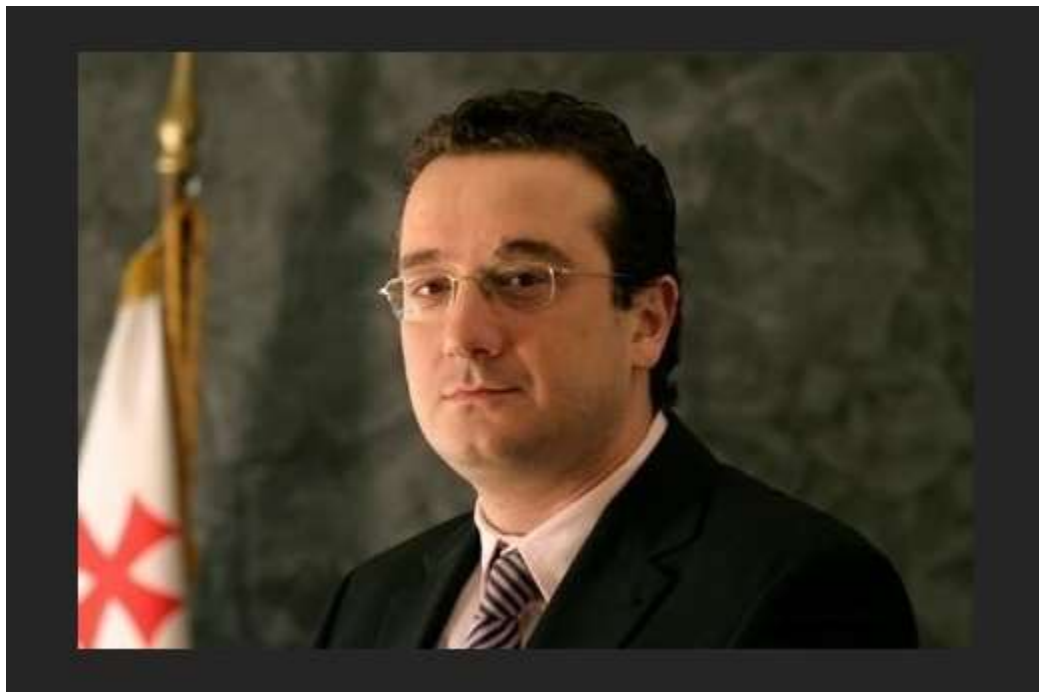


Opinion: Georgia as a member of the Euro-Atlantic community, the present of one generation to another

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Georgia's first "freedom generation" will soon lead the country, economically and politically. This generation has never known anything but a Western oriented Georgia. By implementing a series of reforms associated with the projects of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, the independence generation transformed Georgia to a degree once thought unthinkable.



Georgia has made strands, surpassing expectations in market, justice, education, political, institutional, social and security sector reforms. Today, young people in their twenties no longer define themselves in "post" terms, as in post-soviet or post-communist.

For this generation entrepreneurship, independence, study, travel, elections, voting, freedom of speech or, in a word, "Europe" is not just the way things should be. It is the way things are. For the generation of independence, most economic, political, institutional, or social achievements were "for the first time." We are still breaking new ground. Georgia achieved its first peaceful transfer of power in 2012. International monitors and civic organizations will testify to the fact that Georgia has organized impeccable presidential and local elections since. We are becoming a country

in which each government holds elections it may lose. This is not how things should be; this is the way things are. We are reforming justice and fortifying the independence of judges and prosecutors, so that they protect citizens and businesses from anyone who may consider “a shakeup,” including government officials. This is now the way things are. We look behind and we see a country that is perceived to be the least corrupt in the region, gaining ground in every single index of human rights, including freedom of speech. Year-on-year, we believe in our capacity to progress and for good reason.

For over a generation, Georgia expands and diversifies the goods and services the economy can trade internationally. We have the foundations of an economy that can attract more investment given an internationally acclaimed regulatory environment, cheaper energy, logistics, raw materials, better education, and – something that cannot be bought – location.

These small but tangible successes have cumulated into a well sized success story. None of these achievements will matter without security, for Georgia, or for Europe.

What is at stake?

Georgia’s geopolitical and geo-economic role is usually estimated in terms of where it is. In this sense, Eastern Partnership (EaP) states have their own unique claim to significance. Due to Georgia’s location, Tbilisi has the role of an energy conduit and a logistics hub with multi-regional significance. Georgia is truly a bridge, between Greater Europe, the Middle East, the Greater Caucasus and Central Asia, Southeastern and Central Europe.

However, Georgia is also important for what it is, that is, an over-achiever that has pursued with stubbornness and efficiency a reform path that assimilates international best practices. This model of development has paid off. Of the three EaP states that signed onto an Association Agreement – and the ensuing Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement – Georgia has the best performing economy, is perceived as the least corrupt, is the most politically stable, and is broadly considered “a model.” What is at stake in this sense is not Georgia alone, but Georgia’s model of development.

Because of what it is and where it is, Georgia is also a significant security partner for the Euro-Atlantic community. Since 2009, Georgia has delivered impeccable Annual National Programs (ANP); the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package agreed in Cardiff allowed us to enhance solid defense capability and further improve the country’s interoperability with the Alliance. Georgia has been investing more than the 2% of its GDP on defense and Georgian troops have been fighting shoulder to shoulder with NATO and CSDP troops in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Central African Republic. We already assume our share of the responsibility to safeguard democracy, peace, and security, it is important that the momentum of this sequential relationship is sustained.

Unfailingly, Georgia’s security depends both on the reinforcement of the country’s national capability, as well as the cultivation of Euro-Atlantic community ties. Georgia’s public opinion, which has recently experienced both war and occupation, must be reassured that the country remains on track to achieve these complementary objectives.

The next logical step in Georgia’s relationship with NATO is a Membership Action Plan in Warsaw, consistent with the Bucharest and Newport declarations and a broader narrative of Euro-Atlantic integration. In this confidence, we are still supported by the majority of our population and the overwhelming and cross-party consensus of the Georgian parliament. It is important to recall that the Warsaw summit will be a prelude to national elections in Georgia, taking place under the shadow cast by events in Moldova and Ukraine, but also under increasing pressure in the occupied territories. In this context, more so than ever before, it is important that the Euro-Atlantic consensus in Georgia remains unchallenged rather than develop into a political cleavage. In this sense, MAP is also a nod that the country’s Euro-Atlantic integration project remains, firmly, on track. That is significant for Georgia, the region, and Europe at large.

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