

Foreign Policy Priorities of Georgia

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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a big honor and privilege for me to be here today, having an excellent opportunity to address the distinguished audience of Japanese officials, academics, foreign policy experts and journalists; and present my country's foreign policy goals, as well as describe the process of democratic reforms and development in Georgia.

Having said that, I would like to extend special gratitude to Sasakawa Peace Foundation for organizing this event and inviting me as a speaker. Again, I am very pleased to be here today.

Before I move on to discussing the core aspects of my lecture, I would like to use this opportunity and express deep gratitude to Japanese people and government for standing alongside with Georgia in the process of its democratic and economic transformation, especially during the most critical period for Georgia – in the aftermath of the 2008 war with Russia.

I am pleased to state that further development of existing excellent bilateral relations and partnership between Georgia and Japan is among our foreign policy priorities. I am happy to admit, that long distance lying between Georgia and Japan does not hinder the two nations in any way to develop close ties and exclusive partnership.

Shared values, ideals and vision on international justice and peace make it possible to exercise a friendly atmosphere for cooperation and develop outstanding relations.

Last year Georgia and Japan splendidly celebrated 20th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations both in Tbilisi and Tokyo.

Throughout these two decades partnership between the two nations has been growing irreversibly. One good indicator to that is constantly growing people-to-people relations between Japan and Georgia, which is an essential aspect of the Japan-Georgia partnership.

I can gladly mention that number of Japanese visitors to Georgia is growing year by year, with 35% growth in 2011 and 40% - in 2012. Japanese visitors, traveling to Georgia without any visa requirements, are largely attracted for various reasons, such as exploration of Georgia's millenniums old history, splendid culture, diverse nature and numerous business opportunities. It is also worthwhile noting that trade

turnover between Japan and Georgia is constantly growing with about five times increase in the year of 2012 compared to 2009.

Even though real numbers still remain below the level of satisfaction, I am delighted with this encouraging tendency of rapid growth and express hope that further development of partnership between the two nations, based on shared fundamental principles and values, is irreversible.

We also highly value Japan's profound interest and involvement in cooperation with the regional organization of GUAM, which in addition to Georgia, includes Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova.

I would like to express deep appreciation to the Government of Japan for the possibility of convening GUAM-Japan Meeting on the level of National Coordinators of GUAM very recently in Tokyo (on May 16-17, 2013). The Meeting has offered an exceptional opportunity for discussion of all the relevant issues of GUAM-Japan Partnership and for outlining the prospects of upcoming cooperation in the fields of mutual interest, such as tourism, energy security, agriculture and transport.

We consider that the GUAM-Japan Midterm Cooperation Plan will give a new impetus to enhancing further GUAM-Japan Partnership and we are looking forward to sign it at the upcoming GUAM-Japan high level meeting, which may take place in the framework of GUAM Ministerial, on the sidelines of UN GA in September, 2013.

We reiterate a strong interest towards further enhancement of already existed GUAM-Japan cooperation in the areas of tourism, energy security, agriculture, transport and road services, as well as promotion of cooperation in the areas of nanotechnologies and cyber security.

A well-established format of consultations between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Japan and Georgia, high level exchanges, as well as GUAM-Japan cooperation program are among those venues through which we will expand our existing relations even further.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you are aware, one of our main foreign policy objectives is Georgia's integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, which derives from the popular aspirations of coming back to the European family of nations. These aspirations have deep historical roots and have been strengthened by the political history of independence of more than twenty years, since the end of the Cold War, when Georgia gained long-deprived independence.

This political drive toward the West provides the context of Georgia's foreign policy. Our policy is firmly set in the democratic process currently gaining more and more momentum since the last year's Parliamentary elections in Georgia.

These elections led to the peaceful and orderly transfer of power, and ushered in the new era of democratization and liberalization. I should emphasize that even though the new authorities' foreign policy priorities have not changed, we have accelerated the pace and breadth of reforms in domestic politics.

We have a unique situation of political cohabitation between the ruling party and the minority. This was initially rather difficult but with time, the process is getting better. Georgia proved its political maturity while handling this delicate political situation.

The Parliament of Georgia unanimously adopted on March 7, 2013, a Resolution, drafted jointly by the ruling Georgian Dream and oppositionist United National Movement, reiterating Georgia's commitment to its pro-Western foreign policy course.

Another important step toward consolidating Georgian democracy was adoption of constitutional changes. These changes were adopted by the Parliament with overwhelming majority and effective political collaboration between the Government and the opposition.

These constitutional amendments annulled the right of the president of Georgia to appoint a new government without the consent of the Parliament. This has restored the system of checks and balances between the legislative and executive branches of the government and created appropriate legal foundations for ceasing the dominance of the executive branch of the government over the legislature and judiciary. It also enabled the parliament to start exercising effective oversight toward the government in accordance with its mandate and competences.

Democratization and depoliticization of the judicial system is another important milestone in Georgia's recent drive toward democracy and the rule of law. Before the elections the judiciary was strongly criticized for its dependence on the public prosecutor's office and law enforcement authorities.

The new government opted for a cautious method of the judicial reform that is based on the recommendations of international organizations and non-governmental entities. This reform aims at safeguarding the independence of the judicial branch of the government and empowering individual judges in the judiciary system. The Ministry of Justice developed a draft law on changes in the justice system which aims to strengthen the self-governance of judiciary and improve transparency of the justice administration.

We are also changing the labor code in order to foster social dialogue and come closer to European standards of life and work. The previous Code was adopted by the Parliament of Georgia in 2006 and granted absolute power to the employer and practically made it impossible to exercise the labor rights. The new Georgian Labor Code will be harmonized with the relevant legislation of European states. EU experts will be actively involved in this process. The government actively cooperates on this issue with European Union, the International Labor Organization, NGOs, and other actors.

Ensuring border security through Integrated Border Management is one of the main priorities of the cooperation between EU and Georgia within the framework of European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan, Eastern Partnership Program and more recently Visa Dialogue format and corresponding Visa Liberalization Action Plan. Georgia adopted IBM strategy in 2008 and its 5 year Action Plan in 2009. The Strategy was updated in 2012 and more reforms in the area are underway.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have to reiterate: These domestic changes solidified the ground for the success of Georgia's foreign policy. Our foreign policy priorities remain the same. We strive for regional stability, inviolability of borders, and developing cooperation with the democratic world. These purposes, along with the will of the people, define Georgia's foreign policy priorities that includes Georgia's integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, development of relationship with the United States, more engagement and promotion of bilateral ties with our partners in different regions of the world, improvement of relations with Russia, without compromising Georgia's independence and territorial integrity; fostering regional stability in the Caucasus through peaceful conflict resolution.

Let me now concentrate on specific areas of above mentioned priorities, underlining context for each of these issues.

Georgia's return to the family of European nations is not merely restoration of historical justice. Integration with the European Union also has important practical dimensions for Georgia's foreign policy and national security.

So, we are exerting special efforts to deliver on our commitments by the EaP Summit planned in Vilnius in November 2013. Our efforts are focused on two major priorities: conclusion of negotiations on and initialing the entire Association Agreement (including the DCFTA), as well as finalization of the first (legislative) phase of the Visa Liberalization Action Plan.

During the negotiations on the "Association Agreement" Georgia demonstrated maximum flexibility. We accommodated EU's concerns and positions regarding the content of the Agreement and conduct of negotiations.

We agreed the language of the "peaceful conflict resolution". Therefore, we expect that the EU will be equally constructive regarding other outstanding issues. Georgia has demonstrated significant progress in democratic development, respecting and promoting common European values and further strengthening and deepening relations with the EU.

This progress has been made possible due to Georgia's European Identity and aspirations. Our commitment to approximate with the EU standards, regulations and legislation through the Association Agreement is based on the understanding that Georgia is a European State. Thus, we think that mentioning Georgia's European identity and referring to Georgia as a European State in such ambitious Agreement as the AA

should not be questioned. We have to remember that Georgia is a European neighbor and not a neighbor of Europe.

As for EU's involvement with Georgia, it must be stressed that the EU plays an essential role in promoting security and stability in Georgia. Its staunch support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and the firm non-recognition policy towards the occupied regions of Georgia is highly valued.

The Union plays an important role in the Geneva International Discussions, where the issues of security and stability in the occupied regions of Georgia and the safe and dignified return of IDPs and refugees to places of their original residence are discussed with the Russian Federation. The functioning of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) - the only international mechanism currently operating in Georgia - has proven to be an indispensable mechanism to ensure security and stability along the occupation lines. Our efforts need to be redoubled to achieve the full implementation of EUMM mandate in the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali that will further increase its effectiveness and efficiency.

For the further sustained movement of Georgia toward the European Union we need firm support from our partners within the EU, particularly from our Central European friends. We expect one more manifestation of this support at the Vilnius Summit in November, when discussing Georgia's Association Agreement with the EU.

Speaking of Euro-Atlantic integration, Georgia's integration with NATO remains the top priority of our foreign and security agenda, with overwhelming support of the Georgian people. The issue of NATO membership stands above the internal political debate, representing the political consensus among the major political forces. NATO-Georgia political interaction remained dynamic and substance-driven since the last year's Parliamentary elections.

Georgia is committed to continue contributing to the common Euro-Atlantic security and to remain engaged in the NATO's new international mission in Afghanistan, beyond 2014. Georgia also participated in a 'three plus four' format meeting of Poland, Romania, and Turkey with the NATO aspirant countries (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia and Montenegro). It is the first time since the Chicago Summit when all four aspirants met with the Allied nations at a foreign minister's level.

We are set to continue to retain fully our existing positive dynamic and to advance further our NATO integration agenda. We expect the Allies to duly reflect our progress in their concrete decisions, advancing Georgia towards the NATO membership.

Deepening strategic relations with the US remains the most important priorities of our foreign policy. Georgia's strategic partnership with the United States is as strong as ever. We are making significant progress in our bilateral relations. We are proud to observe a substantial progress in implementing an ambitious agenda in all the directions of our active and fruitful cooperation.

We have conducted another round of vibrant and productive discussions on the development of democracy and strengthening the rule of law in Georgia in the framework of the US-Georgia Strategic Charter.

There are four crucial aspects of the US-Georgia Strategic Charter. These are security and defense; economic cooperation; democracy and civil society; and people-to-people contacts. All these four directions of US-Georgian relations have become more dynamic in the last few months and we hope they will gain further momentum in the years to come.

Apart from Charter, at the moment, we also attach particular importance to continuing close consultations within the high-level trade dialogue between the U.S. and Georgia for increasing bilateral trade and investment, including the possibility of the U.S.- Georgia FTA.

This dialogue is a win-win for the United States and Georgia as we continue to identify opportunities for businesses to invest in Georgia, and for both countries to sell goods and services to each other.

We are grateful for the support of the White House and State Department in this matter and expect to engage successfully with the next U.S. Trade Representative in the FTA consultations.

By launching bilateral trade negotiations with Georgia, United States will indeed provide a boost to economic and democratic consolidation of its strong ally in the region. It is our hope that through such cooperation we will see U.S.-Georgia trade relations achieve this new level that benefits both sides.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I stated above, Georgia remains committed to further expand cooperation with the countries in various regions of the world, including Africa, Middle East, South East Asia, Pacific Rim, Central and Latin America, as we strongly believe that these relations should reach a qualitatively higher level.

This strategy covers enhancement of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the countries in these regions and regional organizations, such as the League of Arab States, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), African Union, Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Organization of American States (OAS), Rio Group etc.

We strive to form positive atmosphere for mutually beneficial cooperation in various fields (political, economic, cultural etc) with the nations and organizations in the stated regions. Our strategy includes both expansion of bilateral ties, and engagement in international development cooperation efforts, and sharing of Georgia's positive experience in reforms and development.

In this context in the recent years we have made important steps:

1. We recently opened embassies in South Korea (2011), Australia (2011), India (2010), Indonesia (2012), Qatar (2012), Ethiopia (2012), South Africa (2011), Brazil (2010), Mexico (2011) and

Argentina (2012). We have further plans to expand our diplomatic presence in these regions. This year we plan to open Embassies in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia.

2. We made strong efforts to expand diplomatic coverage of countries from our already established embassies.
3. In the past several years we have formed diplomatic relations and got engaged in bilateral relations with more than 50 states from these regions. We are actively working to complete the process of establishment of diplomatic relations with the remaining countries.

Esteemed audience,

Our relationships with our partners in the Euro-Atlantic area and beyond are essential in countering foreign threats to Georgia's sovereignty and security. Let me turn now to the momentous problems we are having with our northern neighbor.

The new Government of Georgia analyses the entire complexity of the Georgian – Russian relations and does not have any illusions that the process of improvement of Georgian-Russian relationships, considering the national interests and the stated red lines, will be easy.

But the new approach of the Georgian Government has already produced concrete outcomes: even though Georgia has no diplomatic relations with Russia, the trade and economic relations as well as cultural cooperation are gradually resuming.

There are several issues in Georgian-Russian relations that need to be discussed in greater detail. We attach great importance to these problems as they are central to Georgia's sovereignty and independence. These issues include:

- Prevention of Russian-driven recognition of the secessionist regions of Georgia;
- Establishment of viable international presence within the conflict areas for achieving stabilization of both political as well as humanitarian situation on the ground;
- Gaining international support for the peaceful return of IDPs to their homes, particularly at the General Assembly of the UN;
- Continuation of security dialogue over the areas of Georgian-Russian conflict within the existing Geneva format of negotiations;
- Prevention of so-called 'borderization' within the conflict areas, by which local communities and even households become separated by artificial dividing lines and barbed wires reminiscent of the Cold War era.

Thanks to steadfast support from the international community, we managed to prevent Russia from succeeding in its illegal endeavors to obtain the recognition of the Georgian occupied regions by certain states.

We are working on bilateral dialogue with Russia too. The decision of the Prime Minister to constitute the post of the Special Representative for Relations with Russia aims at creating of an additional channel for the establishment of immediate dialogue with the Northern neighbor.

Yet, Russia is still making efforts to build the case for the international legal personality of the two occupied regions through, *inter alia*, advocating for their accession to the non-governmental organizations and facilitating their participation in international events of apolitical nature in an independent status.

We are hoping that the growing support from international community will help us to prevent worsening of the situation in the conflict zones. We give a high importance to the internationalization of our efforts to resolve our problems related to the IDP-s and refugees. In this regards we attribute special importance to our cooperation with your countries within international forums (particularly in the UNGA).

Passing the Resolution on the “Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia” remains one of the foreign policy priorities of Georgia, as it allows us to keep the plight of IDPs and refugees on the international agenda.

We are glad that the number of the supporters of the resolution increases each year (60 supporters in 2012, 57 – in 2011, 50 – in 2010). In this year, the Government of Georgia intends to introduce once again the resolution within the UN General Assembly.

The Resolution serves the goal of strengthening of the fundamental human rights such as the right to return to their lawful places of residence for the IDPs and refugees, regardless of their ethnic origin, and gives an impetus to the UN agencies remaining on the ground to continue their activities and to keep reporting on the situation pertaining to the safe and dignified return.

As we have been informed some forces are portraying the UNGA IDP Resolution as undermining the discussions on IDP returns within the Geneva talks.

Contrary to what is advocated on the diplomatic arena, we are confident that firm support of the international community for our humanitarian cause would eventually induce Russia to start constructive and result-oriented talks on the safe and dignified return of the IDPs and refugees, including within the Geneva Discussions. Your continuous support for the UNGA Resolution is therefore decisive, as it serves as an essential instrument to reiterate international support for the Geneva Discussions.

We do consider the existing Geneva International Talks as the only format for discussing the security and humanitarian questions (including IDP issues) between Georgia and Russia under the joint mediation of the European Union, OSCE and the United Nations. We emphasize the importance of the enhancement of the Geneva platform to maintain stability and solve humanitarian issues *inter-alia* in accordance with the Six-Point Ceasefire Agreement (12 August 2008).

Georgia highly values the Geneva Discussions and is committed to its continuity as the key format for the implementation of the 12 August ceasefire agreement, which obliges Russia to withdraw from Abkhazia

and South Ossetia. Participants continue to work on one of the central items of the agenda pertaining to the non-use of force. Although the divergence in principled positions remains unchanged, the participants agreed to engage at the next round in drafting of the document – the draft Statement by the participants of the Geneva Discussions on non-use of force – tabled by the co-Chairs and reviewed by the participants during the previous rounds.

Yet, this statement can only be issued after the Russian side reciprocates Georgia's unilateral legally-binding non-use of force pledge made in 2010 and recently reiterated and supported by the Parliament of Georgia.

Geneva participants have recently also discussed the security situation on the ground. Georgia has raised its concern over the recent intensification of the so-called "borderization" process along the occupation line of the Tskhinvali region. Our priority is to improve the lives of the local residents based on humanitarian and people-centered approach.

The Georgian participants expressed their concern over the alarming human rights situation in the occupied regions, including the imposition of severe restrictions on the freedom of movement that affects everyday life of people, their rights to education, access to healthcare, and other social and economic rights. We believe that this issue should be decoupled from the status-related matters, while the procedures facilitating its implementation must be addressed in non-political and status-neutral fashion, based on the principles of transparency and uniformity, predictability and mutual trust.

Fortunately, we have excellent relations with our other immediate neighbors – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Our bilateral relations are acquiring a renewed impetus in the last few months. We believe our relations will develop further in as before and more even dynamically.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As outlined above, Georgia remains a trustworthy partner in international politics, making progress toward becoming a worthy member of the European family of nations through fostering democracy, international economic relations, and building goodwill regionally and internationally.

In this process we are counting on firm support of our friendly nations, including Japan.

Now I take this opportunity to thank your nation for such support and solidarity that we have felt in years since we gained independence. We highly appreciate the relationship we have.

Thank you for your kind attention and warm welcome.

And I take this opportunity also to wish the people of Japan peace and prosperity.

Thank you