

Statement by H.E. Irakli Garibashvili  
Prime Minister of Georgia  
At the General Debate of the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly  
New York, 26 September 2014

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, Fellow Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great honour for me to represent my country here at the United Nations. In recent years, the world has witnessed Georgia's unwavering transformation to freedom, democracy, and economic development.

We have experienced tremendous advances and occasional challenges on our journey to a more full and open democracy. We are a vastly stronger nation than we were twenty years ago, and we are a much stronger nation than we were just two years ago. And while we have made significant progress in a few short years, we are still a young democracy and much remains to be done.

I am fortunate to be part of a new generation of Georgians who grew up in the years after the Cold War. My entire life is one of being part of remarkable change. Our tremendous progress is due to the commitment of the Georgian people to democratic values and their embrace of international cooperation.

Because our democratic transformation has been so hard, we do not take anything for granted. To paraphrase President Kennedy, "we do not do these things because they are easy, we do them because they are hard."

During difficult times, the Georgian people took to the streets in peaceful protest and made their voices heard at the ballot box to ensure that our democratic path continued. I want to express my sincere admiration for the people of Georgia their energy and commitment to securing our democratic progress.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the international community, our partner countries represented in this hall, and international organisations, especially the United Nations, for supporting Georgia and listening to the Georgian people. Despite all the challenges we have faced, the citizens of Georgia are full of hope.

The support from the international community and international organisations continues to play a crucial role in Georgia's progress. On behalf of the people of Georgia, we thank you.

Georgia's success is your success. Georgia's journey is a testament to the good work done by the United Nations and our international partners.

In the past two years, we have taken concrete steps to break the vicious cycle of government corruption, impunity, and an economy that only benefited a few. We have created a true democracy with a system of governance that is more open, more accountable, and upholds the rule of law.

We have established a social compact that rewards work and enterprise while offering support for those in need.

As recognized by various international organizations, the Georgia of today is another world compared to that of two decades ago; or even two years ago.

Every sector of our country has advanced dramatically, from health care and education to the economy and rule of law.

We are now at the dawn of a new day for Georgia. Our democratic institutions are stronger, our foreign policy is making us more secure, and our growing economy is working to benefit all Georgians.

We are strengthening and consolidating Georgia's democracy.

The Parliamentary, Presidential, and Municipal elections held in Georgia during this two-year period are truly something to celebrate.

And because Georgia's democracy was hard-won, there is no going back. The people will hold their government accountable at the ballot box. My government must earn every vote by serving the people faithfully and achieving progress for the country.

We are strengthening democratic institutions and establishing stronger checks and balances. Our new constitution decentralizes executive power and creates greater accountability at all levels of government.

The Parliament now functions like a true legislature. Laws are proposed, debated, and amended. Committees hold hearings and grill ministers. The old rubber stamp has been thrown away.

We are now guaranteeing the protection of human rights through a new Human Rights Strategy and Action plan. In addition, we are equally proud to have enacted a new anti-discrimination law that expands human rights protections to all Georgian citizens.

We have restored the rule of law by establishing an independent judiciary and instituting more rights to defendants. We ended impunity by government officials and torture and abuse in our prisons. All Georgians are now equal before the law, and will have the benefit of a judicial process that meets the highest international standards.

We are committed to building a truly strong, independent, and high quality media. The media, like civil society, is essential to a strong democracy. While I may not always agree with what the

media says or writes, I will always fight to make sure they have the right to that freedom of speech.

These reforms will benefit all citizens of my country. Our goal is to unify society through the rule of law and democracy.

Our commitment to align more closely with the United States and Europe goes hand-in-hand with our commitment to continued democratic transformation.

The United States remains a key strategic ally. The relationship between our countries at all levels of government has never been stronger.

Increased Euro-Atlantic and European integration is our way of returning to the family of European nations, with whom we share history, culture, and most importantly, common values. Our new Association Agreement with the EU and our steadfast movement to NATO membership forms the foundation for this relationship and provides an umbrella for greater engagement.

As German Chancellor Angela Merkel said at this very podium, “there is no development without security and no security without development.”

Our EU Association Agreement is a Master Plan for the gradual establishment of European political, economic, social, and legislative norms and standards. Georgia has embarked on a demanding path of wide-scale reforms.

We will deliver on our commitments.

I believe Georgia's democratic transformation can serve as a model for other countries. We pledge today to share our experience with nations going through similar transitions.

While we are deepening our European and Euro-Atlantic integration, we are also becoming a truly open, globalized economy. We are making important investments and reforms to unlock the full potential of the Georgian economy and Georgian people. From universal healthcare to investments in clean energy, Georgia is becoming a 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy that benefits all citizens.

As we pursue these reforms, we seek to implement the UN development agenda beyond 2015. We have become a leader in sustainable development, taking seriously the outcomes of Rio + 20. We are ready to work together with the international community to define a post-2015 development agenda that is inclusive and people-centred.

This agenda will address the need to achieve economic stability, sustained economic growth, the promotion of social equity, and the protection of the environment. At the same time, we are committed to enhancing gender equality, women's empowerment, and equal employment for every Georgian.

The future belongs to the next generation, so protection and development of our children to achieve their full potential must be based on greater investment in their education.

A top area of concern for Georgia is the issue of internally displaced persons and refugees. There are hundreds of thousands of IDPs in Georgia as a result of Russia's military aggression. Yet, Georgia is still taking in refugees from other conflict torn regions. Sadly, the sources of new refugees are increasing not decreasing, especially in light of current conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East.

We are also doing everything we can to help our friends in Ukraine by providing humanitarian assistance, political support, technical help – such as sending doctors and medicine – and serving as a safe refuge for children affected by the conflict. We are also helping them implement reforms and strengthen their democratic institutions.

The ongoing developments in Ukraine tear at our hearts. We strongly support Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. We hope that the recent peace treaties will put an end to the military operations once and for all, and mark the beginning of an irreversible peace-making process.

The international community has spoken with increasing support every year for the right of return by adopting the UNGA resolution on the "Status of IDPs and Refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and Tskhinvali Regions/South Ossetia, Georgia." It is essential that the General Assembly continues to maintain this humanitarian issue in the agenda and support the rights of the forcefully displaced with strength and conviction.

Let me now address my brothers and sisters in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Brothers and sisters, hear me clearly: I dream of the day when we all live together in peace and prosperity. We are committed to the path of reconciliation and restoring Georgia's full territorial integrity and sovereignty. We must work to find a way for you to participate in our success, including the benefits of our new EU Association Agreement.

I also call on the Russian Government to fulfil its obligations under the 2008 international ceasefire and join in the search for peace, prosperity, and reconciliation.

Our history and our values are a source of strength. When combined with our strategic location, this allows us to offer something unique to the world and serve as a driver of peace and security.

Beyond our borders, we aim to contribute to global security by being a supplier of security, not just a consumer.

Georgia's dedication to becoming a security "contributor" to the world is evident in our aspirations for European and Euro-Atlantic integration, which are the main pillars of Georgia's foreign policy. Building on the achievements of the past 2 years, Georgia has made significant progress that reinforces our path to eventual NATO membership.

The historic NATO summit reaffirmed that Georgia will be a member of NATO in the future and our people remain committed to this ultimate objective. As a result of the decisions taken at the Wales Summit, NATO will significantly increase Georgia's integration and provide tangible cooperation initiatives that will increase Georgia's capabilities and overall security.

We are the largest non-NATO contributor of troops to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan and we are committed to taking part in the post-ISAF mission. From the onset of the operation, our troops, including medical personnel, staff officers, and training instructors will be ready for deployment. We also plan to contribute to institution building in Afghanistan.

We stand with our allies in combating all forms of terrorism and organized crime, anywhere in the world.

We are also proud to contribute to the European Union's efforts under the Common Security and Defense Policy to build peace and security worldwide. In this context, as the second largest participant, a Georgian battalion and one light infantry company have already started a mission under the EU-led operation in the Central African Republic.

Our willingness to serve shoulder-to-shoulder with our allies is not the only way Georgia is serving as a global security provider. We are also taking a rational approach to reducing regional tensions and preventing conflict.

Let me be clear, Georgia will never sacrifice its territorial integrity and sovereignty. However, we will continue to look for pathways to reconciliation with our brothers and sisters in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

We Georgians want a good relationship with Russia, but not at the expense of our sovereignty and independence, which we fought so hard to achieve.

To this end, we are pursuing a new approach from our predecessors in dealing with Russia. We are pursuing a two-track engagement strategy based on being a responsible, pragmatic, and constructive neighbour.

On the first track, we started an unconditional dialogue with Russia on the resumption of trade, economic, cultural, and humanitarian relations. On the second track, we have continued to seek a peaceful settlement of the August 2008 war and the end of Russian occupation of Georgian territory, based on the fundamental principles of international law.

The first track has produced significant results and has helped reduce tensions between Georgia and Russia. Trade has reopened and Georgian exports to Russia have increased over 300%. People-to-people exchanges have also increased dramatically. We are co-existing more calmly as neighbours. This approach has also increased stability in the entire South Caucasus region.

However, Georgia's efforts to reduce tensions and extend the olive branch to Russia have not been met with the same spirit of cooperation. We have taken every constructive step.



Now it is time for the Russian Government to stop the occupation and start on a path to lasting peace.

Georgia is committed to using its strategic location to connect Asia, Europe, and the Middle East; expanding trade from one end of Eurasia to the other.

The re-opening of the “Silk Road” is one of the greatest achievements brought about by the end of the Cold War. The Silk Road region accounts for two-thirds of the world’s population and 60 percent of its GDP. If fully utilized, it will become a key force to the expansion of trade, development of new energy resources and supply chains, and cultural exchanges.

To fully unlock the potential of the new Silk Road, the international community must redouble its efforts in three key areas: trade and transport, energy, and people-to-people contacts.

We have deepened cooperation with Turkey, China, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan to integrate transportation corridors and open new routes that will bring goods from Asia to Western Europe in record time.

Energy resources are a key driver of Silk Road economic development and integration.

Georgia supports a key route for Caspian Sea oil and gas to travel to Europe. Last year, the Shah Deniz Consortium, announced a massive expansion of the South Caucasus Pipeline through Azerbaijan and Georgia, which will bring 16 billion cubic meters of new natural gas to Europe and Turkey and thousands of new jobs to Georgia.

Several days ago, I was in Azerbaijan to break ground and lay the first segment of this new pipeline. This expansion will lead to approximately \$2 billion in new investment by the

consortium in Georgia alone. This will result in Georgia receiving significant quantities of natural gas to improve our economic development and improve our security.

Clean, renewable energy can also be a driver for regional energy cooperation. In Georgia, we are utilizing our massive hydropower resources to become a carbon-neutral country and to export renewable energy to our neighbours.

The potential for the region is great, but more is needed to turn potential into reality. Georgia is ready to use its location as a strategic crossroads and do its part to fully revitalize the “Silk Road.”

To this end, I intend to establish a “Silk Road Forum” in 2015. We seek to launch in Georgia an annual high-level meeting of all states and international organizations interested in the future of the Silk Road. The Forum will discover new ideas for enhancing cooperation in the fields of transport, energy, trade and people-to-people contacts across the Silk Road. The forum will move beyond discussion to action.

In conclusion, let me reaffirm that I am so very confident that our best years are ahead of us; that our worst are now part of history. I am confident that Georgians have come together to move our nation forward, to fulfil the promise of a strong, independent, and free Georgian nation.

Working together, there is no limit on what Georgia, the region, and the world can achieve.

I look forward to seeing many of you in Tbilisi.

I thank you.