promoting good practices of parenting, greater support in the education system, and improved referral mechanism;
- Enhance efforts towards identifying and combating violence against older persons, continue economic and healthcare support to older people, contribute to greater social inclusion of older persons;
- Increase capacity and build knowledge among public servants on human rights issues.

Medium-term priorities

- Maintain effective mechanisms for both dispute settlement and the protection of human rights, prior to or as alternative for judicial mechanisms;
- Continue to promote, train and raise awareness on human rights protection and anti-discrimination in the judiciary, law enforcement, and all public administration including in the regions;
- Further implement recommendations of the Public Defender's Office (PDO) including on discrimination cases and further ensure the effective functioning of the institutional mechanism foreseen in the anti-discrimination law;

- Continue building monitoring capacities of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Civil Integration as well as on legal issues linked to the implementation of the Human Rights Strategy and Action Plan;
- Continue to cooperate with Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and the representative social partners (trade-unions and employers' organisations) as stakeholders and watchdogs in areas prioritised by the EU-Georgia Association Agreement (AA), including labour rights, privacy, rights of persons belonging to minorities and other vulnerable groups and media freedom;
- Undertake steps to raise awareness and work towards further compliance with the standing provisions of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on national minorities including on minority languages;
- Continue combating gender based violence and work for its prevention, in addition focusing on changing gender-biased stereotypes, greater involvement of men and boys, supporting women's political participation, economic and financial independence through entrepreneurship and better access to the labour market.

1.4 Ill-treatment and torture

Short-term priorities

- Ensure the implementation of the relevant anti-torture Action Plans and continue taking further measures to combat ill-treatment and torture, and step up efforts in order to combat impunity;
- Continue to support and further increase the independence of the oversight authority responsible for investigations of complaints against law enforcement officials both at legislative and practical levels in order to efficiently investigate incidents of ill-treatment and torture, in line with international standards;
- Ensure a thorough, transparent, independent investigation into any allegation of the use of torture and ill-treatment in the penitentiary system, police, military and other detention facilities through the above-mentioned oversight authority in charge;
- Continue to support and engage with the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) under the Public Defender's Office to prevent abuse through ensuring its effective functioning including through its adequate funding and by protecting confidentiality of the process;
- Further improve detention conditions and conditions of mental health facilities;

Medium-term priorities

- Continue efforts to further improve the penitentiary healthcare system and prisoners' access to health care services including mental health care services, equivalent to the civil sector. Continue capacity-development and empowerment of health care staff working in or for closed institutions in the reporting of ill-treatment;
- To continue strengthening the rehabilitation, harm reduction and healthcare programmes within the penitentiary system;

- Further strengthen the effectiveness of ongoing internal and external monitoring of the penitentiary system, police, military and other closed facilities for the early detection and prevention of abuse and ill-treatment.

1.5 Equal treatment

Short-term priorities

- Strengthen gender equality and ensure equal treatment between women and men, as well as persons belonging to minorities, regardless of religion or belief, ethnic or national origins, race, sex, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability or other ground in social, political and economic life;
- Take further measures to strengthen the implementation of legislation against gender based violence, including awareness-raising of both the general population and of specific professional groups, such as the police, and in particular in rural areas. Increase the access of victims to counselling services, housing and shelters;
- Increase the access of victims, including persons belonging to minorities, to counselling services and shelters, as well as post-shelter economic empowerment programmes;
- Improve gender based violence data collection, analysis and reporting. Support combatting gender based violence at local level through greater involvement of local actors, such as municipalities, social workers and CSOs;
- As part of the Human Rights Strategy and Action Plan develop and implement a comprehensive equality policy ensuring the enjoyment of equal rights by persons belonging to vulnerable groups in society.

Medium-term priorities

- Approximation to European standards as regards health and safety rules, rules on the protection of maternity, rules on the reconciliation of parental and professional responsibilities as envisaged by the Association Agreement;
- Take active steps to promote increased meaningful participation and representation of women and persons belonging to minorities in political decision making fora and in the labour market and economic activities, including at local representation level (i.e. municipalities);
- Support non-discrimination on the labour market and implementation of the equal pay for equal value work principle;
- Contribute to greater social and economic inclusion and participation of people belonging to ethnic minorities, including through access to information and education, as well as Georgian language learning;
- Through knowledge building and awareness raising activities increase the acceptance and tolerance among the broader population.

1.6 Rights of the child

Short-term priorities

- Implement the Child Rights Code by aligning all necessary legislation and strengthen national machinery to protect children against all forms of violence, including child, early and forced marriage;
- Address the needs of all children including those in the most marginalised and vulnerable situations, children with disabilities and children in street situations, including through improving and expanding social protection mechanisms, as well as supporting territorial access to habilitation/rehabilitation programmes for children with disabilities and take steps towards the full elimination of child labour;
- Implement the Law on Social Work and ensure resources for recruitment and capacity building of professionals groups dealing with vulnerable children, including children with disabilities;
- Raise awareness and build knowledge of professionals working with children and broader public, on prevention and combating violence against children;
- Continue working towards the deinstitutionalisation of children, apply a gatekeeping mechanism and continue the development of alternative care.

Medium-term priorities

- Continue juvenile justice reform;
- Make steps towards social and behavioural transformation on combatting violence against children;
- Finalise the deinstitutionalisation of childcare.

1.7 Trade Union rights and core labour standards

Short-term priorities

- Adopt and implement the legal framework establishing the supervisory functions of the Labour Inspection system for all labour and working conditions legislation, remove all restrictions to the powers of inspectors in existing legislation in accordance with International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards;
- Continue to amend the Labour Code and other relevant legislation and bring them further in line with ILO standards;
- Continue to ensure an effective Labour Inspection system with adequate competences, capacities and resources (financial, human, and administrative) for the inspections of all working conditions and labour relations according to ILO standards.

Medium-term priorities

- Underpin the Labour Legislation with procedures for resolving labour disputes including through the Labour Mediation system;
- Elaborate the methodology of evaluation/measurement of equal work and remuneration;

- Ensure effective functioning of the Tripartite Social Partnership Commission and of its regional branch and continue to improve social dialogue through cooperation with the ILO and European social partner organisations.

2. *Foreign and Security Policy*

Dialogue and cooperation in the field of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) aim at gradual convergence, including on the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and address in particular conflict prevention and crisis management issues, regional stability, arms control, disarmament, non-proliferation, cyber security and hybrid threats. Cooperation will be based on common values and mutual interests, and will aim at increasing policy coherence and effectiveness, making use of bilateral, multilateral and regional fora and upholding the international rules-based order.

2.1 CSDP cooperation, alignment, hybrid threats and cyber security, strategic communication and regional cooperation

Short-term priorities

- Strengthen efforts to increase the level of alignment of Georgia with EU CFSP declarations and action in multilateral fora;
- Strengthen efforts to increase the level of alignment with EU autonomous sanctions measures;
- Enhance cooperation on countering hybrid threats, strengthening cyber security, including through implementing the recommendations based on the hybrid threats survey;
- Strengthen cooperation on strategic communication to consolidate state and society resilience against disinformation; expand and diversify practical cooperation frameworks to include civil society actors and other like-minded state actors and institutions;
- Continue efforts to implement effective Security Sector Reform in Georgia;
- Enhance practical cooperation in conflict prevention and crisis management by facilitating the participation of Georgia in EU-led civilian and military crisis management operations, in consultation and training activities in the CSDP area on the basis of the Framework Participation Agreement signed in November 2013 and in the multilateral framework of the Eastern Partnership Panel on Security, CSDP and Civil Protection and cooperation with EU agencies on CSDP issues;

Promote regional cooperation on security issues, such as improved border management, migration management, protection of critical infrastructure, export control, disaster risk reduction and management including emergency response, civil protection, countering smuggling and illicit trafficking (such as bio and nuclear materials) and the training of appropriate personnel, including in particular through the EU Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Centre of Excellence

Initiative and its South-East and Eastern Europe Regional Secretariat located in Georgia.

Medium-term priorities

- Promote peaceful conflict resolution and international stability and security to uphold the international rules-based order and based on effective multilateralism;
- Promote joint respect for the principles of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders, as established in the UN Charter and the OSCE Helsinki Final Act.

2.2 Counter-terrorism, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and illegal arms exports

Short-term priorities

- Cooperate to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery through full compliance with, and national implementation of, the Parties' existing obligations under international disarmament and non-proliferation treaties and agreements, and other relevant international obligations;
- Make full use of the operational agreement between Georgia and EUROPOL in order to facilitate the exchange of information on terrorist organisations, groups, their activities and their support networks.

Medium-term priorities

- Cooperate so as to deepen international consensus on a human rights-based fight against terrorism, including on the legal definition of terrorist acts, including by promoting an agreement on the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism;
- Continue to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2396, and in particular share information on terrorist suspects in order to identify, detect and prosecute Foreign Terrorist Fighters;
- Co-operate on risk-based customs control ensuring safety and security of goods imported, exported or in transit;
- Tackle the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, including their ammunition, under existing international agreements and UN Security Council resolutions, and commitments under other international instruments applicable in this area;
- Continue to cooperate in the area of conventional arms export control, in the light of the EU Common Position on control of exports of military technology and equipment. Continue co-operation in the fight against trafficking of arms and the destruction of stockpiles;
- Continue contributing to the implementation of the arms control and relevant confidence building regimes; the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) on all its three pillars, as well as Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), Biological Weapons

Convention (BWC) and other existing obligations under the relevant international agreements and other international obligations.

2.3 Peaceful conflict resolution

Short-term priorities

- Maintain effective co-operation between the EU and Georgia towards a settlement of the conflict within agreed formats, including with a view to ensuring full implementation of the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire Agreement and safe, voluntary and dignified return of IDPs and refugees to their homes, as well as establishing ways for appropriate involvement of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia in the deepening of EU-Georgia relations;
- Maintain effective co-operation and coordination between the EU and Georgia on the peaceful conflict resolution including through regular political dialogue, and keep the issue of peace-building and security high on the agenda of the EU;
- Coordinate efforts to facilitate implementation of the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement, including through developing and promoting the subsequent implementing measures in follow-up of the initial one;
- Intensify efforts to ensure meaningful negotiations and reaching tangible results within the framework of the EU, UN, OSCE co-chaired Geneva International Discussions on the basis of the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire Agreement to find durable solutions for the security and humanitarian challenges stemming from the unresolved conflict;
- Fully and effectively use the offices of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia to contribute to stability, normalisation, including facilitating a safe and normal life for local communities living on both sides of the administrative boundary lines, and confidence building;
- Continue to work towards the resumption and effective functioning of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms in Gali and Ergneti and redouble efforts to address safety and humanitarian needs of the conflict-affected people;
- Continue efforts for addressing human rights abuses in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia;
- Support peaceful conflict resolution efforts, including via undertaking contacts with the populations of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia in light of Georgia's reconciliation and engagement policy (including the peace initiative) and the EU's non-recognition and engagement policy on the implementation on which the EU and Georgia cooperate;
- Cooperate in sharing with the populations across the divides the benefits and opportunities stemming from the EU-Georgia political association and economic integration process, including the short-stay visa-free regime to the Schengen area;
- Continue to promote freedom of movement, trade, economic ties and education opportunities across the administrative boundary lines, including through the peace initiative "A Step to a Better Future" and a review of legislation, as needed.

Cooperate in undertaking measures to foster people-to-people contacts, confidence-building and reconciliation efforts between communities divided by conflict;

- Take further steps to promote the sustainable integration of IDPs (property rights, employment, and targeted support);
- Strengthen women's meaningful participation in peaceful conflict resolution and peace building, and ensure conflict-affected women and civil society are actively consulted as part of all conflict resolution efforts;
- Continue joint efforts and take effective preventive measures to further consolidate the non-recognition policy on the international arena.

Medium-term priorities

- Take steps towards the sustainable resolution of the conflict and without prejudice to the existing formats for addressing the conflict related issues, peaceful conflict resolution will constitute one of the central subjects on the agenda of political dialogue between the Parties, as well as in the dialogue with other relevant international actors;
- Continue joint efforts to promote the establishment of international security mechanisms in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, access of international human rights organisations to these territories, and the full implementation of the mandate of the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM Georgia) throughout Georgia;
- Continue working towards enabling the safe, dignified and voluntary return of IDPs and refugees to the places of origin in line with the principles of international law;
- Continue to cooperate with the International Criminal Court (ICC) by implementing the Rome Statute and its related instruments, giving due regard to preserving its integrity. Continue to cooperate with the ICC with respect to August 2008 war investigations.

3. *Justice, Freedom and Security*

In March 2017, visa free travel to the EU was granted to Georgian citizens. In this context, Georgia should continue to fulfil the Visa Liberalisation benchmarks and address the recommendations in the regular reports under the Visa Suspension Mechanism issued by the Commission to ensure the sustainability of the visa-free regime and thus contribute to mobility and people-to-people contacts between the EU and Georgia.

In addition, the Readmission Agreement, the Mobility Partnership between the EU and Georgia, and the cooperation arrangements and agreements as appropriate with several EU agencies in the area of Justice and Home Affairs, such as the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), the European Migration Network (EMN), Europol, Cepol and Eurojust, frame the context for the enhanced cooperation in the Justice and Home Affairs area.

3.1 Protection of Personal Data

Short-term priorities

- Ensure a high-level of protection of personal data and enact legislation in accordance with European standards and take practical steps to guarantee the respect for the right to personal data protection in the public and private sectors, including in the criminal justice field;
- Strengthen the capacity of the data protection oversight authority to ensure facing modern technological challenges in the data protection sphere and successful implementation of European standards in Georgia.

Medium-term priorities

- Continue strengthening the capacity of the data protection oversight authority and follow up on the application of data protection standards.

3.2 Migration, Asylum and Integrated Border Management

Short-term priorities

- Ensure sustained fulfilment of all Visa Liberalisation benchmarks and the recommendations issued by the Commission in the Visa Suspension Mechanism Reports;
- Continue the effective implementation of the readmission agreements, including the readmission agreement between the EU and Georgia;
- Strengthen the operational cooperation to achieve a swift decrease in the number of unfounded asylum applications lodged by Georgian nationals in the Schengen+ area;
- Implement effectively the amendments to the law of Georgia “On rules and procedures for Georgian citizens exiting and entering Georgia”, in full respect of human rights and data protection requirements;
- Continue to organise information campaigns on the rights and obligations of visa-free travel;
- Further strengthen border management and maintain the high quality of border checks and border surveillance;
- Report on improvements in the analysis of migratory data and the assessment of risks;
- Update on a regular basis (at least every two years) Georgia's Migration Profile;
- Continue to strengthen operational cooperation with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), including cooperation on Integrated Border Management, staff exchange, training, observers from the region in joint operations and information exchange through the Eastern Partnership Risk Analysis Network (Eastern Partnership-RAN);
- Finalise and effectively implement Georgia's State Integrated Border Management Strategy 2021- 2025 and the accompanying Action Plan.

Medium-term priorities

- Effectively implement Georgia's Migration Strategy 2021-2030 and the accompanying Action Plans;
- Develop more effective ways to promote circular and legal migration, while respecting existing national legislation and competences;
- Effectively elaborate and implement Georgia's State Integrated Border Management Strategy 2021-2025 and its accompanying Action Plans;
- Maintain a high quality of border checks and border surveillance;
- Progress in the demarcation of state borders with neighbouring countries;
- Continue effective implementation of state reintegration program and activities.

3.3 Law enforcement

Short-term priorities

- Ensure full operational capacity of the oversight authority responsible for independent investigations of complaints against law enforcement officials. Complaints against the police will require a professional, effective mechanism for credible response including through the internal General Inspection;
- Continue the effective functioning of the Human Rights Protection and Investigation Quality Monitoring Department at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, including by supporting provision of professional trainings of law enforcement officers on human rights as guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights;
- Further expand the application of alternatives to imprisonment, by enhancing the use of the existing and by introducing new non-custodial sentences and increasing the capacities of the probation services;
- Modernise investigative processes and techniques in fighting organised, serious and all other crimes.

3.4 Fight against Organised Crime

Short-term priorities

- Ensure the continued implementation of the relevant Action Plans on the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings and continue capacity development activities for the state authorities to proactively identify and efficiently investigate cases of trafficking in human beings;
- Monitor and report on the effectiveness of proactive identification and investigation of cases of trafficking in human beings;
- Develop a new National Strategy for Combating Organised Crime and its accompanying Action Plan and ensure effective implementation;
- Take full advantage of the agreement on operational and strategic cooperation with Europol, including by providing operational and strategic information and by

stronger involvement in the EU Policy Cycle / European multidisciplinary platform against criminal threats (EMPACT);

- Continue cooperating with CEPOL for law enforcement training purposes;
- Continue to further develop the intelligence-led-policing and a unified crime analysis system, including by adoption and implementation of the intelligence-led-policing strategy.

Medium-term priorities

- Continue efforts in the area of prevention and fight against organised crime, notably in the framework of the EU Policy Cycle to tackle organised and serious international crime / European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT);
- Enhance cooperation in addressing cybercrime, and providing relevant law enforcement training to Georgian authorities;
- Step up efforts in the fight against cybercrime to build a comprehensive legal and institutional framework in line with the Budapest Convention;
- Further strengthen cross-border law enforcement cooperation to fight against Georgian organised crime groups.

3.5 Tackling Illicit Drugs

Short-term priorities

- Continue cooperation in drug prevention and through fully aligning drug policies with EU positions and further advance prevention mechanisms through the implementation of the National Strategy for the Prevention of Drug Abuse 2021-2026 and its respective action plans;
- Maintain close cooperation with the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) in order to enhance the capacity of the Georgian National Drug Observatory (NDO) and exchange relevant and valid information;
- Ensure the implementation of the National Anti-Drug Strategies and subsequent action plans.

Medium-term priorities

- Continue ensuring a balanced and integrated approach towards drugs issues in order to strengthen systems to cope with the health and social consequences of drug use as well as ensuring more effective prevention and working towards reducing the supply of, trafficking in and the demand for illicit drugs;
- Continue the regular dialogue in the framework of Eastern Partnership (EaP) Drugs Dialogue.

3.6. Anti-Money laundering and countering terrorism financing

Short-term priorities

- Align Georgian legislation with the EU fourth and fifth Anti-Money Laundering Directive;
- Monitor and report on the number of freezing and confiscation orders issued and on the estimated value of property frozen and confiscated, in order to ensure the effective implementation of Georgia's legislation on confiscation of criminal assets.

Medium-term priorities

- Continue efforts in further developing the legal and institutional framework for preventing and fighting money laundering and financing of terrorism, including through approximation with EU legislation in these fields;
- Continue to implement standards in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations on terrorist financing;
- Continue cooperation with FATF, the Council of Europe, MONEYVAL, as well as relevant authorities in EU Member States on anti-money laundering issues;
- Continue enhancing operational cooperation on confiscation, asset recovery and asset management through effective communication and exchange of best practices between the Georgian authorities and the EU Asset Recovery Offices.

3.7 Legal Cooperation

Short-term priorities

- Continue the implementation of the operational cooperation agreement with Eurojust.

Medium-term priorities

- Enhance judicial cooperation in civil and commercial matters by implementing the 1965 Convention on the Service Abroad of Judicial and Extrajudicial Documents in Civil or Commercial Matters and the 1970 Convention on the Taking of Evidence Abroad in Civil or Commercial Matters;
- Accede to and implement the main Conventions of the Hague Conference on Private International Law in the field of judicial cooperation as well as the protection of children, such as the 2005 Convention on Choice of Court Agreements and the 2007 Hague Convention on Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance, and its Protocol on the applicable law to maintenance obligations;
- Enhance judicial cooperation in criminal matters by acceding to and implementing the relevant conventions, especially those of the Council of Europe.

4. Trade and Trade-Related Matters

The Parties will continue deepening integration on the basis of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The Parties are aware that the full potential of this agreement has not been reached yet, and will cooperate to achieve compliance with the EU *acquis*, as indicated in the relevant annexes to the Association Agreement/DCFTA, particularly in the trade-related areas set out below. The effective

implementation of the Association Agreement and its DCFTA, linked to the broader process of regulatory approximation and related necessary reforms, contributes to establishing conditions for enhanced economic and trade relations with the EU leading to Georgia's further gradual economic integration in the European Union Internal Market, as envisaged in the Association Agreement. The Parties will work together to implement all the provisions of the Association Agreement/DCFTA. Both Parties shall regularly cooperate including through the bilateral structures established under the EU-Georgia AA, as well as within multilateral frameworks.

Georgia will strengthen the national institutional framework to ensure impartial implementation, enforcement and monitoring of the new legislation adopted in each relevant area.

Georgia will regularly inform the EU about the state of play of approximation through the specialised sub-committees and in the framework of the annual Association Committee in Trade configuration. When appropriate, and in agreement of both Parties, the EU will provide assistance and expertise in order to help Georgian authorities in this process.

4.1 Trade in Goods

Short-term priorities

- Make further improvements in the area of trade statistics;
- Work together to increase the diversification of Georgia's export structure, including export of new products to the EU market.

Medium-term priorities

- Cooperate closely with a view to applying effectively the anti-circumvention mechanism;
- Assist Georgia in drafting and implementing legislation it may intend to prepare on market access or other related issues (i.e. trade remedies);
- Ensure exchange of information on market access-related developments and policy on market access.

4.2 Technical Regulations, Standardisation and Related Infrastructure

Short-term priorities

- Develop legislation which Georgia committed to implement on the basis of the Association Agreement as provided in its Technical Barriers to Trade Strategy (TBT);
- Further develop infrastructure related to administration of standards, technical regulations, metrology, market surveillance, accreditation, and conformity assessment procedures, including through EU support;
- Facilitate the preparation and adaptation of stakeholders, including economic operators, for the implementation of approximated legislation;

- Continue the implementation of the Market Surveillance Strategy for industrial goods;
- In the Market Surveillance field, strengthen administrative capacities of relevant Georgian state institutions and market surveillance bodies;
- Provide further staff training for the administration of government bodies and agencies working on technical regulations, metrology and standardisation, and accreditation;
- Exchange information on all relevant aspects of the Georgian TBT and Market Surveillance Strategies, including timeframes as applicable.

4.3 Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures

Short-term priorities

- Support the early warning system for the food and feed, animal health and plant health safety;
- Organise information campaigns with relevant agencies, businesses and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on the requirements for accessing the EU market, as well as with civil society on the relevant consumer protection aspects of food and food safety;
- Provide further EU technical advice and support to Georgia in drafting and implementing legislation on SPS, including training the relevant staff, providing capacity-building to the competent authority and supporting the improvement of the laboratory capacity, in line with the EU requirements;
- Support Georgia in the successful implementation of the approximated legislation in the areas of SPS measures;
- Enhance the adaptation capacity of Georgian business for the implementation of approximated legislation. Focus support to adaptation capacity specifically on micro, small and medium Food Business Operators.

Medium-term priorities

- Support Georgia to strengthen the risk analysis in the SPS field; ensuring veterinary phytosanitary and food safety checks at the border inspection posts; facilitating the adaptation of Georgian businesses for the implementation of approximated legislation; progress on the authorisation of additional food products to the EU market;
- Collaborate in the field of animal welfare and on the reduced use of antibiotics in animal production to combat antibiotics resistance.

4.4 Customs and Trade Facilitation

Short-term priorities

- Continue to cooperate in ongoing work for the approximation of Georgia's legislation to the EU acquis and international standards listed in the relevant Annex to the Association Agreement such as the new Customs Code;
- Ensure implementation of the Strategic Framework for customs cooperation, with follow-up review and update as required;
- Continue to support the implementation of Georgia's legislation on customs enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPR) to the EU *acquis*, as envisaged by the Association Agreement;
- Inform regularly about the implementation of the Customs Code;
- Assist Georgia in its accession to the Convention on a Common Transit Procedure.
- Cooperation on measures related to Customs digitalization initiatives and platforms open to Georgia.

Medium-term priorities

- Continue to modernise Georgian customs authorities;
- Continue to simplify and modernise customs procedures;
- Co-operate on risk-based customs control and sharing of relevant information that contributes to improved risk management and security of the supply chains, facilitation of legitimate trade and safety and security of goods imported, exported or in transit;
- Strengthen dialogue on the fight against fraud to prevent illegal trade, including in excisable products, particularly through enhanced cooperation in the framework of the Protocol on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters;
- Capacity-building to enhance the implementation of the digital customs environment;
- Work towards mutual recognition of an Authorised Economic Operator system as envisaged by the Association Agreement.

4.5 Rules of Origin

Short-term priorities

- Implement the provisions of the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean Convention, especially in the field of proofs of origin (issuance and verification, compliance with the rules of origin) and customs cooperation.

4.6 Establishment, Trade in Services and Electronic Commerce

- Training and building adequate administrative capacity to undertake planned legislative approximation;
- Exchange information and experience on the development of interoperable eCommerce trading platforms;
- Exchange information and experience on raising awareness among stakeholders on the implementation and enforcement of the key provisions of the EU Postal Services

Directive, in particular the universal service obligation, as well as other relevant postal sector policy.

4.7 Public Procurement

Short-term priorities

- Reduce the proportion of direct procurement (without open call for tenders) through stricter secondary legislation and stricter application of rules, in particular regarding direct procurement due to urgent necessity and events with restricted timeframe;
- Set up an independent and impartial public procurement review body, in line with the revised legal framework;
- Provide precise and timely information on planned legislative work affecting procurement policy and its implementation, both for the legal approximation and the set-up of institutions in the field of public procurement;
- The Association Council will adopt the relevant Joint Decision on granting market access in accordance with the completion of phase I of the roadmap on the public procurement chapter.

Medium-term priorities

- The Parties will further discuss the implementation of the obligations stemming from the Association Agreement;
- Georgia to continue, with the support of the EU, the drafting and adoption of new public procurement legislation, in line with the approximation process and time-line foreseen in the Association Agreement.

4.8 Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

Short-term priorities

- Support the functioning of the National Intellectual Property Centre of Georgia “Sakpatenti” in order to ensure the protection of industrial property rights and copyright; extend cooperation with third country authorities and industry associations;
- Strengthen the enforcement capacity of relevant governmental bodies or executive agencies, as well as ensure proper functioning of the judicial system to guarantee access to justice for rights holders and implementation of sanctions;
- Take effective measures against counterfeiting and piracy, including production of statistical information on those activities to be shared between the Parties;
- Cooperate regarding the application of an exhaustion regime in matters of intellectual property.

Medium-term priorities

- Ensure rights holders from both Parties a high level of IPR protection and enforcement;

- Take measures to increase public awareness in the field of intellectual and industrial property protection and use, and ensure effective dialogue with rights holders.

4.9 Competition

Medium-term priorities

- Cooperate on the implementation of the Competition Chapter of the Association Agreement and the related reforms. Cooperation will tackle the institutional framework and relevant administrative capacities of Georgia's Competition Authority in order to guarantee effective implementation of relevant competition legislation;
- Cooperation will also cover an enhanced dialogue on enforcement activities in the competition and subsidy areas.

4.10 Transparency

Short-term priorities

- Further strengthen implementation of commitments on transparency in trade-related policy-making;
- Discuss best practices and respective experience in transparent policy-making, exchange information and provide relevant training, including on communication mechanisms and stakeholder consultations, as well as conduct seminars and other events for the wider public, aimed at explaining the implementation of the Association Agreement and the approximation process.

4.11 Trade and Sustainable Development

Short-term priorities

- Establish an appropriate enforcement and supervision system for all labour standards and rights, and in particular for the eradication of child labour, in line with international and EU principles and practices;
- Cooperate on the implementation of the updated Nationally Determined Contribution and on developing the long-term low emissions development strategy in line with the Paris Agreement;
- Further strengthen the effectiveness of the CITES system implementation, in particular for species traded with the EU in high numbers, such as *Galanthus* spp;
- Continue improving and exchanging best practices under the Chapter about stakeholder involvement and civil society dialogue;
- Continue the dialogue on the implementation of the commitments related to trade and sustainable development.

Medium-term priorities

- Continue to exchange information on effective implementation of labour standards, and on upholding labour protection, including effective supervision and enforcement;
- Discuss the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements, which either side is a party to;
- Cooperate on pursuing an ambitious global biodiversity framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

5. Economic and Sectoral Cooperation

The parties will cooperate to boost economic development and economic integration, including by deepening sectoral cooperation, supporting SME development, focusing on achieving sustainable, green, inclusive and digital economic growth. The parties will cooperate to address the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic while building short-term and long-term resilience. The Parties will work together in order to ensure decent work and fair working conditions for all, strengthen equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fight poverty and social exclusion. Georgia will strengthen its regulatory convergence with EU acquis in line with the Association Agreement commitments. It will also strengthen the national institutional framework to ensure independent implementation, enforcement and monitoring of the new legislation adopted in each relevant area. Georgia will regularly inform the EU about the state of play of approximation through the specialised sub-committees and, when appropriate, and in agreement of both Parties, the EU will provide assistance and expertise in order to help Georgian authorities in this process.

5.1 Economic Development and Market Opportunities

Medium-term priorities

- Cooperate to support Georgia in establishing a fully functioning market economy, focusing on achieving sustainable, green and inclusive economic growth, and gradually approximating its policies to the policies of the EU in accordance with the guiding principles of macroeconomic stability, sound public finances, a robust financial system and sustainable balance of payments;
- Monitor macroeconomic developments, discuss key policy challenges and exchange information on best practices by strengthening the regular macroeconomic dialogue in order to improve the quality of economic policymaking;
- Strengthen the independence and regulatory capacity of the National Bank of Georgia (NBG) and share EU experience on monetary and exchange rate policy including on the international role of the euro, to further develop Georgia's capabilities in these areas;
- Further improve the sustainability and governance of public finances by continuing to improve fiscal reforms;
- Improve efficiency of State-Owned Enterprises and further reduce related fiscal risks through the adoption of corporate governance standards;
- Develop a sustainable, comprehensive and well-targeted social safety net;

- Foster greater inclusion of women in the labour market and business, aiding economic growth.

5.2 Agriculture and Rural Development

Short-term priorities

- Ensure the implementation of the Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy (ARDS) 2021-2027 and relevant Action Plans;
- Adopt by 2021 and implement the strategic document for the Food Safety component of the Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy (ARDS) 2021-2027;
- Implement the institutional reform of rural development;
- Support the development of efficient value chains, support SMEs to increase their competitiveness in selected sectors with high export value; reinforce coherence between selection of priority value-chains and trade priorities;
- Ensure opportunities for women in rural diversified economies;
- Ensure the provision of all public services in rural areas, with particular emphasis on the most remote rural places, not to leave anyone behind.

Medium-term priorities:

- Modernise and improve the efficiency of institutions responsible for agriculture and rural development, including through participation of all relevant sector stakeholders in this process. Further strengthen the coordination mechanism between government and civil society organisations;
- Promote and facilitate climate-smart agriculture, energy-efficient technologies and other good agricultural practices; modernise and improve production, processing and storage of agricultural products to increase productivity, added value and competitiveness of Georgian agriculture;
- Facilitate the gradual adoption of marketing standards for agricultural products to support better food safety and continue the implementation of quality schemes, including organic agriculture and products with geographical indications;
- Improve the competitiveness and sustainability of agricultural production, including by fostering economies of scale via market-oriented agriculture cooperatives and producer organisations, by developing advisory and extension systems to increase production and augment exports; promoting organic production, and by easing access to viable credit and financial resources for agriculture;
- Move towards the progressive convergence and implementation of effective agricultural and rural development policies, on the basis of proven EU models;
- Enhance employment and living conditions in the rural areas through improved management of natural resources, improved services and infrastructure and diversification of the rural economy.

5.3 Public Internal Financial Control and External Audit

Short-term priorities

- Further develop the internal control system under decentralised managerial responsibility, including a functionally independent internal audit in state authorities by ensuring harmonisation with generally-accepted international standards, frameworks and EU good practice.

Medium-term priorities

- Continue to improve the internal control and internal audit system in the public sector in line with a gap assessment between current practice and generally accepted international standards, frameworks and EU good practice;
- Ensure the further development of the external audit function of the Court of Accounts (State Audit Office of Georgia), in line with generally-accepted international standards (INTOSAI).

5.4 Public Health

Short-term priorities

- Further implement the EU health acquis, as mentioned in the relevant annexes of the Association Agreement, in particular in the area of blood safety, tobacco control, quality and safety of substances of human origin (blood tissues, organs, cells), communicable diseases and pandemic preparedness in line also with Georgia's international obligations under the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and the International Health Regulations;
- Improve the coverage of the Universal Health Care Programme and reduce out-of-pocket expenditures to be paid by the patients. Increase digitalisation (e-health);
- Enhance quality and accessibility of primary healthcare aiming at disease prevention and improvement of quality of life;
- Finalise, adopt and start the implementation of the National Health Strategy and its Action Plans;
- Strengthen national multi-sectoral action to fight anti-microbial resistance *inter alia* by strengthening surveillance, prudent use of antimicrobials and infection control in healthcare settings;
- Prepare for the implementation of the International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH), in the framework of approximation with the EU pharma *acquis*. This would give Georgia a good basis to ensure quality, safety and efficacy of medicines (mostly for imports, or for local manufacturing/consumption).

Medium-term priorities

- Improve the inclusiveness of healthcare and preventive services e.g. encouraging healthy lifestyles through involvement of CSOs, local authorities;
- Strengthen policymaking and control healthcare institutions as well as patient rights and their enforceability;

- Strengthen healthcare institutions – most of which are privately-run – and their accountability through establishing quality indicators, value-based purchasing and other quality management processes including recognising the accreditation of health care institutions by international accreditation bodies.

5.5 Taxation

Short-term priorities

- Improve and simplify tax legislation;
- Promote good governance in tax matters, improve international cooperation and implement the principles of good governance in the tax area, including the global standards on transparency and exchange of information, fair taxation, and the minimum standards against Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS);
- Improve the capacity of the tax administration, in particular by moving towards a more focused risk based system for tax control and VAT refund;
- Strengthen cooperation with the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) in counteracting and fighting fraud and smuggling of excisable products;
- Take measures to harmonise policies in counteracting and fighting fraud and smuggling of excisable products, including key policy areas;
- Cooperate with Georgia on accession to and successful implementation of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products;
- Develop cooperation with the tax administrations of EU Member States by exchanging new experiences and trends in the field of taxation, including the exploration of possibilities to involve the tax administration of Georgia in the EU's Fiscalis programme.

Medium-term priorities

- Gradual alignment (by 2026) of the national excise duty rates on tobacco products to the EU tax levels;
- Gradual alignment of the Georgian legislation with the Council Directive 2003/96/EC of 27 October 2003 restructuring the Community framework for the taxation of energy products and electricity.

5.6 Statistics

Short-term priorities

- Address statistical discrepancies in measuring bilateral EU-Georgia trade data;
- Development of sex-disaggregated data and its use for analysis and reporting purposes.

Medium-term priorities

- Ensure approximation to the relevant EU acquis;

- Establish a population register in Georgia;
- Produce regional statistics in line with the NUTS classification;
- Increase access to and use of administrative data for statistical purposes;
- Continue to ensure availability of statistics and data to researchers, journalists and the broader public;
- Align the Business Statistics Methodology with EU standards and business statistics oriented on the future data requirements as contained in the Framework Regulation for Integrated Business Statistics (FRIBS); the promoting of sharing experience of the EU countries in implementing FRIBS is desirable for enhancing the alignment process.

5.7 Consumer Policy

- Continue gradually approximating Georgia's legislation to the relevant EU legislation and international instruments;
- Strengthening consumer protection in Georgia, notably through training of government officials and other consumer interest representatives on the approximation with EU legislation and its subsequent implementation.

5.8 Company Law, Accounting and Auditing and Corporate Governance

Short-term priorities

- Implement the Law of Georgia on Entrepreneurs in line with the requirements of the Annex to the Association Agreement.

Medium-term priorities

- Develop administrative capacity of relevant state institutions;
- Further implement international auditing standards at national level and promote their application by all statutory auditors at national level;
- Exchange timely, relevant and precise information about the state-of-play of existing legislation and its compliance with EU law, based on the format agreed between the Parties, to implement EU law in line with the agreed timetable.

5.9 Financial Services

Short-term priorities

- Adopt and implement a law establishing mandatory insurance of motor vehicles;
- Identify areas in which training and capacity-building should be provided;
- Providing timely, relevant and precise information about the state of play and development of the existing legislation in Georgia.

Medium-term priorities

- Further develop the regulatory and supervisory framework in conformity with internationally agreed regulatory standards, including a new supervisory approach, tools and instruments;
- Improve the administrative capacity of supervisory authorities;
- Promote diversification of financial markets through the development of insurance, capital, pension and non-bank financial service markets. Enhance financial infrastructure and foster financial sustainability and inclusiveness;
- Support Georgia's efforts in meeting the criteria to eventually join the Single Euro Payment Area (SEPA).

5.10 Industrial and Enterprise Policy and Mining

Short-term priorities

- Implement the Georgian SME Strategy and the corresponding Action Plans;
- Develop a budgeted successor SME Strategy including a performance measurement framework. Ensure consultation with the private sector. Task SME agencies with clear objectives (including key performance indicators) while providing operational independence and continuity.

Medium-term priorities

- Implement the country-specific roadmap and the recommendations of the SBA (Small Business Act) Assessments to the extent possible;
- Link SME development to the opportunities created by the DCFTA including through business (support) networks (such as the Enterprise Europe Network) and clusters;
- Strengthen the Public-Private Dialogue in order to improve involvement of enterprises of all sizes and their associations in the preparation of regulatory actions and inform them on implementation measures in time for enterprises – in particular SMEs - to adapt to the new measures;
- Develop opportunities for Georgian start-ups to enter the EU and Georgian markets;
- Improve the outreach to and access to finance for SMEs; develop non-banking funding for business activities, e.g. venture capital, crowd-funding, social enterprise;
- Support gender equality and gender mainstreaming in SME development in Georgia by supporting the increase of the share of women entrepreneurs in particular in small and medium size businesses, their access to finance, etc;
- Promote entrepreneurship among youth and mainstream youth into the entrepreneurship and start-up ecosystem;
- Facilitate improved business-to-business cooperation through the development and strengthening of business clusters focusing on sustainable, green and inclusive economic growth, and taking into account opportunities offered by transitioning to a more circular economy;

- Increase productivity by e.g. further digitising the economy and implementing innovative practices in the public and private sector; prioritising digitalisation of value chains of strategic importance;
- Through the dedicated Subcommittee, exchange information on mining and metals to achieve a better understanding of Georgian and EU policies, including the implementation of the EU Raw Materials Initiative, the action plan on critical raw materials, the Horizon 2020 research programme and its successor programme, Horizon Europe, and the European Innovation Partnership on Raw Materials.

5.11 Tourism

- Inter alia through the dedicated Subcommittee, exchange information on development of tourism in Georgia and in the EU, including on relevant events and best practices and support Georgia in the implementation of its Tourism Strategy.

5.12 Employment, Social Policy and Equal Opportunities

Short-term priorities

- Continue the approximation of Georgian legislation to the EU *acquis* in the areas of health and safety at work, labour law, gender equality and anti-discrimination in line with the timelines of the relevant Annex to the Association Agreement;
- Establish and implement the legal framework for an effective enforcement and supervision system for all labour legislation and working conditions, in line with international and EU principles and build capacity of social partners, judiciary and other relevant stakeholders on approximated legislation;
- Implement the “Law on Employment Promotion” and ensure effective operation of the new State Employment Support Agency (SESA), and notably ensure resources (budget, staff);
- Implement the Labour Market Strategy 2020-23 and the corresponding Action Plans;
- Further enhance capacities of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs and of social services;
- Enhance active support to youth transition to work through ensuring equal opportunities for all young people to develop the necessary skills and gain practical experience in order to smoothen the transition from education to the labour market;
- Make the social protection system supportive to activation (labour market participation) and ensure adequacy and sustainability of social assistance and pension schemes.

Medium-term priorities

- Continue ensuring an effective labour inspection system in line with international and EU practices in order to ensure administrative and enforcement capacities in the areas of health and safety at work and labour law, and strengthening relevant judiciary bodies and stakeholders’ capacity;

- Continue to strengthen capacities of the new State Employment Support Agency in line with practices of the European public employment services and ensure accessible and effective employment services;
- Pilot approaches to support young people’s transition to work;
- Monitor implementation and results of the Labour Market Strategy 2020-23;
- Maintain well-functioning social dialogue through the effective functioning of the Tripartite Social Partnership Commission and its regional branch and capacity-building of social partners;
- Support cross cutting measures to improve access to jobs for persons in vulnerable situations;
- Development of the Social Code aimed at an improvement of the system of employment and social benefits and healthcare from a broader perspective of social welfare (employment, social mobility, healthcare, social security and social assistance);
- Take steps to address “informal employment”/”undeclared work” in cooperation with social partners and international organisations.

5.13 Digital Economy and Society

Medium-term priorities

- The parties will work together to further harmonise Georgian Legislation with the EU’s Network Information Security (NIS) directive, and to improve the cyber resilience of key critical infrastructure sectors and public sector organisations, based on EU relevant experience, practices and norms;
- Approximate with the EU *acquis* in the field of electronic communications; in particular, further strengthen the independence and administrative capacity of the national regulatory authority for electronic communications;
- Implement the Regional Roaming Agreement (expected to be signed in early 2022);
- Implement the Regional Spectrum Coordination Agreement (expected to be signed in early 2022);
- Implement Georgia’s National Broadband Development Strategy and related Action Plan, taking into account EU legislation and best practices;
- Support Georgia in digital Black Sea connectivity;
- The parties will cooperate towards the adoption by Georgia of legal frameworks for electronic identification schemes and electronic trust services, in line with EU legislation and best practices, with a view to a possible mutual recognition agreement for trust services;
- Enhance Georgia’s digital economy in the areas of digital skills, digital innovation and start-up ecosystems, cybersecurity and e-Services for citizens and businesses and uptake of space-based data and services.

5.14 Fisheries and Maritime Policy

Short-term priorities

- Foster an integrated approach to maritime affairs, especially by contributing to the development of cross-sectoral and regional initiatives in the maritime domain by establishing a coordination mechanism, and by identifying areas of common interest and actively cooperating with coastal States and maritime stakeholders in the Black Sea region, in the context of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea;
- Improve and enhance monitoring and control of fishing activities and of trade in fisheries products and their traceability and capacity of the competent authorities, in order to effectively fight illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing;
- Follow developments and measures taken within the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and finalise upgrading of its status as a full GFCM member;
- Continue the implementation of fisheries and aquaculture governance, in line with the 2030 GFCM Strategy, towards fisheries sustainability in the Black Sea and sustainable development of aquaculture;
- Continue with the ongoing process of adoption of a legal framework covering the fishing and fishing related activities of the Georgian long distance fleet and tools for the implementation of that legal framework in order to effectively fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Medium-term priorities

- Take necessary steps to achieve sustainable fisheries in the Black Sea, both in bilateral and multilateral frameworks on the basis of an ecosystem approach to fisheries management;
- Increase scientific and technical co-operation on regional and bilateral level with a view to ensuring the capacity of monitoring fisheries activities, data collection, surveys at sea, in a view of improving the evaluation of the state of stocks and of interaction of fisheries with the marine environment;
- Make use of technical assistance possibilities for fisheries monitoring the further development of control and surveillance in support of the operation of the fisheries monitoring centre and of the electronic monitoring system for fishing vessels;
- Take the necessary measures to ensure the proper implementation of the legal framework that will cover the fishing and fishing related activities of Georgia's long distance fleet, including monitoring, control and surveillance tools over those activities, in order to effectively tackle IUU fishing;
- Actively support the implementation of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea and the identification of bankable projects;
- Improve conditions for small-scale fisheries and aquaculture development, enhance data collection, improve access to local markets and to the supply chain, improve small-scale fisheries and aquaculture products' food safety standards, and encourage the establishment of producers' organisations.

6. Connectivity, Energy, Environment, Climate Action and Civil Protection

The Parties will cooperate to foster the implementation of the EU *acquis* in all transport modes with the objective of improving physical connectivity, as well as related standards and regulatory and safety aspects. The Parties will work together towards achieving environmental and climate resilience by promoting – also within post-COVID-19 recovery efforts – a modern, resource-efficient, clean and circular economy leading to the greening of the economy and a more sustainable use of natural resources. Promotion and support of energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy will further contribute to reducing emissions. Cooperation on disaster prevention, preparedness and response will be further strengthened.

6.1 Transport

Medium-term priorities

- Pursue the implementation of the EU aviation *acquis* in order to take full advantage of the EU-Georgia Common Aviation Area Agreement;
- Improve safety across transport modes (aviation, road, maritime, railways);
- Support Georgia in setting up a comprehensive road safety database to provide for necessary data on the current road safety situation (crash data/ serious injuries) to allow for more efficient policy-related actions;
- In view of the importance of road safety, provide further support to Georgia in harmonising its road safety legislation with the EU *acquis*, including road safety management and capacity building;
- Support the reform of the railway sector of Georgia that could in particular contribute to more sustainable transport by shifting freight from roads to railways;
- Further develop infrastructure, in particular by implementing the projects included in the indicative TEN-T Investment Action plan to support the completion of the extended core TEN-T network in Georgia by 2030; consider further developing the bridging role of the Black Sea basin in terms of connectivity;
- Support Georgia in developing sustainable urban mobility plans and in activities aimed at raising awareness of the general public on alternative options of urban mobility (in relation to car usage) in order to increase the availability, safety, efficiency and sustainability of the public urban transport.

6.2 Energy Cooperation

Short-term priorities

- Ensure implementation of commitments as a Contracting Party of the Energy Community;
- Implement relevant legislation in the fields of electricity, renewable energy, energy efficiency, oil, gas, energy statistics, prospection of hydrocarbons, and energy-related environment provisions, in line with the terms and conditions set out in the Protocol of Accession to the Energy Community Treaty, and in the Association Agreement;

- Complete and implement the institutional framework for energy efficiency policy;
- Prepare the country's National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) and start its implementation.

Medium-term priorities

- Take steps towards the integration of Georgia's energy market with that of the EU, and strengthening Georgia's energy security and regulatory convergence, through implementation of relevant EU legislation, including related secondary legislation in line with Energy Community commitments;
- Cooperate on attracting international support for sustainable energy development, including from international climate funds and other financial instruments;
- Reinforce Georgia's energy infrastructure network and interconnections, in particular:
 - with regard to electricity, promoting cross-border trade and interconnections with neighbouring countries and reinforcing Georgia's transmission grid; further assess the feasibility of a Black Sea Transmission Line Project as well as other projects serving the security of supply and overall energy security in the region;
 - with regard to natural gas, support the continuous proper operation of the main gas pipelines, including the portion of the Southern Gas Corridor situated on the Georgian territory, as well as support/promotion of other gas and oil transit projects of regional importance to ensure the transportation of Caspian energy resources to Western markets, as well as facilitating development of underground gas storage to enhance Georgia's energy security, recognising the EU's goal of climate neutrality by 2050.

6.3 Environment

Short-term priorities

- Enhance environmental governance by implementing legislation in Georgia on environmental impact assessment, strategic environmental assessment, by adopting and implementing legislation on environmental liability, by ensuring public access to environmental information and public participation in decision-making, by involving all interested stakeholders, as well as by integrating environment into other policy areas and by improving environmental information sharing in line with the principles of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS);
- Continue with the implementation of the National Radioactive Waste Management Strategy;
- Ensure the sustainable use of water resources through the adoption and starting implementation of the Law on Water Resources Management;
- Implement the new Forest Code and adopt subsidiary legislation; establish an economically viable state forest management body; finalise the National Forest Inventory and maintain the database;

- Implement the third National Environmental Action Programme of Georgia (2017-2021) according to the NEAP 3 timeframe;
- Develop the fourth National Environmental Action Programme of Georgia, including the five-year programme for water resources, which covers both strategic approaches and action plan;
- Implement the National Waste Management Strategy and measures foreseen in the 2016-2020 Action Plan, and successor plans;
- Ensure a proper assessment of the operational costs of the waste management facilities and establish a proper tariff system for their recovery.

Medium-term priorities

- Tap the economic potential of a green and circular economy and develop comprehensive green growth policies in all relevant sectors, e.g. by considering a green image of Georgia as a competitive advantage, by incorporating the circular economy principles in the national waste management system, etc.;
- Continue the approximation of Georgia's legislation to the EU *acquis* and implement the provisions of EU Directives and Regulations as provided for in the relevant Annexes of the Association Agreement;
- Adopt and introduce measures for reducing water and air pollution and for the protection of biodiversity, including in the Black Sea;
- Adopt the Law of Georgia on Biodiversity and develop the subsidiary legislation, among others to provide a solid legal basis for the establishment and management of the Emerald Sites, Biosphere Reserves, as well as for the national Red List of endangered species. Protected Area Management should be further strengthened and adequately funded from the public budget;
- Continue the development of air quality monitoring network in key municipalities and most polluted areas. Adopt measures for pollution prevention and control in the most polluted areas (air quality plans). Adopt and implement the Law on Industrial emissions;
- Ensure a proper assessment of the operational costs of the water management facilities and develop proper economic instruments for their recovery;
- Draw up a roadmap for the ratification and implementation of multilateral environmental agreements, including among others the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, the Protocols to the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone, Protocol on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) and Protocol on Heavy Metals), and the UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents. Advance preparations to become a party to the Espoo Convention and its protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment.

6.4 Climate Change

Short-term priorities

- Operationalise the Climate Change Council to coordinate climate change policy in Georgia;

- Finalise and adopt a mid-century, Long-term Low Greenhouse Gas Emission Development Strategy of Georgia;
- Elaboration and adoption of a National Adaptation Plan (NAP);
- Start the implementation of the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in line with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change;
- Ensure that COVID-19 recovery measures encompass efforts to make the economy greener and do not compromise the environmental and climate targets.

Medium-term priorities

- Approximate legislation of Georgia to EU *acquis* and international instruments as envisaged by the Association Agreement in accordance with the relevant Annexes thereof;
- Support the timely implementation of Georgia's climate action commitments under the Energy Community;
- Mainstream climate action in sectoral policies and measures and strengthen the capacity of different authorities to implement climate action across sectors;
- Enhance Georgia's transparency framework for climate action, in particular through a robust national system for the monitoring and reporting of climate policies, measures and greenhouse gas emissions in line with the Katowice Rulebook the Paris Agreement.

6.5 Civil Protection

Short-term priorities

- Further to the administrative arrangement signed in July 2018, explore ways to further define the most appropriate elements of cooperation in relation to the risk profile, legislative and organisational framework of Georgia, as part of the EU's regional approach.

Medium-term priorities

- Ensure effective communication on a 24-hour basis including exchange of early warnings and information on large scale emergencies affecting the EU and Georgia, as well as third countries where the Parties are involved in disaster response;
- Facilitate mutual and regional assistance in case of major emergencies, as appropriate and subject to the availability of sufficient resources;
- Promote the implementation of the EU guidelines on host nation support; encourage effective inter-institutional coordination and cross-sectoral linkages to facilitate international assistance in disaster response operations; further enhance capabilities to receive and provide international assistance;
- Improve the knowledge base on disaster risks by enhancing cooperation on data accessibility and comparability;
- Promote integrated disaster risk management based on multi-hazard risk assessments;

- Support, as necessary, the development and reinforcement of early warning systems at national level;
- Facilitate the use of the Copernicus European Flood Awareness System (EFAS) and the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) by Georgia in cooperation with the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission;
- Improve prevention of and preparedness for industrial and NATECH (natural hazard triggered technological) disasters;
- Reinforce disaster prevention, preparedness and response in line with the Sendai framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the European Green Deal through an exchange of best practices, joint trainings, exercises, study visits, workshops and meetings on lessons learnt from real emergency situations or exercises. Share good practices on integrating climate change scenarios into risk assessment and planning.

7. *Mobility and People to People contact*

The EU and Georgia will also keep a focus on youth participation and leadership through empowerment. The parties will further cooperate to maximise the benefits to Georgia of its association to the Horizon Europe and Creative Europe programmes and further promote its already active participation in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes, and well as other volunteering, cooperation and exchange programme and initiatives.

The Parties will encourage a strategic approach to vocational education and training. Integrated Territorial Development in Georgia will also be a priority for EU-Georgia cooperation. Both Parties will ensure a well-informed discussion with the Georgian citizens about the opportunities and implications of Georgia's EU association by creating youth policy with the aim to create a sustainable ecosystem for youth development.

7.1 Research, Technological Development and Innovation

Short-term priorities

- Adopt and implement the new strategy of Education and Science for 2022-2032 involving policymakers, the academic and research community, business and civil society leaders;
- Support the development and implementation of innovation policy, including revising the regulatory framework and infrastructure for research and innovation;
- Ensure better coordination and complementarity among key stakeholders (ministries and agencies); improve knowledge transfer (via a brokerage network and a favourable Intellectual Property Rights regime); stimulate co-creation via competence centres; fine-tune funding schemes to the needs of collaborative Research and Innovation (R&I); and improve the mobility of human resources between research and business;
- Associate Georgia to Horizon Europe.

Medium-term priorities

- Maximise the benefits to Georgia of its Association to the Horizon Europe programme, to contribute to boosting the competitiveness and economic growth of the country;
- Encourage participation under the Research and Training Programme of Euratom, complementing Horizon Europe, particularly in the field of nuclear safety and radiation protection based on competitive calls;
- Reinforce human, material and institutional resources in order to improve research and innovation capacities;
- Develop a properly functioning R&I information system reducing fragmentation (by establishing R&I centres) and aligning R&I priorities to be consistent with economic priorities;
- Introduce adequate base-line funding to support public research organisations and the creation of a level playing field among them;
- Create favourable conditions encouraging and incentivising companies to invest in research and innovation;
- Implement the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea, a regional agenda feature of the Black Sea Synergy.

7.2 Education, Training and Youth

Medium-term priorities

- Ensure the right to quality education for all, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds; taking further steps to promote inclusive education and training;
- Encourage a strategic approach to vocational education and training (VET) with a view to bringing Georgia's VET system in line with the modernisation of EU VET structures as pursued in the Copenhagen Process and through its instruments and respecting the equal opportunities principles;
- Encourage active engagement of the private sector in VET to enhance its relevance and effectiveness and ultimately to achieve improved access for the private sector to skilled labour;
- Further enhance the quality of education, equal access and sustainability (incl. efficient funding for all levels of education) and stimulate non-formal education and lifelong learning;
- Promote Georgia's active participation in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes;
- Carry out joint work and exchanges with a view to promoting Georgia's reforms in the education and training system and further integration into the European Higher Education Area, enhancing the quality of the education provision, modernising teaching and learning practices and fostering skills development for a greater employability and civic engagement of graduates;

- Further enhance joint efforts to ensure effective full-fledged implementation of the Eastern Partnership European School in Georgia;
- Strengthening a strategic approach to youth policy through the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport of Georgia and enhancing exchanges and cooperation in the field of non-formal education for young people and youth workers, inter alia through the youth strand of Erasmus+ with the aim to create a sustainable ecosystem for youth development;
- Encourage a strategic approach to Youth Work to address more effectively the challenges young people are facing and to promote key competence development and realisation of young people's potential.

7.3 Cooperation in the Cultural Field

- Promote the implementation of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions;
- Cooperate on the development of an inclusive cultural policy in Georgia and on the preservation and valorisation of cultural and natural heritage, on culture and creative industries with a view to fostering socio-economic development, inclusion and citizen participation;
- Promote the participation of Georgian cultural and audio-visual operators in cultural/audio-visual cooperation programmes, in particular Creative Europe;
- Promote intercultural dialogue and the development of a democratic culture through youth work;
- Encourage mobility of artists;
- Cooperate on the development of sport policy in Georgia through exchanging best practices. Promote the participation of Georgian sport stakeholders in Erasmus sport actions as well as other initiatives such as the European Week of Sport Beyond Borders and the #BeActive Awards;
- Exchange good practices in the field of fight against threats to sport such as violence in sport, all kind of discrimination, manipulations of sport competitions and doping;
- Encourage the promotion of gender equality in sport, the development of sport ethics as well as social inclusion and good governance principles.

7.4 Cooperation in Audio-visual and Media Field

Medium-term priorities

- Work towards the reinforcement of independence and professionalism of the media in compliance with relevant European standards and approximation of the audio-visual legislation with the EU *acquis* as envisaged by the Association Agreement, inter alia by exchanging views on audio-visual policy, relevant international standards including co-operation in the fight against incitement of hatred, racism and xenophobia;
- Exchange best practices regarding freedom of the media, media pluralism, decriminalisation of defamation, protection of journalist sources and cultural

diversity aspects of media through regular dialogue; Strengthen the capacity and independence of regulatory authorities/bodies for media.

7.5 Regional Development and Regional Level Cooperation

Short-term priorities

- Successfully complete the implementation of the Regional Development Programme of Georgia for 2018-2021 (RDP), including through establishment of effective inter-institutional coordination and partnership mechanisms between national and sub-national authorities;
- Successfully implement the Pilot Integrated Regional Development Programme for 2020-2022 (PIRDP) focusing on EU "focal regions", including potential investments in areas such as innovation and SMEs, with a view to creating new centres of gravity in Georgia;
- Advance the work on the regional Smart Specialisation assignment, including through training and capacity building for stakeholders;
- Identify further steps for future gradual introduction of the EU NUTS methodology and classification in Georgia;
- Proactively participate in the development of the Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin 2021-2027 programme, to tackle the risks of climate change, man provoked and natural disasters, as well as enhance cooperation in the protection of the natural heritage and biodiversity; Enhance the capacities of the necessary management and control structures.

Medium-term priorities

- Further support authorities in strengthening partnerships between national and sub-national administrations, capacity building efforts and other regional development instruments while effectively implementing the PIRDP 2020-2022 and its successor programme(s) as well as the Decentralisation Strategy of Georgia for 2020-2025;
- Support integrated, multi-stakeholder actions for Georgia's territorial development such as in the area of spatial planning, water and waste management, roads, electricity and other basic infrastructure, diversification of the rural economy, tourism and business development, educational infrastructure and facilities, brownfield ventures, energy efficiency, social activation and engagement;
- Improve institutional arrangements and build adequate capacity at national/regional/local levels to participate in the Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin 2021-2027 programme;
- Develop and operationalise Smart Specialisation as a basis for determining investment decisions in research and innovation with a view to increasing the innovation potential of regions and of the whole country;
- Select priority domains for economic transformation based on competitive advantages and an inclusive dialogue amongst local authorities, academia, business and the civil society;

- Support the gradual application of EU NUTS methodology and classification in Georgian national statistics system.

7.6 Participation in EU Agencies and Programmes

Medium-term priorities

- Review the implementation of the Protocol on Participation in EU Programmes on the basis of the current participation of Georgia in specific EU Programmes.

7.7 Public outreach and visibility

- Ensure a well-informed discussion, including with a broader public and Georgian citizenry, about the opportunities and implications of Georgia's EU-approximation, including the Association Agenda and specifically the DCFTA;
 - Enhance communication capabilities in order to advance EU visibility, promote shared values and explain positive impacts of EU political association and economic integration;
 - Ensure adequate visibility of all EU projects and programmes and of their impact, in line with Article 2.6 of the Post-2020 Eastern Partnership Priorities and the overarching rules and guidance on EU communication and visibility in place.
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