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# EU : Georgia Crisis Fortifies Importance Of Turkey

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HELSINKI, Finland: The Georgian crisis has strengthened the strategic importance of Turkey both in the Caucasus and for the European Union, the bloc's enlargement chief said Friday.

EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said Turkey was "engaged in very active and evidently successful diplomacy" in its neighboring regions.

Turkey has met separately with Georgian and Russian officials in an effort to promote peace between the two countries since their war in August.

It is also helping to normalize ties between Syria and the EU and is mediating talks between Israel and the Palestinians in Istanbul.

"Turkey remains a very important bridge between Europe and the Islamic world," Rehn told reporters during a visit to Helsinki. "In other words, everything that has happened in recent weeks has only strengthened Turkey's strategic importance from the EU's point of view."

Today in Europe Chunnel fire's cause still as dark as the tunnel itself Gates urges cautious NATO stance on Russia What's in a street name? Moscow is finding out He did not give any specifics, however, on if or when Turkey was likely to join the EU.

Rehn said that Turkey, eager to join and currently engaged in accession talks with the bloc, had made "a very important initiative" in talks aimed at achieving stability in the Caucasus.

"The problem in the Caucasus now is that there are many countries that cannot engage in bilateral talks; Russia and Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and just a little while ago, Turkey and Armenia," Rehn said. "Turkey is very active in (regional talks) and the EU supports them."

Rehn also described Turkish President Abdullah Gul's June 6 breakthrough visit to Armenia as a sign the two countries were beginning to normalize relations and said the political implications of the visit were "significant."

Turkey, a NATO member, has cause for alarm about how Russia's recognition of the Georgian breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia might inspire its own separatist Kurds, or provoke Armenia to boost support for separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh, a region of Azerbaijan, which is a close Turkish ally.

Since the Georgia conflict, Turkey has proposed a regional grouping for stability in the Caucasus, which would include Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

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