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Georgia Isn't on the MAP For NATO Membership

By Paul Rimple

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It should come as no surprise that Georgia did not make it to -NATO's Membership Action Plan, or MAP, this year. President Mikheil Saakashvili has put the blame on Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili — a convenient excuse if it were true.

After a meeting of NATO foreign ministers last week in Brussels, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen again reiterated that Georgia passed "an important test" after October's parliamentary elections.

But NATO has now given Georgia a new test to pass in 2013, when the country elects a new president. MAP was not discussed at this meeting. Nevertheless, on Thursday, Saakashvili said Georgia had a chance to gain MAP but had failed because of certain "events of recent months."

Are we to assume that if Saakashvili's party had won the elections, Georgia would be part

of the MAP today? Rasmussen answered that question when he restated the old song and dance about there being "more work to be done," such as "reforming the judiciary and strengthening the rule of law and media freedom and transparency."

Since NATO integration became a national priority in Tbilisi, the alliance's secretaries-general have continuously said more work needs to be done, while Albania, a NATO member since 2009, proves that less is more by being one of the most corrupt countries in Europe. The whole democracy thing is a dubious prerequisite. Georgia fought a war with Russia four years ago, and now Russia is occupying one-third of Georgian territory. The country is simply a liability.

Instead of saying, "Look, before you can join our club, you have to deal with your Russia issues first,"

Rasmussen talks of the challenges of cohabitation between the president and government and expresses concern that Ivanishvili's appetite for arresting representatives of Saakashvili's administration will be "perceived as political persecution." Meanwhile, Saakashvili has been busy making sure it is perceived as such. You could argue it's Saakashvili's fault that Georgia isn't on the MAP, although that wouldn't be entirely correct.

Ivanishvili is betting that this wave of arrests will actually be an endorsement of his reformed judiciary and a demonstration of how transparent Georgia's rule of law has become. But even if this were true, it wouldn't guarantee NATO membership. There will always be more tests for Georgia to pass until NATO decides that the alliance will benefit from having Georgia as a member.

Paul Rimple is a journalist in Tbilisi.

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