

Georgian Defense Minister Calls for Greater EU Integration As Russia Denies Territory Violations

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Protesters attend a rally against Russia's policy towards Georgia in Tbilisi, Georgia, July 18, 2015.

Georgia's defense minister called for greater integration with the European Union on Wednesday — the same day Russia's foreign ministry issued a statement denying claims that it had violated Georgian territory.

Georgia can only achieve its "ultimate goal — the restoration of its territorial integrity" by completing the country's integration with the European Union, Georgian Defense Minister Tina Khidasheli said in an exclusive interview with RFE/RL.

"No one has any illusions about Russia" and "no one in the world today thinks of Russia as a partner," Khidasheli said, adding, however, that so far Tbilisi has been successful in its "diplomatic war" with Moscow.

"Russia is losing all of its bridgeheads" in diplomatic circles, while "Georgia is gaining new friends," Khidasheli told RFE/RL.

Khidasheli's interview took place on the same day the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement denying Tblisi's accusations that it had moved further into Georgian territory by placing border markers on the edge of the breakaway South Ossetia region.

"Information about moving the borderline inside the Georgian territory is wrong," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in its statement.

South Ossetia and its fellow breakaway region of Abkhazia moved away from Georgia's control after the Five Day War with Russia in 2008. Russia recognizes both regions as independent states and both host Russian military bases, but most countries and the United Nations regard them as part of Georgia.

Russian troops have been installing barbed wire and fences around South Ossetia since the war but residents say the soldiers have now erected border signs up to 1.5 km beyond the administrative border.

Georgia's Foreign Ministry said last week that part of the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline was now in territory it regards as occupied by Russia.

European Council President Donald Tusk criticized Russia on Monday for placing the border markers, calling it a provocation.

The 830-km Baku-Supsa pipeline, operated by BP, runs from Azerbaijan to the Georgian Black Sea terminal of Supsa. It can transport up to 100,000 barrels of oil per day.

A former Soviet republic, Georgia is important to Europe because its pipelines bring in Caspian gas and oil.

The country of 3.7 million has no diplomatic relations with Russia but says a foreign policy goal is not to antagonize Moscow. Nevertheless, it is seeking membership of NATO and the European Union

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