

Why Europe's Standards Don't Apply to Georgia

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Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said he was worried about Georgia because he believed the parliamentary minority "is being threatened publicly with the use of prosecution services." He added that the European Union was also "very concerned about the overuse of pretrial detention toward people who have not been proven guilty yet."

Indeed, there is a lot to be concerned about, but Sikorski ought to look at the broader picture before expressing himself. He should recall 2004, when immediately after coming into power, the revolutionary United National Movement, or UNM, began locking up former government members in pretrial detention. Then-President Eduard Shevardnadze's Citizen's Union Party did not lobby Western governments to whine about how unfairly they were being treated.

The new government institutionalized extortion and brought millions of dollars into the state budget.

This was called reform, and it attracted investment because the bad guys were behind bars. Now, when Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili arrests former government officials, Sikorski calls it "unacceptable behavior by European standards."

What are European standards? Sikorski is a leading proponent of fracking, an ecologically devastating method of harvesting gas. While countries like France, Bulgaria and Germany are banning and halting fracking, Poland is rolling back environmental laws to attract gas companies to come exploit shale gas reserves on protected areas recognized by the EU.

While Chevron is lobbying Poland to ensure all the necessary laws are changed so it can drill for gas, Sikorski is lecturing Georgia on the methods of justice. Yet if Sikorski had bothered to look into the wheels of Georgian justice, he would have noticed how light the sentences are of the 16 former government officials who tortured, abused or failed to report the acts. Most men received sentences of 2 years or less, while half were fined.

Sikorski's focus on one aspect misses the disturbing issues facing Georgia. Ivanishvili's bombastic anti-Saakashvili messages to the West and continued arrests of minority party officials are having a devastating effect on foreign investment. In May, the country had zero economic growth.

Meanwhile, Georgia is seeing a surge of intolerance and extremism. Last week, villagers in East Georgia attacked a Muslim woman after they had been preventing the small Muslim community from praying on Fridays for three weeks.

Sikorski's talk of European standards reeks of UNM lobbyists. Let's get real and set the benchmark to something called "human."

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