

# Georgian Prime Minister, on Brussels Visit, Criticized Over Arrests

By [The Moscow Times](#)

November 12, 2012

**The**  **Moscow Times**

NATO and European Union leaders upbraided Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili on Monday over the arrest of political opponents as he visited Brussels to try to bolster ties with the West.

Ivanishvili, a billionaire whose coalition won parliamentary elections last month, has been accused by opponents of being too close to Russia, but by making Brussels his first foreign destination he signaled that relations with the West were his priority.

Fears of political score-settling have been raised by the detention of a former interior minister and two army commanders on suspicion of insulting servicemen a year ago.

They have not been charged but could be jailed for up to eight years if found guilty of abuse of power. The commanders have been freed on bail, but the ex-minister is still being held.

"I'm extremely concerned about the development we have seen since [the elections], not least related to recent arrests of political opponents in Georgia," NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said during a visit to Prague. It's for the legal system, the judicial system, in Georgia to sort out these cases. But, of course, it's important that such trials are not undermined by political interference."

The 56-year-old Ivanishvili, who made his fortune mainly in Russia, has vowed to take action against former officials suspected of wrongdoing. He has also said he will be better at building bridges with Moscow than with the West.

"We will do our best to speed up and accelerate our aspiration of achieving our ultimate goal, which is integration into the European family," he told reporters after talks with European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso and European Council President Herman van Rompuy.

Barroso said democracy was about more than elections.

"Situations of selective justice should be avoided, as they could harm the country's image abroad and weaken the rule of law," he said. "I've addressed this issue to the prime minister, and he responded to me in a very concrete way."

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