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## GEORGIA SUGGESTS TAKING AN UNCONVENTIONAL PATH TO EU ACCESSION

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Georgia reaffirmed its objective to becoming an EU member on Thursday (11 July), even if it meant an innovative approach and knocking on every door, its president told an international conference marking the tenth anniversary of the Eastern Partnership in the Georgian Black Sea city of Batumi.

The time has come to set a new course in our relations, after a successful decade of partnership, President Salome Zurbishvili told the 16th edition of the Batumi International Conference.

She said Georgia had deep European roots, as the home of wine-making and a Christian nation since the fourth century, a country that pioneered women's rights, having had a female king in the 12th century, and by giving women the right to vote in 1918.

Our values, culture, history are European, our population is European, 80% of our population support the objective of joining the European Union, and that is steadily in the last 15 years, without any change, without Euroscepticism, she argued.

The president argued about the benefits from the current status of her country as associated with the EU and member of the Eastern Partnership, but stressed: Georgia's ambition doesn't stop here, it goes even further on the path to EU membership.

Zurbishvili said Georgia understood the EU's internal problems and could be a little bit patient, but in return, it offered itself as a testing ground for innovative rapprochement. This, she said, should be based on full Georgian participation in more EU policies.

We intend to knock on every door, to open every door, and by the time we are finishing opening all the doors, you will discover that Georgia has become an EU member, the president said.

She said there was a need to think outside the box.

We understand the difficulties of the political decision to award a country the candidate status [ \* ] One idea outside the box is for Georgia to start accession negotiations on an ad hoc basis. Such a pragmatic, non-institutional, non-political decision, would be very significant and very important, she stressed.

As expected, Zurbishvili also mentioned geopolitics and the recent tensions with Russia.

Relations came under fresh strain two weeks ago when anti-Kremlin protests erupted in Tbilisi over

a visit by a Russian lawmaker who addressed parliament in Russian.

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/eastern-europe/news/georgia-suggest-taking-an-unconventional-path-to-eu-accession/>

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