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Thursday, 18 January 2001 – Strasbourg

Visa requirements between Russia and Georgia

European Parliament resolution on the visa regime imposed by the Russian Federation on Georgia

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Georgia and Russia, and in particular its resolution of 13 December 2000⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to the declaration of the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee of 9 May 2000,
- having regard to the statement by the United Nations Security Council of 14 November 2000,
- having regard to the statement by the Presidency of the European Union of 23 November 2000,
- having regard to the statement by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Georgia on 7 December 2000,

A. noting with deep concern the continued failure to achieve a comprehensive political settlement of the internal conflicts in Georgia, in the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region and Abkhazia,

B. recognising that unresolved conflicts in the Caucasian region impede economic development and political stability in Georgia as well as in the whole region,

C. whereas all parties to, and mediators in, the conflicts in the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region and Abkhazia should intensify the efforts to find a political solution to the conflicts with full respect for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity,

D. stressing the importance of security guarantees to those refugees and internally displaced persons who exercise their unconditional right to return to their homes,

E. regretting the situation whereby the territories of the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region and Abkhazia are *de facto* outside the jurisdiction of Georgian law, and the principles of democracy, human rights and rule of law which Georgia has adhered to as a full member of the Council of Europe are not fully respected in these break-away territories,

F. expressing in this context its concern about the security situation in the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region and Abkhazia and in particular the security of international aid workers and personnel of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG),

G. welcoming the efforts of the European Commission to contribute to increasing confidence between the parties in the conflicts, in particular through the Rehabilitation Programme in the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region and the planned rehabilitation of the Inguri hydro power plant on the border with Abkhazia,

H. supporting all initiatives aiming at consolidating friendly and constructive neighbourly relations and regional cooperation in the Caucasian region,

I. whereas a further rapprochement between Georgia and the European Union could make an effective contribution to the political and economic development of the country and to the stability of the entire region of the Caucasus,

J. recalling the OSCE Istanbul Declaration of 1999 regarding conventional forces in Europe and the agreement

reached on the withdrawal of Russian troops from the territory of Georgia,

K. noting with deep concern the unilateral imposition of a visa regime on Georgia by the Russian Federation which took effect on 5 December 2000, which will make the development of friendly neighbourly relations more difficult, hamper economic relations and complicate the lives of Georgian citizens living in the territory of the Russian Federation and of those Georgian citizens living in Georgia itself, who are dependent for their survival on the earnings of their relatives working in the Russian Federation,

1. Recalls that the imposition of visas which respect international law is a matter for the sovereignty of a state, but regards the plans to exempt residents of the secessionist Georgian regions of South Ossetia/Tskhinvali and Abkhazia from the visa regime imposed on Georgian citizens as a challenge to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia which the Government of the Russian Federation officially supports, and calls on the government of the Russian Federation to reconsider these plans as they would amount to *de facto* annexation of these indisputably Georgian territories;

2. Urges the government of the Russia Federation to suspend the implementation of the visa regime with Georgia given the difficulties it causes to ordinary citizens;

3. Recalls that a decision on unilateral introduction of a simplified procedure for border-crossing for residents of South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region and Abkhazia by the Russian Federation would compromise its role as a mediator in the conflicts;

4. Calls on all parties to refrain from unnecessary retaliatory actions which might aggravate the precarious situation and to display the necessary political will to achieve early substantial results in the negotiations, with full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia;

5. Calls on the Russian Federation as a matter of urgency to respect the commitment it made at the OSCE in Istanbul in 1999 to withdraw its troops from Georgian territory;

6. Lends its support to the UN-led peace process in Abkhazia and to the efforts by the OSCE to increase dialogue and direct contacts between the parties to the conflict in the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region and Abkhazia;

7. Calls on the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union to support actively all efforts to bring about a political settlement to the conflicts in the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region and Abkhazia, and looks forward to the report of the Swedish Presidency to the 3rd Meeting of the European Union - Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee to be held in Brussels, and asks it to submit proposals for a further rapprochement between Georgia and the European Union;

8. Urges the Council, in this regard, to take into account the possibility of appointing a Special Envoy for the Caucasus in order to increase the visibility of the EU in the region and facilitate the dialogue between all parties to the ongoing conflicts

9. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the OSCE and the Government and Parliament of Georgia and of the Russian Federation.