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Russia's Georgia Flight Ban 'Unjustified,' EU's Tusk Says

By Reuters

July 11, 2019



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European Council President Donald Tusk said on Thursday that Russia's decision to ban flights to Georgia was "unjustified and disproportional."

Relations between Russia and Georgia came under strain three weeks ago when protests erupted in Tbilisi over a visit by a Russian lawmaker with many demonstrators saying they were angry about the continued presence of Russian troops on Georgian soil.

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The small nation, an ally of the United States, fought and lost a short war against Russia in 2008.

The countries have not had diplomatic ties since, and Russia went on to recognize the

independence of two breakaway Georgian regions, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, where Russian troops are now garrisoned.

Tusk said that the European Union was ready to support Georgia to withstand current challenges.

"The EU stands with Georgia in solidarity and with a full commitment to your sovereignty and territorial integrity," the EU executive said at a conference dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the Eastern Partnership.

He added that the EU's relations with Georgia, which has aspirations to join the EU and NATO, were built on common values.

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Citing risks to its citizens after recent events, the Kremlin suspended passenger flights to Georgia, a move that threatens to hurt Georgia's tourist industry since over 1 million Russians visit each year.

Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili said that occupation of the Georgian regions by Russia was "a frustration that is in a long-term is a matter for further instability."

"The reaction of the Georgian population is a sign that has to be considered here and by our partners," Zurabishvili said after meeting Tusk.

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