

**UNGA 2013**

Mr. President,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

It is a great honor to represent again my beloved nation at this rostrum.

During the past decade, as I had the privilege to address this hall, Georgia has moved from a failed state to a market democracy.

We have experienced both advances and setbacks, both breakthroughs and mistakes. But the world has been able to witness the constant commitment to freedom of the Georgian people.

I ask you today to once more hear the voice of a nation that transcends political, social, and religious differences in a common love for freedom.

A voice that—despite all the problems we have encountered and the challenges we still have to overcome—is full of hope.

And, looking at our world today, I do think that this voice of hope is needed.

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The optimism of the early 1990s—when the spread of liberal and democratic values seemed natural—when the End of History had been proclaimed—and when the United Nations was set to become the heart and the soul of a world finally at peace—this optimism of the 1990s has been crushed by a wave of pessimism and cynicism.

The world is not at peace. Humankind has not reconciled with itself. And the UN did not become the soul or the heart of a united globe.

Western civilization, once triumphant, is now trying to tackle a deep economic, social, and mental crisis.

In Eastern Europe, the colored revolutions are challenged by the forces they had defeated a few years ago.

In the Middle East, the glorious images of the cheering crowds of Cairo and Tunis have been replaced by the horrendous videos of the gassed children of Damascus.

There are many good reasons to be disillusioned.

But should the dogmatic optimism of the 90s be replaced by an equally dogmatic pessimism—by a sense of resignation that suffocates hope?

Should the fact that the expansion of democracy and freedom turns out to require profound struggle—should this lead us to renounce our beliefs and our principles?

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I came here today to share the hopes of my nation, and to speak out against this ambient fatalism.

I came here to address those who doubt, those who hesitate, those who are tempted to give in.

If the West is outdated, then why do millions of Poles, Czech, Estonians, Romanians, and others cherish so much the day they entered NATO? And why are millions of Ukrainians, Georgians, Moldovans, and others desperately knocking on the doors of the European Union?

If freedom is no longer fashionable, how do we explain that the suicide of an unknown citizen in a remote Tunisian town has changed the map of the world?

No.

History did not come to an end in 1989 or 1991 and it never will.

But freedom is still its motor and its horizon.

Everywhere, men and women who want to live in freedom are confronted by the forces of tyranny.

The question is: are we going to be actors or spectators in this confrontation?

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

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As I speak, the Eastern European countries aspiring to join the European family of free and democratic nations are facing constant pressures and threats.

Armenia has been cornered, Moldova is being blockaded, Ukraine is under attack, Azerbaijan faces extraordinary pressure, and Georgia is occupied...

Why?

Because an old Empire is trying to reclaim its bygone borders. And “borders” is actually not the right word, since this Empire – be it the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation, or the Eurasian Union – never had borders. It only had margins.

I came today to speak in the name of these margins.

Unlike most nations, the Russian Federation has no interest in having stable states around it.

Neighboring countries in constant turmoil is what the Kremlin is seeking.

It rejects the very idea of strong governments in Georgia, Ukraine, or Moldova, even ones that try to be friendly to its interests.

I was never a great fan of what the French call “La langue de bois”, but as my second term nears its end, I feel more than before the urge to speak my mind.

So let us be concrete.

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Do you think that Vladimir Putin wants Armenia to decisively triumph over Azerbaijan, for instance? No. This would make Armenia too strong and potentially too independent.

Do you think then that the contrary is true, that Moscow wants Baku to prevail over Erevan? Obviously not. The current rise of a modernized Azerbaijan is a nightmare for the Russian leaders.

No, they do not want anyone to prevail and the conflict *itself* is their objective, since it keeps both nations dependent and blocks their integration into the European common space.

Do you think that the electoral defeat of the forces that led the Orange Revolution in Ukraine has led the Kremlin to take a softer approach to this country?

To the contrary. The government lead by Viktor Yanoukovich is under permanent attack, a commercial war has been launched against Ukraine ahead of the European Summit of Vilnius and Russian officials now speak openly about dismembering this nation.

Do you think the Kremlin would agree to discuss the de-occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, now that the government has changed in Tbilisi? Far from it! The annexation of Georgian lands by Russian troops continues.

Yesterday, the occupants have expelled again Georgian citizens from their homes and villages, the homes and villages of their parents and grand-parents. In daylight and in total impunity.

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Despite the friendly statements made by the new Georgian government in the recent weeks and months, the Russian military keeps advancing its positions, dividing communities with new barbwires, threatening our economy, moving towards the vital Baku-Supsa pipeline, approaching more and more the main highway of Georgia and thus putting into question the very sustainability of our country.

The hostility of Vladimir Putin and his team towards the government I had the privilege to lead for almost a decade was not based on personal hatreds or cultural misunderstandings. Any such interpretation was just a smokescreen.

My predecessor, President Shevarnadze, came from the highest Soviet *nomenklatura*. He was returned to power in Georgia with direct Russian help in the 90s, through a military coup. He was well known for his Soviet diplomatic skills unlike me. And yet, Russia has constantly undermined his authority and even tried to assassinate him several times.

This is not about Gamsakourdia, Shevarnadze, Saakashvili, or Ivanishvili

Those names actually do not matter when the stakes are so high.

This is about the possibility—or not—of true statehood in Georgia, and beyond.

Why?

Because the current Russian authorities know perfectly well that—as soon as strong institutions are built in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, or any other place—as soon as functioning states emerge—such institutions, such states will reflect

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and enforce the will of their people, which is to become fully independent and move towards Europe.

The Georgian experience of successful reforms and the creation of a functioning state was therefore considered to be a virus --- a virus that could and would contaminate the whole post-Soviet region --- a virus that should be eliminated, by every means possible.

This is why the Georgian nation has suffered an embargo, a war, an invasion, and an occupation—all since 2006.

But this also is why the resistance of the Georgian people and the resilience of the Georgian democracy are of the utmost importance for the entire region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The efforts to roll back the advances of the EU and NATO in our region — progress based on the will of our people - are becoming ever more intense.

These efforts have a name: the Eurasian Union.

The Eurasian Union has been shaped as an *alternative* to the European Union and unveiled by Vladimir Putin as the main project of his new presidency.

Because European and Euro-Atlantic integration take a lot of time and require tremendous efforts—because there are moments when you might think you are pursuing a mirage—because the threats become so strong, the pressures so direct, while the promises seem so far away—some people in our region might fall victim to fatigue and ask themselves: why not?

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Today, I want precisely to explore this “why not?”

Much more than with a choice of foreign policy or of international alliances, our nations are confronted with a choice of society, a choice of life.

Our people have to decide whether they accept to live in a world of fear and crime // a world in which differences are perceived as threats and minorities as punching bags // a world in which opponents are facing selective justice or beatings // a world, Ladies and gentlemen, that we all know very well in our region since this is the world from which we are coming.

The Eurasian Union is both our recent past and the future shaped for us by some ex-KGB officers in Moscow.

On the opposite side, our revived traditions and our centuries old aspirations lead us towards another world called Europe.

European societies are far from perfect and there too, you can have fears, doubts, angers, hatreds even.

But there, meritocracy prevails over nepotism, tolerance is a fundament of public life, current opponents are the future ministers and not the prisoners to be or the enemies to beat.

The choice – when it is put like that – is so obvious for the people of Eastern Europe that some Kremlin strategists (they call themselves *politechnologists*) have decided to cancel the truth and have shaped lies that they are spreading throughout Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and many other places.

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Their mouthpieces in our respective countries – this conscious or unconscious 5<sup>th</sup> column – identify the European Union with the destruction of family values, the erosion of national traditions and the promotion of gays and lesbians.

Strangely, in recent years and even more in recent months, we hear in Tbilisi, Kiev, or Chisinau the same ugly music that was first orchestrated in Moscow—we hear that our traditions are collapsing under the influence of the West, that Christian holidays will be replaced by gay pride events, and Churches by multicultural Disney Lands—we hear that our orthodox identity is under threat...

And after all – here we come – we hear that we share with our former masters a common respect for decency and traditions.

Are we so naïve to believe these lies, as other generations did, allowing our sovereignty to be kidnapped?

Are we so unfair to our ancestors to think that their memory would be honored by attacks on mosques or some pogroms?

Are we so unaware of our own History that we allow it to repeat itself endlessly?

When we hear the fake music of the orthodox brotherhood sung by Russian imperialists, can't we hear the true voice of the Patriarch Kirion who was assassinated or the eternal voice of the Patriarch Ambrosi Khelaya who was tortured during days and weeks only because he appealed to the Geneva Conference against the invasion of his country? Are we so deaf as not to hear the voices of the killed bishops and priests? Are we so uneducated that we do not recall who has repainted our churches and erased our sacred frescos?

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Are we so blind today not to see the destruction of our churches in the occupied territories?

We need to know our History. And our History teaches us that tolerance is the basis for sovereignty in our region. It is not only a moral duty: it is an issue of national security.

We need to know our History and understand that the same old imperialistic principle – divide to rule – is applied today as it was two centuries ago.

Looking at our region today, those who have some knowledge of the Caucasian history might remember the Armenian – Azerbaijani bloodshed of 1905, directly created by the tsarist administration, and compare it to the beginning of the conflict in the Karabach in the late 1980s.

They might recall – as I do too well - the beginning of the war in Abkhazia in the early 1990s, when Georgian paramilitary groups were getting their weapons from the same Russian troops who were actually leading the Abkhaz militia and bringing in Chechen mercenaries in order to kill any form of solidarity between nations of the North and the South Caucasus.

Just as they were sending - for the same reason – more than one century before - Georgian officers at the forefront of their wars against Chechens, Ingush or Daghestani.

We could also look at other margins throughout the times, we could look at Poland or Ukraine, and we would see the same pictures. Everywhere, the Empire has always inflamed the relations between subjugated people and separated them by a wall of fanatical antagonism.

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It used to work, unfortunately. But what is even more unfortunate is that it is still working today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Distinguished delegates,

The European Union – the greatest political success of recent decades – has been built on three pillars, which also could be characterized as three rejections: the rejection of the extreme nationalism that had led Europe to the collective suicide of two world wars and the horrors of Nazism —the rejection of communism that was threatening to spread throughout the continent—and, in the end, the rejection of colonialism and imperialism.

It took time for the French and British Empires to accept this third rejection, but giving up their colonies was the price to pay for the modernization of their economy and the development of their democracy, and also for the European unification to actually be realized.

The Eurasian Union is based on the exact opposite premises.

It is fuelled by intolerance, it is lead by old KGB structures and it is shaped to revive an old Empire.

Of course, joining the Eurasian Union is therefore very easy. There are no social, economic, or political criteria to be met: becoming a colony, in fact, requires no effort at all. Passivity and mediocrity are the only requirements.

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On the other hand, to get into a real Union, there is no alternative to making a Herculean effort and meeting exact criteria - because such principles are precisely what create the Union.

So, to those who doubt, I tell that it is precisely *because* the EU demands effort and imposes criteria—it is precisely *because* it does not seek to absorb us (while the other one is dreaming about it) - that the choice should be obvious.

But there is an even better reason for saying that the choice is obvious.

The choice is obvious because the Russian project is doomed to fail.

No Empire is sustainable today, and certainly not the Russian one.

If we look at History, France and UK have lost their colonies not only because these colonies fought for their independence, but also because people in Paris and London ultimately did not believe anymore in their Empire.

Exactly the same is happening in Russia nowadays.

The imperial dream is being rejected first at its margins as we have seen.

But, most crucially perhaps, the idea of the Empire is rejected at its very center.

Such a rejection does not manifest itself only in public protests or in the rising polls of the opposition in the main cities of Russia.

It expresses itself in the universal cynicism of Russian elites towards Putin's eurasian vision.

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The very people who are supposed to serve it do not believe in the viability of this project.

Rejected at its margins, rejected at its center, the imperialistic path will come to a dead end, the Eurasian Union will fail and Russia will – after all – become a nation state with borders instead of margins.

Then, it will start to seek stable relations with stable neighbors.

Then, cooperation will replace confrontation.

It will happen, and much sooner than people think, to the benefit of the margins, but most of all to the benefit of the Russian people themselves.

It will happen because the imperial project is absurd for a generation of Russian citizens who are among the most enthusiastic users of Internet in the world.

It will happen because the endless resources provided by the revenues of oil and gas are challenged by the perspectives offered by the exploitation of shale gas and shale oil.

It will happen because gas alone does not replace economic modernization.

It will happen because of the corruption and the absence of justice.

It will happen because entire regions have been alienated by discriminations and violence, because the people of Chechnya, Ingushettia, Daghestan, Tatarstan and many other places have been so much persecuted that they do not feel part of any common project with Moscow.

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It will happen because frustrations, angers, hatreds are too strong and the unifying ideal too absent.

It will happen. Not in the coming decades, but in the coming years.

Few years from now, Vladimir Putin will have left the Kremlin and vanished from the Russian politics.

Russian citizens will remember him as a ghost from the old times, the times of the Empire – the times of corruption and oppression.

Nobody knows whether this process will be calm or violent, whether his successor will be nationalistic or liberal, or both together, but what matters is something else: Russian will no longer be an Empire, it will become finally a normal nation state.

This is the horizon we should prepare for, all together.

Meanwhile, as our region will remain an area of confrontation, the formerly captive nations should unite their strengths instead of cultivating their divisions.

Some leaders, some countries in the past had understood that the freedom of one was depending on the freedom of all subjugated nations, like the Poland of Pilsudski that was inviting all the oppressed people to unite under the flag of polish independence.

But never had our ancestors benefited from a vast and powerful enough force that had understood its strategic interest was to preserve the sovereignty of each of our nation. Today, this force exists: it is the European Union.

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As we come closer to the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit, I would like to reiterate a call that I have made several times in the recent years.

By launching the Eastern Partnership, as a response to the 2008 invasion of Georgia, the EU has offered to our nations a platform to cooperate under its benevolent umbrella. We should invest much more in it. We should develop common projects, first and foremost focusing on the necessary reforms that we should carry on together.

Because reforms mean – for all of us – statehood and independence.

Catherine the 2<sup>nd</sup> knew it well and - when Poland started to implement successfully an ambitious program of reforms following the precepts of the French or British Enlightenment - she wrote a long and secrete letter to Friedrich the Great.

This letter was and remains one of the most impressive expression of the nature and the strategy of the imperialistic project.

It reads that ongoing reforms are dangerous both for Russia and Prussia because they will turn Poland into an true State, that they need to be stopped and that Poland should be attacked and dismembered before they are fully implemented.

This letter will not sound unfamiliar to those who know how much Vladimir Putin was loathing the Georgian experience throughout this last decade.

For the first time, an efficient nation State was being built in the Caucasus and the reforms had to be crushed before they would bear all their fruits.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Unity should be our rule in Eastern Europe, including in the divided Caucasus.

I have spoken about the beginnings of the war in Abkhazia, I could have recalled an older scene that is very symbolic of the History of the Caucasus.

At the end of the rebellion lead by Shamil against the Russian Empire, after Shamil had surrendered himself, the last Chechen leader still fighting - named Baysongour - had been wounded and captured.

As they were going to hang him, the Russian officers gathered a crowd of Daghestani men to witness the execution. They ordered one of them to remove the chair on which Baysongour was standing in order to kill him.

By doing so, they wanted to fuel the local vendettas and oppose the people.

Seeing this, Baysongour moved the chair himself, committing a forbidden suicide and preserving the relations between neighbors.

But for one failure, how many successes this strategy has encountered among the Caucasian nations?

It needs to come to an end. And this is why I have launched several projects during my Presidency reinforcing the people-to-people contacts between North and South Caucasus, projects focusing mostly on education and on University exchanges.

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We need to build on those small efforts.

We need to prepare for the times when the Empire collapses. So that its legacy of hatreds is swiftly overcome.

And we, as citizens of Georgia, need to prepare for the times when Russian troops will leave our occupied regions, when Moscow will withdraw from Tskhinvali and Sukhumi.

We need to prepare ourselves to welcome back our Ossetian and Abkhaz fellow citizens as brothers and sisters, and not as enemies.

Because these times will come sooner than we think.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As my second term nears its end, I take pride in the many accomplishments that Georgia achieved during my tenure in office.

We took Georgia literally out of darkness, brought unprecedented transparency into our public service, put our children back to schools and took the gangs out of them. We have brought our nation closer than ever to its European dream and worked tirelessly to renew the spirit of tolerance that guided Georgia in our glorious past.

We did many good things. But I realize that some of these things were done at a very high cost. In our rush to impose a new reality, against the background of internal and external threats, we have cut corners and made mistakes.

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We went sometimes too far and other times not far enough.

I acknowledge fully my responsibility in all these shortcomings and I sincerely care for all those who have felt that they did not benefit enough from our work—or even that they were victims of our radical methods.

I want to tell to all Georgian citizens—to those who supported our project, our policies and our party and to those who rejected them—I want to tell them how proud I am of their maturity and their bravery, how humble I feel looking at the sacrifices and the efforts they have made.

We are and should remain a nation united in a common love for freedom and dignity.

We are and should remain a nation united in the deepest respect for the sacrifices made by our soldiers in Afghanistan, a nation sharing the same sorrow when they lose their lives and taking the same pride in their bravery.

We are and should remain a nation united in our historical destiny to join the European family of democratic nations, the family we should never have been separated from, our family.

The path of the Georgian people towards freedom, regional unity and European integration is far from over and I will continue to dedicate every day of my life to its success, as a proud citizen of a proud nation.

Thank you