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The "Attitudes Towards European Integration" Survey

Georgia's government openly seeks greater cooperation and, eventually, convergence with the EU. The CRRC and the EPF have recently released the results of their "Attitudes Towards European Integration" survey, along with its summary report. The results show that Georgia's population seemingly strongly supports its government's drive toward Europe. The survey itself, in addition, is an excellent tool for analyzing and fostering a greater understanding of an important subject for the citizens and the government of Georgia.

Some interestingly high numbers from the survey include 81 percent of the respondents who said they think Georgia should become a member of the EU in the future, and 79 percent who said they would vote for EU membership were a referendum held on the issue. Furthermore, 68 percent of the respondents said that EU membership would either significantly or somewhat improve Georgia's national security. Being a part of what EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana calls the "bigger element of Europe" (Erlanger, "Europe's Foreign Policy," *NYT*, Nov. 30, 2009) not only includes the potential for increased trade with and mobility throughout the EU, it means being a part of a phenomenon that has brought peace, prosperity, and stability to a large part of Europe – and one that continues to gain momentum.

In contrast to Georgia's enthusiasm, the EU's approach toward deeper cooperation with Georgia is often lukewarm. Many commentators have noted this, and have even gone so far as to warn Brussels against adopting such a passive attitude (see, for instance, Vasalek, "What Does the War in Georgia Mean," *CER*, 2008 & Kucharczyk, "Time for the EU," *European Voice*, Aug. 21, 2008). Some of the survey's results may indicate that Georgia's citizens are aware of the EU's sometimes less-than-heightened interest: Although 37 percent said that a majority of Europeans supports Georgia's EU membership, 53 percent either did not know or refused to answer. Moreover, when asked whether a majority of EU Member States supports Georgia's inclusion, 39 percent said "yes," while 51 percent either did not know or refused to answer.

There are, nevertheless, at least two means by which the Georgia-EU relationship can be reciprocal and more constructive. First, for its part, the EU can continue with and strengthen cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership (EaP). There should be a greater political will within the EU to inject life into a relationship that often finds itself to be lagging within the ENP (European Neighbourhood Policy). The recent meetings in Brussels on October 26, 2009, between the EU and the foreign ministers of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, which were led by Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, are a start – especially in terms of practical steps to be taken. Visa-free travel to the EU for citizens of the South Caucasus, for instance, was one of the major subjects broached at these meetings. Although Bildt stressed the need to better facilitate mobility between the EU and the South Caucasus, no definitive commitments were agreed upon.

The numbers from the survey arguably support the ministers' requests: A fair number of the respondents – 30 percent – said they would be interested in working in the EU, a

number that increased to 42 percent of the respondents under the age of thirty-five. In addition, 37 percent of the respondents aged thirty-five or under expressed interest in studying in the EU.

Second, for its part, Georgia can foster a greater understanding of the EU among its citizens by disseminating more information on EU affairs to its citizens through various media outlets and further studies and surveys such as these. In fact, the survey revealed that Georgia's population often lacks sufficient information on the EU. Forty-four percent of the respondents either did not know or refused to answer the "What do you expect from the Eastern Partnership for Georgia" question, and 17 percent answered "restoration of territorial integrity" – decidedly not the EaP's principal aim. Only 9 percent answered "political and economic integration with the EU." In all, 66 percent of the respondents stated that they would like to have more information on the EU.

A well-informed populace is one way to get Brussels to pay more attention to Georgia, where so much progress that is on par with other potential EU members has occurred. It also places Georgia in a unique position, i.e. to be an example to other nations on similar courses of development by taking matters into its own hands rather than passively waiting for directions from the EU.

For all the information on the survey, the report, and other documents from the EU, please visit EPF's [site](#).