



What Next for Georgia's Foreign Policy

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During the European Council summit on 23 June, Georgia was not granted EU candidate status, unlike Ukraine and Moldova, and received only the prospect of EU accession. Georgia is the most pro-European state in the South Caucasus. The effectiveness of its Euro-Atlantic foreign policy course is hampered by internal political polarisation and Russia's policies towards the region. Georgia's continued cooperation with the EU and NATO will depend primarily on its willingness to implement reforms and the development of an internal consensus between the government and opposition.

Internal Conditions. The political conflict between the ruling Georgian Dream (GD, the party of the richest oligarch, Bidzina Ivanishvili) and the opposition, led by the United National Movement (UNM, the party of former President Mikheil Saakashvili) in recent years has destabilised the internal situation and aggravated Georgia's cooperation with the EU and NATO. The opposition has for domestic political purposes accused those in power of being pro-Russia and having authoritarian tendencies. However, the GD government has not led a pro-Russia course, and abuses of power have only partly confirmed by assessments by independent institutions. In turn, the government, feeling that there was no real prospect of Georgia's accession to the EU and NATO, adopted a wait-and-see—and often assertive—approach towards them, while neglecting a number of important reforms.

The political polarisation has not influenced a change in Georgian foreign policy, with integration into the EU and NATO officially remaining its priorities. The political preferences of the general public are still the main factor preventing the Georgian authorities from even potentially making changes in this field—about 88% of Georgians support EU accession, about 75% support joining NATO, and about 90% of Georgians see Russia as the greatest threat to their country. Despite this, about 47% of Georgians and the Georgian Orthodox Church, which is influential in society, support normalising relations with Russia, seeing it as an opportunity to minimise mutual tensions.

EU/NATO as Priority Foreign Policy Directions. Integration with the EU and NATO has been the main direction in

Georgia's foreign policy since 2003 when Saakashvili took power. The pro-European course was maintained after 2012 when GD took over. In 2014, Georgia signed an Association Agreement and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU. In 2021, Georgia, together with Ukraine and Moldova, formed an "association trio" to deepen cooperation leading to EU accession. [Following Ukraine's accession application, the Georgian government fast-tracked its application for EU membership on 3 March \(as did Moldova\).](#)

The European Council (EC) on 23 June granted Georgia an accession perspective, but did not give it EU candidate status, unlike Ukraine and Moldova. The EC pointed to the need for Georgia to implement additional reforms in the areas of the rule of law, the judiciary, the fight against corruption, de-oligarchisation, media freedom, minority rights, the functioning of state institutions, and the electoral process. The EC's decision was also a consequence of Georgia's policy towards the Russian aggression against Ukraine—the Georgian government did not join the sanctions, avoided actions and statements that could provoke Russia, and was accused of allegedly facilitating Russian businesspeople in circumventing sanctions and a number of actions unkind to the Ukrainian authorities. As a result, there were massive anti-government protests in Georgia. GD has pledged to implement most reforms in areas identified by the EU by the end of next year.

The Georgian authorities maintain cooperation with the EU as a priority, seeing that it is the most important donor of

development assistance to the country. The EU is Georgia's largest trading partner (27% of its trade) and also the largest donor to Georgia, providing some €120 million in grant support annually for reform. The EU is also involved in stabilising the situation along the line of demarcation between Georgia and the separatist republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia through the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), which has been in operation since 2008, as well as diplomatic (Geneva International Discussions) and technical (Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism) mechanisms.

The second pillar of Georgia's foreign policy remains cooperation with NATO. [Georgia has been a member of the Partnership for Peace programme since 1994 and has been officially seeking membership in the Alliance since 2003.](#) Since then, Georgia has been implementing political and military reforms along the lines of the Alliance countries, conducting regular exercises with NATO countries, and engaging in missions conducted by the Alliance (in the past in Kosovo, Afghanistan, in the Mediterranean Sea, and now in the Black Sea as part of *Operation Sea Guardian*).

Regional Politics. Russia is seen by almost all of Georgia's political elite and society as the greatest threat to their state. Fear of Russian aggression has been further strengthened as a consequence of its attack on Ukraine. Pro-Russia parties in Georgia function on the margins of political life and have no chance of taking power in the state. However, the post-2012 GD government has changed the tenets of its policy towards Russia, [aiming for normalisation](#)—while diplomatic relations have not resumed, dialogue has been launched at the level of special envoys, the Russian embargo on Georgian products has been lifted, imports of certain strategic products from Russia (including gas and wheat) have increased, and the influx of Russian tourists is being facilitated. This pragmatic approach by the Georgian government to Russia is the result of both an attempt to improve the local economic situation as well as to secure the interests of Georgian oligarchs doing business in Russia (including Ivanishvili).

The frozen conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain a limiting factor in Georgian foreign policy. The separatist republics, which account for more than 20% of Georgia's territory, have been occupied by Russian forces since 2008 and recognised as independent states (de facto controlled and maintained by Russia), and they are an instrument of Russian military and political pressure aimed at preventing

Georgia from deepening cooperation with the EU and NATO. To the same end, Russia, [with Türkiye and Iran, is pressuring Georgia to join the "3+3" regional cooperation platform and curb its pro-European and pro-Atlantic aspirations.](#) Georgia remains reluctant to join this format, aware of its negative impact on relations with the EU and NATO. However, Georgia's growing cooperation with Türkiye, [linked to the growth of Turkish influence in the South Caucasus,](#) has contributed to increased scepticism among Georgian authorities about the real possibility of their country's accession to the EU and a weakening of efforts in this field. This is based on, among other things, the negative Turkish experience with the EU accession process ([as was the case with Azerbaijan](#)).

Conclusions and Prospects. The Georgian authorities will maintain a pro-European and pro-Atlantic foreign policy direction, as their political legitimacy depends on it. However, the government's determination to reform in the sectors identified by the EC remains uncertain, as it will require socially costly and power-threatening changes that could weaken the ruling GD's internal position. With a prolonged stalemate over Georgia's EU candidate status, the country could face both a deep internal crisis and possible protests that force a change in government.

Georgia is unlikely to abandon EU and NATO integration in favour of cooperation with Russia. Georgia's actions in the face of the Russian aggression against Ukraine are not a rationale for this as they were the result of the Georgian authorities' fear of Russian aggression (fears of a repeat of the 2008 invasion), as well as bilateral tensions in relations with Ukraine, whose authorities maintain intimate relations with the Georgian opposition. If the EU and NATO want to counter such negative trends in the South Caucasus and reduce the influence of Russia, Türkiye and Iran, they should strive to keep a pro-European course in Georgia's foreign policy. It remains the last country in the region interested in cooperation with the EU and NATO. However, this will not be possible without a real willingness on the part of the Georgian authorities to carry out the necessary reforms.

Poland can support Georgia by sharing its pre-accession experience with it. Poland can also use its good relations with both the Georgian government and opposition to mediate the internal political conflict and deescalate it in order to limit its negative effects on foreign policy and cooperation with the EU and NATO.