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Georgia: terrible dilemma for Europe

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2023 is a crucial year in Georgia. It could even be historic, in the hope that it does not turn dramatic. At the end of the year, the twenty-seven members of the European Union must decide whether or not to grant the former Soviet republic the status of candidate country[1]. This decision is anxiously awaited by the 3.7 million Georgians, more than three quarters of whom say they want to join the European family. A trend that has grown over the last three decades. [However, Georgia was refused this status in June 2022 by the European Council](#), which thereby sanctioned the policy of breaking with the West that has been methodically implemented since 2021 by the party in power, the 'Georgian Dream' led by oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili.

A year ago, the European Council confirmed [Georgia's European "perspective"](#) giving it [a list of twelve "priorities"](#) to be implemented by the end of 2023 if it wanted to achieve "candidate" status. Since then, the Georgian government has passed a few laws to meet these "priorities", so as not to arouse the ire of an overwhelmingly pro-Western opinion. Above all, however, it has continued to undermine relations with the West ... and to forge closer ties with Moscow, which waged war against it in 2008. This endeavour culminated in March with a draft law initiated by the Georgian Dream on "foreign agents", inspired by the law passed in Russia in 2012. The bill would have required organisations and media outlets to declare themselves as "foreign agents" if more than 20% of their budget came from another country. This text could not be more contrary to the letter and spirit of the "Twelve Priorities". But after two days of protest, the government withdrew its text.

Europeans therefore face a delicate dilemma at the end of the year. Should Georgia be given

"candidate" status for membership of the European Union or not? To grant it would signify rewarding and strengthening a government that has every reason to believe it will continue its policy of breaking with the West. To refuse it would be to risk arousing popular anger with serious consequences. It should not be forgotten that the question of a rapprochement with Europe, at the end of 2013, led the Kremlin to destabilise Ukraine and to wage war against it. Over and above political positions, it is the possible consequences for the country's security and stability that also need to be taken into account.

1. A DEEP DESIRE FOR EUROPE

The latest polls show that 82% of Georgians approve "the government's stated goal to join the EU[2]". Admittedly, there is a lack of sociological data on the type of Europe that the Georgians are dreaming of. During the course of our interviews over the two last decades, it appears that some dream of a Europe of human rights and liberal values (these are more the active, politicised 'elites'); others believe that it is about material well-being (thanks to the rule of law, the absence of corruption, etc.), while it is primarily a Christian land for certain segments of society. Depending on their vision of Europe, they may or may not advocate caution towards Russia and are more or less inclined to tolerate Moscow's influence in the country, but with an extremely small pro-Russian minority.

The desire for Europe is a long-term one. The modern Georgian nation has been built over the last two centuries based on the feeling that it belongs to the European family[3]. This explains the current rejection of Russian geopolitical

[1] The national political game has made the granting or non-granting of EU candidate country status a key issue for Georgia's future, among the country's elites as well as the population. But in truth, this question is far less important than that of the granting of the European "perspective", which was set in June 2022.

[2] NDI (National Democratic Institute), "Taking Georgians' pulse - Findings from March 2023 telephone survey" (carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia, May 2023, page 50)

[3] See, for example, Stephen Jones, "Socialism in Georgian Colors: The European Road to Social Democracy, 1883-1917", Harvard University Press, 2005, 410 pages. Ronald Suny, "The Making of the Georgian Nation", Indiana University Press, 1994, 419 pages.

projects, be it the USSR or Putin's "*Russian world*". This rejection intensified after Russia wrested the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from the country in the early 1990s - almost 20% of the country's territory - and then attacked it again in the war of summer 2008. This atmosphere has led Russia, particularly since the "*Georgian Dream*" came to power at the end of 2012, to deploy soft power in the Caucasian republic that is less "*positive*" (come to our "*Russian world*") than "*negative*" (reject the "*decadent*" West).

In this context, in which people think that the best way to protect themselves from Russia is to place themselves under NATO's security umbrella (73% are in favour according to a recent poll, as was the case ten years ago)[4], the "*Georgian Dream*" was forced in 2018, thanks to a compromise with the opposition, [to add to the supreme law](#) a new article 78 stipulating that "*the constitutional bodies shall take all measures within their competence to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*". In exchange, Mr Ivanishvili's party managed to include in article 30.1 that marriage is a "*union of a woman and a man for the purpose of founding a family*".

It was this same context that led the "*Georgian Dream*" to apply to join the European Union in March 2022, after Brussels had hurried along the procedure for the other two Eastern Partnership countries, Ukraine and Moldova, following Russia's invasion of the former a few days earlier. The overwhelming pro-Western majority in the country forced the government to follow in the footsteps of Kyiv and Chisinau, with the population expressing its fear of "*missing the European train*", of being left alone to face an increasingly aggressive Russia.

2. A STRATEGY OF BREAKING WITH THE WEST

When Bidzina Ivanishvili took office at the end of 2012, he and the "*Georgian Dream*", a new party created the previous year, said they wanted to pursue Georgia's policy of Euro-integration while "*normalising*" relations with Moscow. The gamble

seemed untenable given that the Kremlin had proved intractable on the subject of relations of the former Soviet republics with the West, as we observed later with Armenia (forced in September 2013 by Moscow to withdraw from negotiations for an "*association agreement*" with the European Union[5]) and Ukraine (forcing the then President, Viktor Yanukovich, to abandon the "*association agreement*" with the European Union the following November, thereby triggering the Maidan revolution and, in response, Russia's annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in the Donbass).

The Georgian leadership has never been troubled by Moscow. Tbilisi has shown goodwill towards the latter, restoring a platform for dialogue through special envoys in the absence of diplomatic relations since 2008. But Bidzina Ivanishvili was quick to send out strong signals designed to please Moscow: support for the creation of pro-Russian political parties (such as the Alliance of Patriots), the reintroduction of Russian economic interests (the giant Rosneft obtained the right to take a stake in the Poti oil terminal), and the development of propaganda echoing that of Moscow (on traditional values, the decadent West, etc.).

For eight years, Bidzina Ivanishvili's team has pursued a policy of Euro-Atlantic integration that has taken its course in fits and starts, even obtaining [visa-free access](#) to the European Union for Georgian citizens at the end of 2016. It has pursued a policy of prudence and '*strategic patience*' towards Russia (to achieve its objective of Euro-Atlantic rapprochement[6]). But this also went hand in hand with the demonisation of the outgoing leadership, that of the very pro-Western and sworn enemy of the Kremlin, Mikheil Saakashvili (president from 2004 to 2013), and with various signs of a deterioration in relations with the West.

This trend accelerated from the summer of 2021, against a backdrop of high regional tensions after Moscow deployed 100,000 troops around Ukraine from April, and over the months this became a policy of breaking with the West. The decisions, practices and declarations of the government and the party in office have increasingly come to be perceived as unacceptable by European and American partners:

[4] NDI (National Democratic Institute), *ibid.* p. 54.

[5] Armen Grigoryan, "[Armenia Chooses Customs Union over EU Association Agreement](#)", *Cacianalyst*, 18 Sept 2013

[6] Advocated by Washington in the aftermath of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, under the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili.

denunciations of political agreements signed with the President of the European Council Charles Michel, appointment of Supreme Court judges solely by the "Georgian Dream" in a way that is contrary to the agreement signed with Mr Michel, permanent rhetoric that is very harsh and sometimes insulting towards the representatives of the West[7], tacit support for anti-Western forces claiming to be traditionalist and orthodox, who are "authorised" to use street violence against pro-European segments of society[8].

This continued even as far as the sentencing of Nika Gvaramia, director of the main opposition television station Mtavari, to three and a half years in prison on 16 May 2022 in a case that human rights organisations unanimously consider to be politically motivated[9]. The day after this conviction, handed down by a court that is known to be under orders, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili was due to travel to Brussels to discuss whether or not Georgia would be granted the EU candidate country status. Such a blatantly fabricated trial, which ran directly counter to European values, could only have been designed to push Brussels not to grant the country this status. This is what the European Council decided on 22 June 2022.

The imprisonment of former President of the Republic of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili since October 2021 follows the same logic. Admittedly, the cases for which he has been tried are not without grounds, but the motivation for his detention is clearly political. "His first conviction, for which he is serving a six-year sentence, may have been well-founded in law. But it is nevertheless contrary to international standards. Mikheil Saakashvili was initially tried in absentia and should therefore have been retried while in detention in Georgia. However, he was not. In addition, there have been several violations of his right to privacy and he may have been subjected to "inhuman or degrading treatment", explains Giorgi Gogia, of Human Rights Watch. The man has lost more than fifty kilos in twenty months of detention and his health is becoming extremely precarious.

3. THE YANUKOVYCH MOMENT

This strategy of rupture culminated at the beginning of March 2023 with the ruling party's attempt to push through a law "on the registration of foreign agents" and the "transparency of foreign influence". The bill resembled in every way the text adopted in Russia in 2012 and sought to oblige the country's media and non-governmental organisations to sign up to a "register of agents of foreign influence" if more than 20% of their income came from a "foreign power". After its first reading, the bill provoked the rejection on the part of some segments of society, particularly young people. Two days of demonstrations were enough for the government to withdraw the bill.

The political intention was certainly to muzzle the country's pro-Western voices. It was also designed to force the 27 Member States of the European Union to reject the "candidate country" status to which the government had to apply in March 2022, in the footsteps of Ukraine and Moldova. A text so contrary to European values could only encourage at least some Member States to refuse to grant Tbilisi this status, whilst the European Council is obliged to take its decision unanimously.

How could a government that experienced so many problems winning the last elections want to adopt a law that goes so far against the will of more than 80% of Georgians? The answer given by many observers is that the real initiator of the text was none other than Russia. We have no proof of this, of course, but the memory of the way in which the Kremlin forced Armenia and Ukraine in 2013 to break off negotiations with Brussels regarding an "association agreement" argues strongly in favour of such a hypothesis. This is all the truer given that one of the Kremlin's primary motivations in its current war in Ukraine is to maintain a dominant, if not exclusive, influence in its "near abroad". Georgia is one of the first countries concerned, having experienced Putin's first war outside Russia's borders in 2008, for the very same reasons.

[7] Between 24 February and 30 July 2022, ruling party president Irakli Kobakhidze made 9 statements critical of Russia, 57 critical of the West and its representatives, 26 critical of Ukraine and its representatives and 15 critical of sanctions and support for Kyiv. Cf. Shota Kincha, "Irakli Kobakhidze: The face of Georgia's turn from the West", OC-Media, 1 August 2022 -

[8] This was particularly the case on a day that was supposed to be a "pride march" by LGBTQ rights organisations on 5 July 2021, but which turned into a counter-demonstration by movements claiming to be traditionalist and Orthodox. On that day, following statements made by Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, among others, who attacked activists wishing to organise the Pride march "when 95% of our population is against the organisation of a demonstrative propaganda parade", the police remained passive despite the great violence unleashed on the streets of the capital, and none of the ringleaders have been convicted to date.

[9] "Nika Gvaramia's conviction is a blatant act of politically motivated prosecution in retaliation for her dissenting views and criticism of the authorities," said Marie Struthers, Amnesty International's Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia. (« Amnesty Int'l, HRW Decry Critical TV Chief's Imprisonment », Civil.ge, 17 May 2022)

This is what has prompted Georgian experts to see the attempt to adopt this text on "*foreign agents*", immediately dubbed by its detractors as a "*Russian law*", as a "*Yanukovych moment*". In other words, the moment when the Kremlin pushes the leadership of a former Soviet republic to break its ties with the West. For former diplomat Sergi Kapanadze, Georgia is in its "*After missing the candidate status in 2022, Georgia's ruling Georgian Dream party has done everything to "persuade" European partners that it did not deserve this status. The arrest of journalist Nika Gvaramia, mistreatment of former president Mikheil Saakashvili, increased polarization [of political life], deliberate torpedoing of the ombudsman's election process, and reluctance to join EU policies and sanctions on Ukraine were enough to push away even the biggest friends in the EU. However, introducing the foreign agents' law, a la Russian playbook [KGB/FSB], makes even the ardent supporters of Georgia wonder whether this is done to deliberately invoke the EU's negative position on the candidate's status*[10]."

The withdrawal of the bill following pressure from the street has not discouraged the government from continuing in the same direction since last March: launching into public debate the idea of laws that clash head-on with European values, restoring direct flights between Russia and Georgia (at a time when Western partners are calling for sanctions to be stepped up[11]), an account of the war in Ukraine that allegedly started because Kyiv wanted to join NATO[12], no flags at official ceremonies in spring 2023[13], ever stronger relations with Viktor Orban's Hungary[14].

4. WHY THIS STRATEGY OF RUPTURE? THE UNPRECEDENTED ROLE OF THE OLIGARCH

The resolutely anti-Western course followed since the summer of 2021 has come as a surprise to those who had believed the official position, which was to pursue a policy of prudence towards Russia, a laudable approach in itself. But this interpretation of the policy conducted indirectly by Bidzina Ivanishvili, who was Prime Minister of Georgia for only one year, from October 2012 to November

2013, ignores the essential fact, namely that the man is an oligarch, and was at the centre of Russian power in the 1990s.

An oligarch, in the context of authoritarian or dictatorial regimes, never frees himself from power. There are no examples of Russian oligarchs[15] or someone who has made his fortune in Russia, or because of his links with Russia, who escape some form of control or influence over him from the Kremlin. By what miracle would Mr Ivanishvili escape the influence of the Kremlin when he took the reins of a country that is strategically very important to Moscow?

This is a fundamental question, since an oligarch is a geopolitical player. This is all the truer in a country where his fortune, €4.5 billion according to Forbes magazine, represents 26% of GDP and 70% of the national budget (2022). During a visit to Tbilisi in 2012, Boris Berezovski, who knew Bidzina Ivanishvili extremely well, having invited him to join the small group of billionaires who went on to found the *Russian oligarchy* in 1996, explained that Bidzina Ivanishvili always plays "*according to the rules set by the Russian government*[16]". Better still, the "*father*" of the Russian oligarchy pointed out that "*there are no businessmen in Russia who do not have problems with the government and, at the same time, are not supporters and carriers of its politics*". In fact, never in eleven years has anyone heard from Russia or read in the Russian media the slightest criticism of Bidzina Ivanishvili.

With his financial power, but also and above all with his knowledge of the political culture of post-Soviet states, Bidzina Ivanishvili has succeeded in establishing a virtually undivided reign over the Georgian political scene. The opposition is in tatters, while none of the ministers of the "*Georgian Dream*" have had a political existence since leaving government[17]. So much so that, with the weakening of the country's institutions that he is orchestrating, Georgia, while retaining a certain democratic dynamic, is taking on the air of the curious autocracy of an oligarch who has no official position.

The main ministers are his men, like the head of government, who has been his factotum in

[10] "The Introduction of a "Foreign Agent" Law in Georgia Quick Comment - insights from SCEEUS's experts on breaking news and hot topics", The Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (SCEEUS), 7 March 2023 -

[11] This does not mean, according to several sources in the European chancelleries, that Georgia's Western partners want the country to join in the sanctions against Russia, knowing how exposed it is to Russian aggression. "All we are asking is for Georgia to remain neutral on the matter", explains a European diplomat in charge of the Eastern Partnership in Brussels.

[12] Statement made in Bratislava at the Globsec forum 2023: "PM: NATO Enlargement "One of the Main Reasons for Ukraine War", Civil.ge, 30 May 2023.

[13] Since 2004, Georgia has been flying European flags in front of public buildings. In fact, the flag itself is the flag of the Council of Europe, which is an organisation to which Georgia belongs.

[14] "Georgian Prime Minister Advocates for Conservatism and Slams "False" Values at CPAC", Civil.ge, 4 May 2023

[15] In fact, there have not been any "oligarchs" as such in Russia for the last twenty years, the Khodorkovskiy affair (named after the oil tycoon who was dispossessed of his company Youkos and imprisoned) having served Putin to bring the country's billionaires into line and force them to abandon any desire to interfere in Russian political life. The Russian oligarchy only existed from 1996 to 2002, from the re-election of President Boris Yeltsin (elected thanks to the financial support of the semibankirschina - the "seven bankers" who were in fact a dozen bankers and businessmen including Mr Ivanichvili) and the Khodorkovskiy affair.

[16] "Boris Berezovsky: Ivanishvili plays according to the rules set by the Russian government", Tabula, 24 May 2012

[17] The only exception, and a very modest one, is former Prime Minister Giorgui Gakharia (September 2019 - February 2021) who, with his "For Georgia" party, won less than 8% of the vote in the autumn 2021 local elections

Georgia since 2005, or Interior Minister Vakhtang Gomelaouri, who has headed up his personal security. He controls the judicial system, key institutions such as the National Bank, the Central Electoral Commission and the security services, and indirectly has the upper hand over many of the country's media. Armed with this impressive range of tools, Mr Ivanishvili seems on the verge of succeeding in diverting an entire people from its historical course, of making Georgia abandon thirty years of efforts to draw closer to Europe and bring it back into the fold of the former Russian colonial power. This policy is served by an approach based on fear (of war, but insofar as it would come from the West's desire to open up a second front against Russia in Georgia[18]) and financial interests: since May 2023, the Prime Minister and members of the party in power have been saying that the Georgian economy cannot survive without that of Russia.

5. TWELVE "PRIORITIES"

In this context, the way in which the government of the 'Georgian Dream' was going to implement the twelve 'priorities' recommended by the European Commission on 17 June 2022 and adopted by the Council five days later was bound to be problematic. These priorities are all political:

- Address the issue of political polarisation (...);
- Guarantee the full functioning of all state institutions. (...) Further improve the electoral framework (...);
- Adopt and implement a transparent and effective judicial reform strategy (...). Ensure a judiciary that is fully and truly independent, accountable, and impartial (...);
- Strengthen the independence of its anti-corruption agency (...);
- Implement the commitment to "de-oligarchisation" by eliminating the excessive influence of vested interests in economic, political, and public life;
- Strengthen the fight against organised crime (...);
- Undertake stronger efforts to guarantee a free, professional, pluralistic and independent media environment (...);

- Move swiftly to strengthen the protection (...) of vulnerable groups (...);
- Consolidate efforts to enhance gender equality and fight violence against women (...);
- Ensure the involvement of civil society in decision-making processes at all levels;
- Adopt legislation so that Georgian courts proactively take into account European Court of Human Rights judgments in their deliberations;
- Ensure that an independent person is given preference in the process of nominating a new Public Defender (Ombudsperson (...)).

The "challenge" for this government and its parliamentary majority was, given its now pro-Russian orientation and the overwhelmingly pro-Western public opinion, to make people believe that it was willing to implement these "priorities" while at the same time ensuring that Europeans considered these "efforts" insufficient. This is exactly what has happened. At the end of May, a European diplomat in Tbilisi deplored the situation: *"We can't see any progress. The judiciary is still in the grip of the "Georgian Dream", and the polarisation of political life is still primarily the daily work of the ruling team, which demonises the opposition over and over again and denies it the right to exist in its rhetoric, the new amendments to the law on broadcasting increase the power of the authorities to close down critical media on the basis of a vague definition of what constitutes "hate speech". Point No. 5 on de-oligarchisation has given rise to a draft law that targets everything that could be called the "oligarchy" in this country, with the exception of Mr Ivanishvili... who is the only one acting as an oligarch in his own right. This law in fact gives the "Georgian Dream" new ways of repressing the opposition."*

On 30 April, a group of Georgian NGOs assessed the "implementation" of the twelve "priorities"[19] :

- Five have not been implemented: independence of the judiciary, depolarisation of domestic politics, freedom of the media, involvement of civil society in political decision-making, de-colonisation;
- Four have only been partially implemented: electoral reform, appointment of the rights

[18] This theme has been developed since June 2022, echoing the statements made by political and security leaders in Russia or close to Russia.

[19] "State of implementation of 12 priorities – EU candidacy check", GRASS, 16 May 2023 - The document summarises the level of "implementation" of each of the twelve "priorities".

defender, protection of vulnerable groups, anti-corruption measures;

- Two are fairly well implemented: gender equality, fight against organised crime;
- One has been fully implemented: Georgian courts have taken into account the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights.

6. "CANDIDATE" GEORGIA, A CONUNDRUM

While the ruling party in Georgia, for reasons closely linked to the type of geopolitical player that the oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili is, is doing everything it can to reverse the pro-Western course of the Caucasian republic's foreign policy, the decision that the Europeans are due to take at the end of 2023 carries great risks for the country's stability. As is so often the case, what the Kremlin's propaganda portrays to be its opponents' position is more likely to reveal its own intentions. Georgia could serve as a second front for Russia, in relation to the war in Ukraine, one of the primary aims of which is to impose a "Pax Russica" on the region that Moscow considers its "near abroad", if only to be able to boast that it has won a victory in its battle against what it calls the "collective West". It would also show the former Soviet republics that they must accept the Russian yoke.

In October, the European Commission is due to deliver its traditional "analytical report", in which it will assess the progress made by Tbilisi in its rapprochement with the European Union, as well as progress on the twelve "priorities" set by the European Council on June 2022. Following this, probably in December, the twenty-seven Member States will vote unanimously to decide whether or not to grant Georgia its "status". Europeans have three options:

- Not to grant Georgia "candidate country" status, thereby punishing a government that is doing everything it can to break with the West. At the same time, it would punish an entire people, over 80% of whom aspire to become members of the European Union. Such a refusal could lead to strong popular protests, as the fear of missing the train of history is so strong in the country, especially

if Kyiv were indeed to begin its accession procedures as early as 2024.

- Granting the said "status" in order to reward the will of the Georgian people might strengthen a ruling party and an oligarch that will be able to boast of having obtained what the people wanted. This will not prevent it, in the long term, from pursuing its anti-Western policy.

- Postpone the decision or grant it conditionally (implement the "priorities" that have not been properly met, hold free and fair legislative elections in 2024, etc.).

Georgians, and also European diplomats and politicians, are divided. No solution is satisfactory. According to an ambassador from a former Eastern bloc country, "we cannot reward what the government is doing, which is systematically breaking ties with the West. For some Member States, such as Poland or certain Baltic States, the treatment meted out to former President Mikheil Saakashvili will be taken into account and will weigh in favour of not granting candidate status". Others argue in favour of granting "status" to the Georgian people, even if such a formulation makes no legal sense.

In his [speech to the European Parliament](#) on 31 May last, Georgian President Salomé Zourabichvili, who has mostly honorary powers, stated that "granting of EU candidate status to Georgia would give recognition to the Georgian people's relentless fight for their European identity, provide protection and security for a Georgia that experienced multiple Russian occupations, help safeguard democracy, and cement the country's role as a pro-European force in the Caucasus[20]".

Politically, both positions are defensible. But it is crucial as well to assess the impact of any decision taken. The most serious would be the destabilisation of the country, either from within or provoked by Russia. The latter is the most likely outcome if "candidate country" status is not granted. The population could revolt, as it did at the beginning of March 2023 against the draft law on "foreign agents". The historic nature of this choice and the feeling of abandonment that many Georgians would have, particularly active minorities and young people, could give rise to immense popular anger.

[20] These words are welcomed in Georgia, but the President's record and her current actions make her a much-criticised figure in the country. Many people point out that her election in 2018 was only possible thanks to the support given to her by Mr Ivanishvili's "Georgian Dream", who was already perceived by many of the country's observers as an "agent of the Kremlin", and to the fact that the oligarch had promised between the two rounds to buy back 600,000 loans contracted by the Georgians, which had a decisive influence on an election in which, in the opinion of the experts, she could not have won. Her insistence that President Saakashvili was more responsible than Mr Putin for the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 also affected her credibility. But her change of stance on these issues after the start of the invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 gave her more popular support. The opposition and most civil society organisations criticise her for not using her right to pardon Mr Saakashvili and Mr Gvaramia, the director of the main opposition television channel. Of course, her "pardon" would not be enough to secure the release of these two personalities, and the authorities would probably not accept it, but it would give weight to their defence and shed light on the political motivations for their imprisonment.

It seems that granting this "*status*" would place the European Union in an awkward position, given the extent to which the "*Georgian Dream*" has intentionally failed to satisfy the twelve "*priorities*", particularly the most important ones. The preferable solution might lie in not granting the 'status' directly, firstly to show the 3.7 million Georgians that the European Union is not abandoning them and wants to reward the real efforts made by the country over more than two decades; but also to tell the government that it cannot be given this gift because it has worked in the opposite direction to that recommended in June 2022 by the Commission and the European Council. This non-granting with conditions attached (starting with the actual implementation of the "*priorities*") would mean that the government would have to continue to answer to the people for its work in favour of closer ties with the European Union.

The way in which the European Union communicates these issues to the Georgian people will be crucial. It will have to explain the European approach as well as possible and endeavour to distinguish what it is saying to them, on the one hand, and to the current government, on the other. The importance of the question of financial support for Georgia (1.5 billion lari - around €500 million – support alone [in response to the Covid-19 pandemic](#) for example) and the visa-free regime could be mentioned in order to highlight their importance for Georgia.

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