**Statement by Ms. Shorena Mezurnishvili,**

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**of High Council of Justice of Georgia**

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Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the last five years tremendous positive developments had taken place in the Georgian Judiciary. These were the years when the new institutions and innovative mechanisms had been put in place that had greatly contributed to the enhancement of independence, efficiency, accountability, transparency and accessibility of the judiciary.

The constitutional reform along with the four waves of the judicial reform has significantly enhanced both the individual independence of judges and the independence of the judiciary as a whole.

A major step to this end has been the depolitization of the High Council of Justice of Georgia. The representatives of other branches of the government can not anymore be members of the judicial council.

Let me emphasize that introduction of the system of lifetime appointment of judges has been a crowning achievement of the past judicial reforms.

In order to ensure the merit-based, objective and transparent judicial appointments Georgia has reformed the previous system and currently the law stipulates the detailed procedure for recruitment and appointment of judges. It is mandatory for the judicial council to justify all the decisions including, the decisions on appointment of judges and court chairpersons. The law provides numerous safeguards for the transparency of the judiciary by ensuring the publicity of the decisions of the judicial council and availability of information on its activities. In 2019 a unified database for publishing court decisions had also been initiated.

During the last two years and for the purpose of further strengthening the court system, Georgia has put in place the competitive and merit-based system of selection and appointment of Supreme Court judges.

In September 2020 the Law on Common Courts of Georgia was amended to respond the recommendations of the Venice Commission. The new provisions ensure that decisions on selection of candidate judge shall be justified and that the decisions of the High Council of Justice can be appealed to the Qualifications Chamber.

One of the pivotal outcomes of the reform that is another guarantee for the independence of judges, is the launching of the system of electronic random allocation of cases.

To ensure an objective and unbiased examination of alleged disciplinary misconducts of judges, a position of an independent inspector was introduced who operates independently from the high judicial council. The fourth wave of the judicial reform specifically targeted the disciplinary proceedings against judges to enhance safeguards for the accountability of the judiciary and now, the relevant rules are in compliance with international standards and best practices.

And very briefly, regarding the capacity building of judges, during the last 5 years, the High School of Justice has significantly strengthened professional trainings for judges and court staff by developing a number of new training modules, improving learning methodologies and increasing capacities of trainers. Among the topics from wide-range fields of law, trainings on human rights remain priority for the School.

All these developments and advancements have enhanced public trust towards the judiciary that is demonstrated by different surveys as well as the statistical data of the European Court of Human Rights, that reveals the significant reduction of the applications lodged with the Strasbourg Court against Georgia and therefore, serves as a proof that the quality of the remedies for the citizens at the national level has notably improved.