



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



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Statement by President Herman Van Rompuy following his meeting with Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili

First of all, it is a real pleasure to be back in Tbilisi. My last visit to Georgia was almost two years ago - in July 2012. Let me also thank President Margvelashvili and Prime Minister Garibashvili for the warm welcome they have extended to me today, and for their continuing commitment to closer relations between Georgia and the European Union.

At top of our agenda today was the strengthening of relations between Georgia and the European Union. We discussed preparations for the signature and implementation of the Association Agreement including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. We will sign the agreement in Brussels on the 27th of June together with all the EU heads of state or government. This important milestone will mark the beginning of a new phase in our relations and in the history of your country. By choosing this path, Georgia is signalling its commitment to strong democratic institutions, respect for the rights of its citizens, and firmly upholding the rule of law.

I assured the President and Prime Minister that the European Union will stand firmly by Georgia's side as we embark upon this path together. Georgia is a free, democratic country that should make its own choices. No external pressure must change this.

P R E S S

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I expressed my strong appreciation for the efforts, which the Prime Minister have made to implement an ambitious reform agenda, including the recent adoption of anti-discrimination legislation. The EU respects diversity – diversity is in our DNA. Modern societies defend human rights and the dignity of all human beings, irrespective of their skin colour, religion, gender or sexual orientation. This is not about "traditional values" or "European values". It's about universal human values. By adopting the anti-discrimination law, Georgia has demonstrated that it shares those values and is prepared to defend them – to the benefit of all citizens. This reform agenda also includes the impartiality of the judiciary and the fight against abuses.

Georgia continues to have a strong record on democratic elections. Avoiding polarisation will make this even stronger.

We also discussed the troubling regional situation and the implications for Georgia's security. I confirmed again the European Union's support for Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, and our commitment to conflict resolution efforts in Georgia, including through the EU's co-chairmanship of the Geneva International Talks and through the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia. The EU remains very concerned by obstacles to free movement across the Administrative Boundary Line. This has a direct and negative impact on the lives of local people. In this context, I would also like to express my appreciation for Georgia's participation in CSDP operations, not least in the Central African Republic - one of the most tragic conflicts of today.

Before concluding let me add a few words on the situation in Ukraine. Two days ago I was in Kiev and met with Prime Minister Yatsenyuk and President Turchynov. In Kiev I reiterated the European Union's firm commitment to Ukraine's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. After the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, the European Union has introduced sanctions against a number of individuals and entities. In case of further destabilisation, the European Union remains committed to further increase the cost for Russia should it take more steps to destabilise the situation. For now the immediate goal is to ensure free and fair presidential elections on the 25th of May. The European Union will continue to insist on and work for dialogue and negotiations as this is the only way forward to come to a stable, democratic, inclusive and modern Ukraine. And we will continue our support for the necessary political, economic and security reforms in Ukraine.

Let me conclude by once again thanking for a warm welcome to Georgia. I look forward to give you, Prime Minister, a similarly warm welcome in Brussels, when we meet in less than two months to sign our Association Agreement. And let me reiterate, the Association Agreement is an important milestone. The Association Agreement is not the final goal in our cooperation.

Thank you.
