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Georgia's Green Policy Means More Pollution

By Paul Rimple

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Georgia's legislature has just passed groundbreaking legal amendments to attract foreign investors to come pollute the Georgian environment. Thanks to the astute foresight of the country's lawmakers, a company can open up shop and legally dump its hazardous waste wherever it wants to, providing it pays the Energy and Natural Resources Ministry in advance.

It has long been established that polluting your air, ground and water is simply immoral, except when private interests are concerned. The question is whether a green light to break existing environmental laws will really attract foreign investors. Or will it make it easier for handpicked developers to rape the country's natural resources?

Unlike Georgians, foreign investors think about the long term. The law exempts a license holder of virtually any responsibility and prevents the state from even challenging a license holder's intentional emissions of toxic pollutants. But that's not the kind of business pheromone stable enterprises sniff around for. Their first question will be: What should

happen if a new government comes along and repeals the law and sues me to clean up the mess and compensate everybody?

For local developers, however, particularly those with companies registered off shore, the law is a godsend. These companies are scattered all over Georgia. A guy purchases property from the state for millions of dollars, sells it to an offshore company for $1,000 and becomes the firm's director. It's hard to sue a license owner when you don't know who he is.

The law also effectively neuters those pesky environmentalists who always demand environmental-impact studies required by law. Now the government can go ahead with its environmentally disastrous plans to build more hydroelectric projects. President Mikheil Saakashvili won't have to worry that the location of his quixotic city, Lazika, is in a national park and protected wetlands. ⊠

Oddly, nobody within the government has considered what this law could mean to Georgia's tourism industry. Instead of cleaning up its mess along the Black Sea coast, it is encouraging people to pollute the sea more.

In developed countries, the trend is toward improving the wretched ecological conditions of our planet for our children's sake — particularly as our planet is warming. Georgia claims it is modeling itself on Western concepts, yet inviting factories to wantonly pollute the environment, This reflects a Soviet mentality where thinking green has an entirely different meaning.

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