



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO GEORGIA

Speaking points:

**Strengthening Democracy and Local Governance
in Eastern Partnership Countries: Sharing the Vision**

Hualing hotel 10/07/2015 10:00

A. Speaking points:

Minister, Ambassadors, Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to address you today at this conference, and particularly on the topic of Local Governance.

Local Governance has long proven itself as a key tool in democracy and development in the European Union. The reason is clear: Due to its close proximity to its citizens, local government has incomparable knowledge of their basic needs and can bring real solutions and improvements in their day to day existence.

As such, it is not surprising that this concept is enshrined in European institutions.

Within the European Union, for example, it is reflected in the concept of subsidiarity, which states that issues should only be elevated to the EU level when doing so brings clear benefits.

The Council of Europe in particular has been a strong champion of Local Government, as demonstrated by its European Charter on Local Self Governance, to which Georgia is also a signatory.

Our belief in the importance of local self-governance is belied by our actions in this area.

For example, the EU has been heavily involved in the consultations of the Council of Europe's "Programmatic Cooperation Framework" multiannual regional action, which is in part discussed today.

More specifically in Georgia, the EU has also implemented a variety of support measures for local authorities. Most visible is our significant support through grant programmes: just this year, around €2.5 million of direct funding is available through calls for proposals that local authorities can apply to. This is a similar amount to what has been provided in the past years, through the same programme.

Besides this direct support, the EU is also promoting structural reforms that strengthen Local Authorities in Georgia. This is clearly noted in the EU – Georgia Association Agenda, where

there are clear commitments to both strengthen decentralisation as enshrined in the European Charter for Local Self Governance, as well as to involving local authorities more explicitly in the process of regional development.

In both cases, the EU is following up on these commitments. In the latter case, for example, a key part of the second phase of the EU's €30 million Support to Regional Development Programme is focused on giving municipalities greater influence in deciding how large scale government investments are taking place in their areas, through the use of the Regional Development Fund and the Regional Coordination Councils.

In the former case, the Georgian Government has taken the lead, as reflected in the new State Public Administration Reform strategy which should be adopted in the coming days, and where decentralisation to local authorities is included.. This strategy reflects the focus of the Government in pursuing the path of the reforms of Local Self Governance as enacted by the Local Self Governance Code of 2014.

We are working hard to support the Government in this process by preparing a future sector support programme on Public Administration Reform, which we hope to be able to finalise next year, and which will explicitly has a section supporting local governance.

As you can see, therefore, support to local governance is at the forefront of EU activities in Georgia – we believe it is a key foundation for the economic and political development of any country. As such, I look forward to hearing the outcomes of this event, and to working together with you on this area in the future.