



## Georgia's application to the EU: What should we expect?

The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association has always supported Georgia's Euro - Atlantic integration aspirations. Russia's unprecedented, unjustified military aggression on Ukraine has completely changed the international agenda and global politics.

The organization welcomes the decision, according to which, at the request of the people, Georgia, like Ukraine, will apply for the candidate country status for EU membership.

Due to the high public interest, we share information about the importance of status and the steps that the country should take in the next stage.

### **At what stage is the relationship between Georgia and the EU?**

In 2014, an Association Agreement was signed between the EU and Georgia. The

document entered into force in 2016, in conjunction with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the European Union. Since 2017, Georgian citizens have enjoyed visa-free travel in the Schengen area. Currently, the country is in the process of fulfilling its obligations under the Association Agreement. Application for EU membership was scheduled for 2024.

### **What does EU candidate country status mean?**

An applicant country that formally applies for EU membership may be granted candidate country status. This procedure does not give a right to join the EU automatically.

### **What is the procedure for accession to the EU?**

Obtaining candidate country status is, by standard, a lengthy process involving two major EU bodies: the **European Commission**, which consists of 27 Commissioners with different portfolios, and the **European Council**, which includes the Heads of Government of the EU Member States. The European Commission is examining the application for EU membership within the (Copenhagen) accession criteria framework. It assesses whether the country should be awarded the title of candidate country. Based on the opinion of the European Commission, the European Council decides on the issue of granting candidate country status and begins negotiations with the state for full membership.

Although an expedited rule other than this procedure is not provided for in EU acquis, such a decision depends on the unanimous political will of the member states. In this case, too, the European Commission, the European Council, and the Parliament must assess in a short period how ready the applicant country is for EU membership. The decision is based on consensus, and all members of the Council of Europe, i.e., representatives of all countries, must agree to grant membership status.

### **What are the next steps for Georgia?**

Georgia's application for EU membership status will be considered by the EU through the same procedure but will likely be considered in a shorter timeframe. The window of opportunity was created by Ukraine, which applied with a similar application to the European Union on 28 February 2022. The expedited procedure for Ukraine's candidate country status was initiated by the European Parliament, which adopted a

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recommendatory resolution calling on EU institutions to work on granting Ukraine's candidate country status. If, like Ukraine, Georgia's application is supported by the European Parliament, the European Commission will continue the process by the decision of the European Council, which will begin to assess the country's readiness following the Copenhagen criteria. In its opinion, the European Council will decide on granting Ukraine and Georgia EU candidate country status. The decision requires the consent of the 27 member states. After that, the formal negotiation process for full membership will begin. It is crucial that at this stage, the candidate country submits to the European Commission a plan and vision for membership readiness and European integration.