

DEVELOPING THE GEORGIAN BLACK SEA COASTAL ZONE – PROBLEMS OF FUNCTIONAL DISCREPANCY

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The Idea

- The substantial part of actions affecting the SES ecosystems is initiated and enacted from government and business executive offices.

Georgia's Black Sea Coast Line

Legend

- City
- Town
- ▨ Protected Area
- Country boundary
- Black Sea
- ▭ Region

Elevation above sea level (m)

- 0 - 500
- 500.0000001 - 1,200
- 1,200.000001 - 2,000
- 2,000.000001 - 3,400
- 3,400.000001 - 5,009.303711



The Problem:

- The stretch of the Black Sea coast currently under control of the Georgian Government is just about 105 km long.
- The sizeable part of this coast (as well as some coastal waters) are occupied by various protected areas.
- The Black Sea coastal zone is factually the only strategic development asset remaining to the country.
- Due mainly to the current geopolitical situation, this is almost the only readily available safe outlets towards the main global sea transportation network, not only for Georgia, but for other countries of South Caucasus and [probably, with some reservations] Central Asia.
- Motivation for the authorities to develop it at any coast is extremely high. The Georgian leadership treats this zone as a kind of "hen capable of laying the golden eggs".

The Aim

- Attempt to understand the logic behind the Georgian government activities with regard to coastal zone development.

Some background information:

On March 11, 2011, the President of Georgia signed the amendment to the Law "On the Regulation of the Structure, Authority and the Rules of Operation of the Government of Georgia".

In accordance to this Amendment, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Georgia was reorganized into the Ministry of Environmental Protection and deprived of vast majority of leading functions and departments.

The only two major bodies remaining to the Ministry are: Agency of Protected Areas and National Environmental Agency.

The reorganization was performed in accordance with instruction by the President of Georgia, citing “systemic corruption” as a reason.

There was no public discussion, no consulting with interested parties, including the leading environmental NGOs.

“Unfortunately, the society is yet unaware what is a real reason behind the changes – desire to eradicate shortcomings named by the President or the continuation of practice of recent years, which is directed towards ignoring environmental protection needs,” was said in the joint statement by the non-governmental groups, released on February 14.

The Examples:

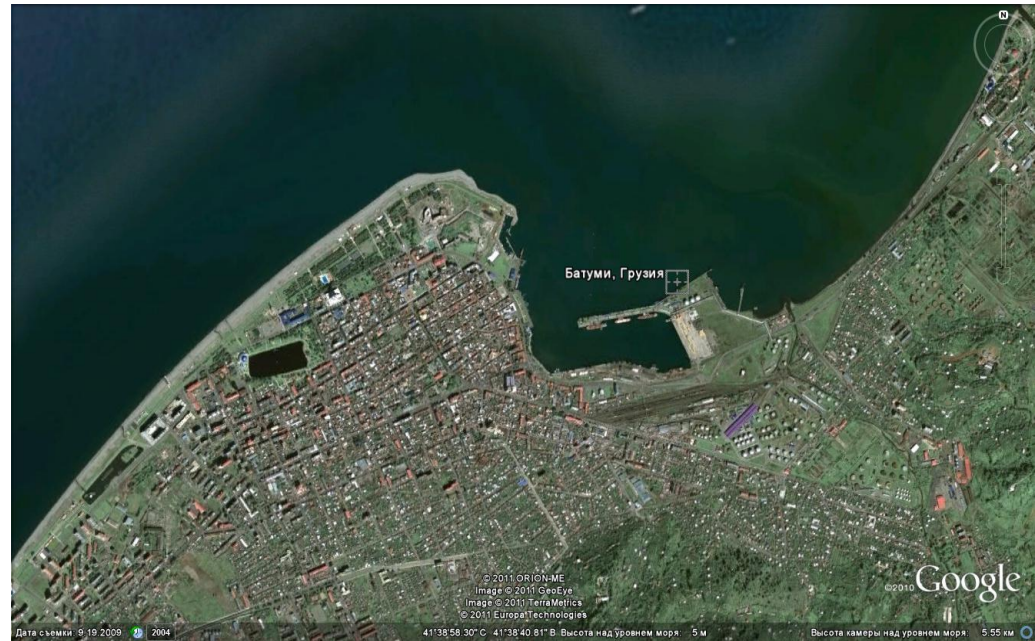
- “I have mentioned the year of 2015 several times. We follow a long-term plan for Georgia’s development, which is not adjusted to election terms and political carriers of distinct individuals. The course will be definitely continued”, Georgian President Saakashvili noted at his annual address to the parliament on February 11. He also noted that this long-term development plan will be completed in 2015.
- Later the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development confirmed that such plan actually existed.
- Try hard as one might, it is impossible to find any traces of such plan in any publicly available sources (printed, electronic, etc.).
- Still at the opening of the free economic zone in Poti in March Georgian President again mentioned the country's modernization plan for 2015, according to which population of Poti would hit at least 100,000, Batumi – at least 250,000.
- Current population of Batumi is 124 000, Poti – 47 000.
- Again there is no other document, which can substantiate this claim.

More Examples:

- Two draft documents able to introduce some kind of planning into the Georgian Black Sea coastal zone development, namely the draft “Law of Georgia on Integrated Coastal Zone Management” and “Policy Note on the Development of an Integrated Coastal Zone management (ICZM) Concept for Georgia” were shelved by the government more than an year ago with slight chances of enactment in foreseeable future.

Further Examples

Batumi – the capital of Adjara autonomy is considered by the government as a focal point of regional development, center of tourism, higher education and culture and developed as such. All the prime attraction objects, including 5 star hotels, the planned Trump tower, Technical university, starting point of 32 km long seaside boulevard etc. are located within the walking distance from the oil refinery, planned petroleum waste storage and treatment facility, sea port with 11 berths (three for tankers) and 12-14 million Tons annual freight turnover.



Kulevi Marine Terminal and Port

They are designated for transshipment and storage of oil and oil products with its further loading to tankers. Overall storage capacity of Tank Park is 320 000 m³ There are two berths for receiving tankers with tonnage up to 100 000 tons. Loading performance is from 1000 to 8000 m³/h. The Terminal has its own railway station, the trestles make possible the simultaneous discharge of 168 oil tank carriages. It belongs to the Azerbaijan state oil company SOCAR.

The problem is this terminal (as well as all access roads) is situated within the area cut from the RAMSAR site. This was done without the obligatory preliminary notification, without any EIA in violation of Georgia's own environmental laws.



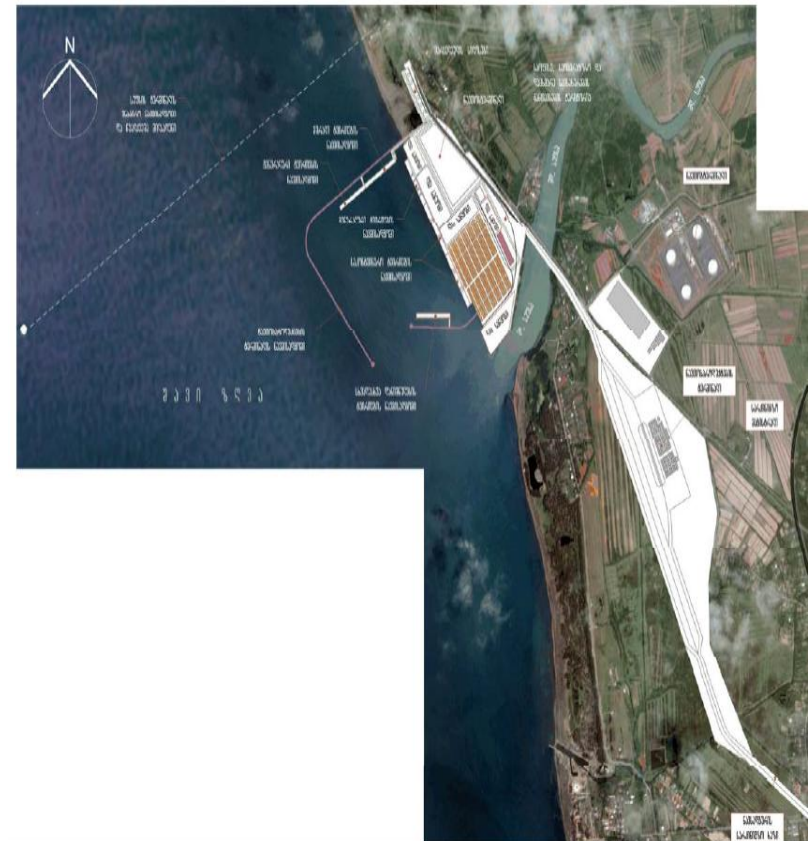
Supsa sea port (planned)

Projected annual freight turnover app. 16 million tons, including 2 million tons petroleum, making the port the largest in Georgia.

The problem – there is no answer on the simple question – what Georgia needs an additional large port for, while the existing ones are being reconstructed and enlarged and prospects of finding an extra freight for this one are rather bleak.

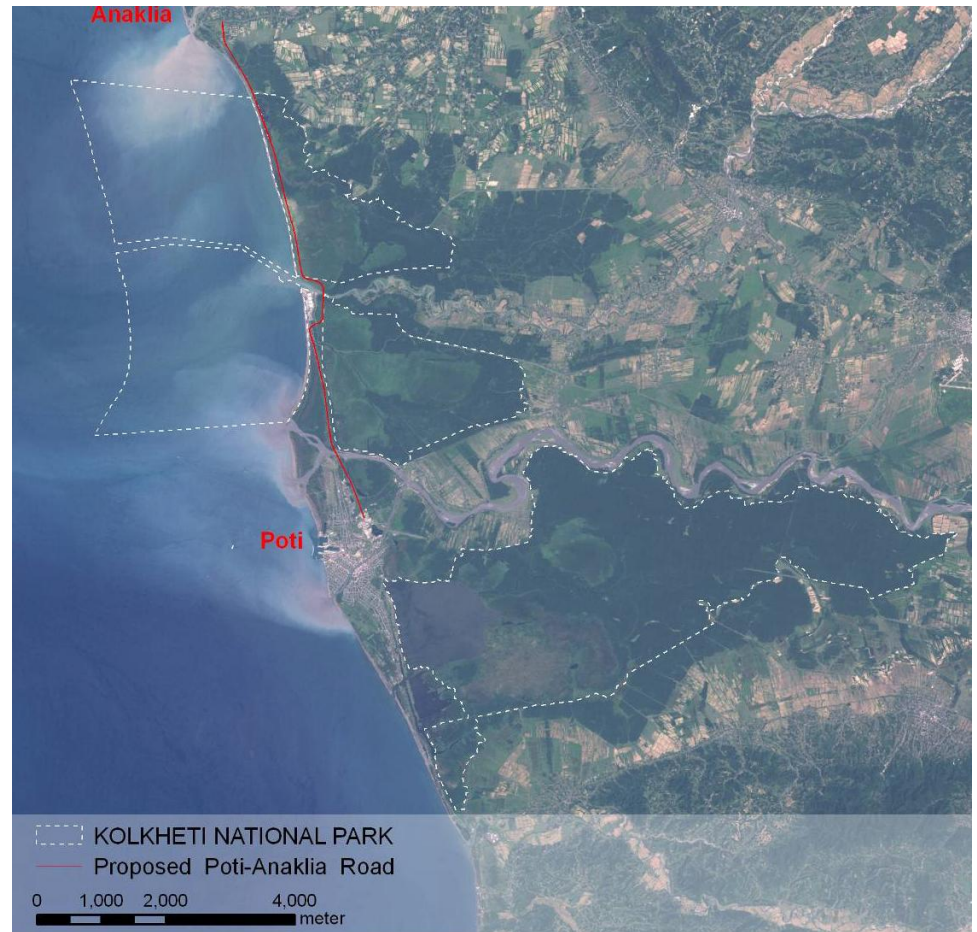
EIA for this port is so lenient that local experts express strong doubts about its credibility. The port will virtually be “hanging over” the popular Ureki resort with all the pending consequences.

The most important – no one knows who the formal owners of this port “Black Sea Products” are; where from are they going to attract \$ 700 million of the initial investment.



Anaklia-Zugdidi ‘Free Touristic Zone’

The Government of Georgia plans to develop within the next 1½ years new touristic zones. These are considered so important that the Parliament adopted a special law concerning two such zones (3754-III, 2010-10-26). The government offers investors unprecedented terms for the construction of hotels along the seaside: Free land - on average 0.6 ha for each hotel plot; a Free Hotel Master Plan; no profit and property taxes for 15 years; free casino license for the hotels with over 100 rooms; full engineering utility networks; corresponding outdoor infrastructure such as electricity, gas, water and new roads.



Anaklia- Zugdidi “Free Touristic Zone” - Continued

- The problem: the resort may have a strong negative impact on the Strict Nature Protection Zone of the Kolkheti National Park. EIA has been carried out, but unavailable to public.
- There is a plan to construct a highway along the seaside to connect the resort and Poti. Highway has to cross the Kolkheti National Park over ~10 km destroying the protected and only remaining natural coastal sand dunes, fresh water habitats with rare and endangered plant species and affecting several mire sites.
- There are also persistent talks about a large port development in the same area, right inside the Kolkheti National Park.

Conclusions

- The Georgian authorities obviously have no forward planning, no clearly formulated development policy (at least such that is known to public), no legal framework to develop the Black sea coastal zone;
- Their actions are reactive, rather than proactive, leaving impression of something makeshift, erratic;
- Decision to start some project of country-wide or regional importance, is usually initiated and implemented without preliminary public discussion, consideration of alternative scenarios, etc. Decisions are non-transparent, the leading decision-makers hardly accountable for consequences of their actions;
- Not only public, but sometimes even government bodies are left uninformed about expected actions/projects. It is usually unclear who initiated and is in charge of any given project, where the financing comes from;
- Environmental considerations are given a lip service and formal restrictions usually ignored, even in the case, when the large part of the zone under development is formally occupied by protected areas. EIA is sometimes used as a tool to justify government actions.

Thank you