



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



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**Remarks by Herman Van Rompuy,
President of the European Council,
following his meeting with President of Georgia
Mikheil Saakashvili**

Mr President, it is a great pleasure to be here in Tbilisi for the first time, after having met on many occasions in different places around the world; Brussels, Warsaw, Seoul and Chicago.

As always, we have had a substantial exchange of views here today. I should like to make the following points:

First, it is clear to me that Georgia has made remarkable progress in its modernisation and reform efforts since gaining independence 20 years ago. New and more efficient state institutions have been built. Services to the citizens of Georgia are improving. You have also made great efforts to create a more business- and investment friendly environment.

These are all important steps in making a difference not only for today's Georgia but for the next generation. Georgia serves as an example for many in the region and elsewhere.

Second, The relationship between the EU and Georgia is rapidly developing. We have achieved a lot in a short time: Negotiations on the Association Agreement are steadily progressing. The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area on which negotiations have been launched, is an integral part of this agreement. We have also taken important steps towards visa liberalisation.

It is by continuing this work and through reforms that Georgia's prosperity and stability can be ensured in the long term. The more Georgia reforms the more the EU can do to help and support. Your personal commitment, Mr President, will continue to be crucial, in supporting and advancing this work.

P R E S S

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Third, it is clear, and we talked about this today, that Georgia needs to take further steps and continue this path of modernization. The parliamentary election in October and presidential elections in 2013 will be crucial indicators of the progress Georgia has made on its path to reform.

I encourage all political actors in Georgia to support a tolerant political culture and issues based debate. Fair competition and genuine participation in the elections will be fundamental. I have pointed to the responsibility that lies with the President and his Government to ensure legitimacy of the elections. In this regard, I welcome President Sakaashvili's aim to keep the electoral process open to election observers.

I made the same point to the opposition when I met them earlier today. Building democracy needs responsible actors across the political divide.

Fourth, The Eastern Partnership joint determination to uphold the values on which the Eastern Partnership is based: democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Georgia is one of the front runners in the Eastern Partnership. The next Eastern Partnership Summit in Lithuania 2013 will be an important follow-up to the Summit in Warsaw, and an opportunity to again confirm the importance of the EU:s relationship with its eastern neighbours, including Georgia.

Finally, I have also made clear to the President that the EU shares the strong interest in the resolution of the conflicts regarding the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. I can reassure you that the EU will remain engaged in a central role in the Geneva international discussions and through the EU Monitoring Mission.

The EU firmly supports Georgia's territorial integrity. I should, however, also like to emphasize that Georgia and Russia need to find ways to normalise relations. One important step could be for all parties of the conflicts to agree on a non use of force commitment.

I would in this regard like to underline Georgia's constructive role in enabling Russia's WTO- accession. This issue shows that progress can be done if there is political will on both sides.

I have also encouraged the President to look for further pragmatic and constructive steps to enhance its reconciliation and conflict resolution efforts with the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Mr President, The European Union has a stake in Georgia's future. We value and support your progress. I encourage you to stay the course.