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## GEORGIA'S EU CANDIDATE STATUS WILL TEST ITS RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

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The Moscow Times (8 December 2023)

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The European Union recommended on November 8 that Georgia be granted its long-awaited candidate status, an essential step to future membership of the bloc. The recommendation is, however, contingent on Tbilisi meeting nine conditions: a reminder that Georgia still has a long way to go before accession talks can begin. For now, the main sticking point is that carrying out the reforms the EU wants may damage the countrys ruling party, Georgian Dream.

Candidate status is not a panacea, nor is it an iron-clad guarantee that a country will become an EU member state. Still, the announcement will likely calm political tensions in Georgia, and soothe relations between Tbilisi and Brussels that have been marred by disagreements on how the country is progressing toward meeting EU recommendations.

Georgian political life has become increasingly polarized in the last year. The opposition lacks financial resources, a viable political agenda, and charismatic leaders. The ruling party is more popular, but it too is facing significant challenges, including growing political apathy.

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