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The position of the European Parliament towards the parliamentary election in Georgia

The European Parliament (EP) is the only EU institution with democratic legitimization, which by definition represents the European society. This body may not only invoke the will of the European public opinion, but also shape it thanks to the wide spectrum of instruments capable of exerting influence (parliamentary debates, resolutions, reports). As a result, the Parliament as an EU institution claims a special right to take a clear stance in relation to the respect for human rights and basic freedoms in the modern world. The EP pays special attention to the eastern neighbors of the EU, who are included in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP). In the list of resolutions, which constitute the form of expressing its position, it condemns any instances of the violation of human rights, rules of democracy and rule of law in these countries. The deepening of the cooperation with a country is dependent on its respect for the standards within those areas characteristic for Europe. The position of the EP, in the above-mentioned issues, is very often unambiguous and principled, in contrast to the much more balanced opinions of other EU institutions, especially the European Commission and the Council of the European Union. This results from the fact that the EP defines itself as the “guardian of democracy”. It must be mentioned that the non-legislative resolutions adopted by this body, being a means of expressing its position, have great political importance, but are not legally binding.

Within recent years, the EP and the entire EU noticed the geopolitically strategic location of the South Caucasus as a corridor for energy, transportation and communication connecting the region of the Caspian Sea and Central Asia with Europe. The goal of EU policy should be to ensure stability in the region, which constituted for the EU a condition for the diversification of energy supplies and routes. Among the countries of the South Caucasus, Georgia is the most advanced when it comes to relations with the EU - it is one of the member states of the Eastern Partnership inaugurated in 2009. It is also the most pro-European and pro-Atlantic country of the South Caucasus, in which the process of political, economic and social reforms is the most advanced in the whole post-Soviet area. It needs to be emphasized that the involvement of the EU in Georgia increased during the military conflict with Russia, which took place in August 2008. Thanks to a successful EU intervention, which ended in a ceasefire between the sides of the conflict, Brussels became an important guarantor of security within the region. The EaP does not presuppose the membership of Georgia in the EU, but in the context of the association agreement negotiated since July 2010 between the EU and Tbilisi, the position of the EP is to consider Georgia as a European country and base the relations with it on the European perspective, including art. 49 of the Treaty on the European Union, which will facilitate the introduction of democratic values to Georgia. The last parliamentary election, which took place on 1 October 2012, was a test for the Georgian democracy. It ended in a victory of the opposition - the "Georgian Dream" coalition led by a billionaire, Bidzin Iwaniszwili, and the failure of the previously ruling United National Movement, represented by President Micheil Saakaszwili.

This is important for the functioning of the Georgian political system, because next year, pursuant to the amendments to the Constitution of this country adopted in 2010, Georgia will no longer be a Presidential Republic and start using the Parliamentary-Cabinet system of government. What is also important for the stability of the Georgian democracy and constitutes a sensation of sort within the area of the former USSR is the fact that the former President admitted the failure of his party, which dominated the political scene for 10 years, and announced its passage to the opposition. The events related to the election in Georgia were reflected at the level of the EP. The EP President, Martin Schulz, in an issued communication, concluded that the election in Georgia testifies to the political and democratic maturity of the country, as for the first time in its history the power was transferred as a result of a democratic process. He also stated, on behalf of the EP, that he was counting on the further strengthening of the relations between the EU and Tbilisi regardless of the nature of the government created after the election. The resolution concerning the election in Georgia, adopted on 26 October 2012, testifies to the importance of the development of democracy in this country for the EP. The resolution reflects several



important tendencies in the approach of the EP to the development of the EU policy in the South Caucasus.

1. The position of the European Parliament is that the further development of the relations between Georgia and the EU, including the completion of the association agreement, depends on the adherence to the rules of democracy, law and order, good government and the respect for human rights in Georgia.

2. The European Parliament clearly emphasizes that the development of the relations with Georgia is one of the goals of the EU foreign policy and assumes that the parliamentary election, despite certain reservations, was free, honest and in line with the standards of the international community, and that they will result in the creation of a new government, which will continue to cooperate with the EU and NATO.

3. In the context of the results of the parliamentary election, the position of the EP is to retain social peace in Georgia, respect the constitution of the country and seek consensus between the main political powers. It emphasizes the need for constructive cooperation between the President, government and parliament, which will be crucial for the democratic credibility of the Georgian state. Such an approach of the EP, expressing the position of the entire EU, is very important because of the exacerbating pre-election situation in Georgia, as a result of the actions of the new government aimed at the political camp of President Saakashvili. Demands for his resignation, arrests of high officials of the previous government, actions aimed at changing the Constitution or rumors of impeachment are all bad sign for the development of the relations with the EU, which are and will be considered negative by the EP and other EU institutions.

4. In relation to the post-election situation in Georgia, the EP is waiting for the end of the negotiations concerning the new association agreement between the EU and Georgia and is calling on the Council of the EU and the EC to intensify their actions to conclude the negotiations concerning the implementation of visa-free traffic between Georgia and the EU. It emphasizes the importance of the association agreement for the European aspirations of Georgia. In the previous resolutions, the EP was unambiguously for the implementation of the association agreement within the whole Georgian territory, including the separatist areas of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are supported by Russia.

5. In relation to the position towards the Georgian parliamentary elections, the EP also confirms its support for the sovereignty and integrity of the Georgian territory in the context of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and is calling on Georgia and Russia to intensify their efforts in order to resolve them. The EP unambiguously appeals to Russia to withdraw its troops from the separatist Georgian regions, allowing an EU observation



mission to access these territories. It demands from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to continue the actions aimed at convincing Russia to fulfill the six-point Sarkozy Plan for the stabilization and conflict resolution in Georgia.

6. It is important to emphasize that the EP, in many previous resolutions, was in favor of increasing the EU support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, showed unconditional support for the inviolability of the Georgian borders approved by the international community and encouraged Russia to respect them. Moreover, it expressed the opinion that the unresolved conflict between Russia and Georgia is an obstacle in reaching social stability by Georgia and maintaining the status quo with the current conflicts within the region is not acceptable and cannot be permanent, because it contributes to the escalation of tensions and poses a risk of military actions.

7. Analyzing the position of the EP, it is important to remember that the unresolved Georgian-Russian conflict has a negative influence on the European aspirations of Georgia, because a country in which, because of ethnic conflicts, often externally inspired, secession took place with the help of a foreign power (Russia), cannot count on becoming a member of the EU. There should be no illusions that the EU will allow the accession of a country within which territorial disintegration is supported by a global superpower, because it could have catastrophic effects for its functioning and international authority.

The European Parliament attaches significant weight to the incorporation of democratic values by the countries neighboring with the EU, especially those showing European aspirations. The honesty of the election process and adherence to democratic standards is for the EP a condition for deepening cooperation with its partner countries. In the case of Georgia, the interest on the part of the EP is significant, because it defines this country as European, the relations with which should be based on art. 49 of the TEU. The EP positions, which most often take the form of a resolution, constitute a formula for exerting influence on the remaining bodies of the EU and the member states, in order for such values as democracy, human rights and rule of law to be taken into consideration in the EU and state strategies and decisions shaping the nature of the foreign policy of the entire Union as well as individual member states.

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