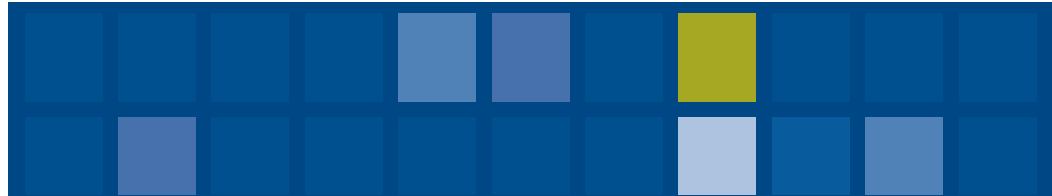




Konrad
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THIRD GEORGIAN-GERMAN STRATEGIC FORUM

Policy Recommendations and Observations

KONRAD-ADENAUER-STIFTUNG
REGIONAL PROGRAM POLITICAL DIALOGUE SOUTH CAUCASUS



THIRD GEORGIAN-GERMAN STRATEGIC FORUM: Policy Recommendations and Observations

The third German-Georgian Strategic Forum took place in Tbilisi on 10-11 June, 2014, and gathered more than 70 participants from a wide spectrum of organizations and sectors from both Germany and Georgia: government officials, members of parliament from ruling and opposition parties, experts from the most influential think tanks and media representatives. During the presentations as well as subsequent discussions, participants not only discussed recent developments in international relations and important strategic issues of mutual interest but also expressed different policy recommendations and ideas.

Since the first launch of the Forum in 2012, significant political changes took place at the national and international level. With free and fair parliamentary elections in 2012 and the subsequent presidential elections in 2013, Georgia experienced the first ever peaceful and democratic transfer of power. The successful implementation of the recent local municipality elections in June 2014 constituted another litmus test for the democratic development of Georgia. Furthermore, the implementation of the recently signed Association Agreement (AA) with the EU, which also includes of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), not only brings Georgia closer to Europe in political and economic terms but will also have a positive impact on the consolidation of democracy.

At the same time the annexation of Crimea by Russia and Moscow's continuing efforts to destabilize Ukraine not only violate crucial principles of international law but also pose a serious threat to regional security and stability. It is in this context that Georgia needs security assurances and backstopping from the Euro Atlantic community and Germany is considered as one of the most influential countries in this regard.

Against this background, the Georgian-German Strategic Forum continues to play an important role in the development of cooperative discussions among politicians and experts from both countries on the basis of mutual trust and confidence.

The main issues discussed at the Third Georgian-German Strategic Forum were: EU Association Agreement (AA) and perspectives of German-Georgian Relations, the upcoming NATO summit in Wales and prospects of a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Georgia, Georgia's internal political agenda, and perspectives of regional security in light of current events on Crimea and in Ukraine.



As the result of the discussions the following Recommendations and Observations were offered:

ON ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT AND BILATERAL RELATIONS

Recommendation 1: Germany's support to Georgia is essential for furthering Georgian integration with EU and enabling swift fulfillment of its obligations under the Association Agreement. Fostering sustainable economic development and investments in human development are key priorities. Germany could support their implementation with various projects and a new framework of cooperation between the two countries.

Argumentation:

The Association Agreement (AA) aims at deepening political and economic relations between Georgia and the EU, and to gradually integrate Georgia into the EU Internal Market – the largest single market in the world. This includes the setting up of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), which is a core part of the Agreement. The AA is a concrete way to activate the potential of EU-Georgian relations, focusing on support to core reforms, on economic recovery and growth, governance and sector cooperation. The main focus of sector cooperation are areas such as energy, transport, environment protection, industrial and small and medium enterprise cooperation, social development and protection, equal rights, consumer protection, education, training and youth as well as cultural cooperation.

Germany underwent a remarkable social, political and economic transformation after World War II, thus having accumulated tremendous experience. Due to its experience and its political and economic strength, Germany is one of the most influential partners who can really contribute to Georgia's smooth transformation according to AA conditions. German assistance is crucial in many aspects, and as Chancellor Merkel stated, Germany's support for reforms could be directed towards the agricultural sector, and the facilitation of foreign direct investments in Georgia's economy.

From Georgia's side it's essential to transform the judiciary system, as well as ensure political pluralism and democratic governance.



ON NATO INTEGRATION PERSPECTIVE

Recommendation 2: Germany should support Georgia's integration into NATO.

On the NATO Bucharest Summit 2008 NATO leaders agreed that Georgia will receive the perspective of a membership, and it is the most important challenge to ensure the fulfillment of this statement by the NATO allies. Germany should support Georgia's NATO aspirations and this support should be expressed in certain steps taken by NATO alliance: a substantial package of proposals should be adopted; additional consultation formats in the NATO-Georgia commission should be initiated and strengthened. Furthermore, granting Georgia a Membership Action Plan (MAP) should not become a distant possibility in order to keep integration and democratization process on track, as well as prevent further and graver Russian provocations aimed at undermining Georgian and European security. It should be ensured that the NATO Wales Summit communiqué creates perspectives for Georgia in several dimensions: intensive and expanding collaboration within agreed formats, defence capability building, increased NATO interoperability of Georgian armed forces, NATO-Georgia joint exercises and trainings, and widened functions and increased capabilities for assistance of the NATO Liaison Office.

Argumentation:

Mutual interests and common values are the foundation of strong bonds and relations between the West and Georgia. For the West, Georgia is important from both a geostrategic perspective and on basis of its democratic identity. As part of the east-west corridor Georgia links Europe with Asia and provides crucial transit routes to the oil and gas resources of the Caspian region. Georgia embraces principles of democratic governance and European values what was once again underlined by the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU. Only integration into NATO provides Georgia with the security assurances necessary for a democratic development free from Russian interference and pressure.



Recommendation 3: With regard to NATO membership prospects it is important for the Georgian government to conduct effective expectation management before the NATO Wales summit and communicate its results properly to the Georgian population in the likely case that Georgian would not be granted MAP. An effective public relations and communication strategy should be developed in order to ensure the continuing support of the population of Georgia towards NATO integration process and to forestall disappointment with the Western policy of prolongation of membership decision.



Argumentation:

Georgia possesses an impressive track record with regard to the consolidation of democracy as well as with regard to reforms and contributions in the defense sector. The Georgian government strengthened democratic governance in defense structures; it increased military capabilities and contributed significantly to Euro-Atlantic security by actively participating in NATO operations. At the same time the conduct of Russian foreign policy is affecting the sense of insecurity in the region. In addition to its hard-power Moscow also bolstered its soft-power instruments by doubling its propaganda efforts and supporting pro-Russian NGOs such as Eurasian Choice. NATO and Georgia have to find joint answers to the shared threat of Russian strategy of hybrid warfare.

The potential for frustration with the West can also be demonstrated by the rise of pro-Russian political parties. More than 15 % of votes in total (from different political groups or parties) at the recent local municipality elections were collected by political forces who openly express their negative attitude towards the West and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Public disappointment about NATO's perceived lack of commitment towards countries of the eastern neighborhood in the face of Russian threats will further weaken the stance of pro-Western politicians in Georgia. This worrisome developments needs to be deeply reflected not only by Georgia side but also by Western governments including Germany's. A sovereign and democratic Georgia, free from Russian influence is a salient support to Euro-Atlantic security.

ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Recommendation 4: The German government should continue its efforts to support the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) as well as non-recognition policy towards Georgia's breakaway regions. Furthermore, Germany should raise the ending of the occupation of these regions in interactions with Russian officials. Simultaneously, it should support the initiatives of the Georgian government aiming at normalizing relations with Russia, but not on the expense of compromising Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Argumentation:

Currently EUMM is the only mechanism of international monitoring of the line of contact between Georgia and the breakaway regions, thus ensuring the international presence and at least some sort of security and stability on the ground. Tbilisi continues its efforts to promote and advocate for dialogue and normalization policy with Russia for achieving through peaceful means the de-occupation and reintegration of Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali into Georgia proper. After the parliamentary elections 2012, the appointment of the prime minister's special representative on the regulation of the relations with Russia and the regular meetings between the special representative and the Russian deputy foreign minister contributed to improvement of bilateral trade relations. While there has been some progress with regard to trade relations and humanitarian issues, no progress was achieved with regard to the status of the two breakaway regions. However, Tbilisi tries to reach progress in this respect through increasing the engagement with and assistance to the population residing in occupied regions. Assistance programs in healthcare, educational scholarships and the prospects of a visa-free regime with the EU are stimulating the increased interest and goodwill towards Georgia in populations of those two occupied regions.



ON PROMOTING AND SUPPORTING DEMOCRATIZATION IN GEORGIA

Recommendation 5: The Georgian Government should continue democratic transformation of political institutions and structures. All necessary measures must be taken to adhere to high standards of the rule of law and prevent the perception of selective and politically motivated justice from occurring. A free and fair judiciary is a core pillar of democracy. Thus the German government should continue to actively support justice sector reform and democratic transformation in Georgia.

Argumentation:

Together with its direct contributions to the European security, Georgia's further democratization and strengthening the rule of law are the best arguments supporting Georgia's integration into both, NATO and EU. Georgia's successful example of democratic transformation carries a big weight in regional context and stimulates the democratic processes and reforms in the region and beyond. Further strengthening and consolidation of Georgian democracy is the best way for ensuring the national security and speeding up its turning into a full-fledged member of Euro-Atlantic family of democracies. Any perception of selective justice, dragging feet on further strengthening the rule of law and implementation of democratic reforms could have dismal consequences for Georgian security and implementation of its national interests.

ABOUT THE GEORGIAN-GERMAN STRATEGIC FORUM

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Atlantic Council of Georgia are initiators of the Strategic Forum and act as organizers. The Forum will hold meetings at least once in a year. The first meeting was held on May 2-3, 2012. It applies strict observance of Chatham House Rules.

The Forum acts as a non-governmental forum that brings together representatives of all sectors (academia and think-tanks, government, parliament, media) from Germany and Georgia and focuses mainly on the security policy field. The main goal of the Forum is to strengthen and deepen bilateral relations between Georgia and Germany through further improving the partnership, increasing the mutual understanding and facilitating a better coordination of security policies.

The Forum is intended to serve as a permanent venue for discussions on important strategic issues of mutual interest. Policy recommendations will be elaborated, as well as adequate bilateral projects launched and implemented within its framework.

When deemed useful, on a case by case basis, the Forum can decide to also involve experts and/or policy makers from other countries in its work, especially when this contributes to a better understanding and helps to bring closer the positions of Georgia and Germany on important security policy issues.

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