



**Statement by H.E. Mr. Irakli Garibashvili**

**Prime Minister of Georgia**

**General Debate of the 77<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly**

**New York, September 22, 2022**

Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Georgian people, it is an honor to speak to you again at the United Nations General Assembly.

As we gather for this 77th Session, we reflect on our founding principles and the progress we have made as an international community since the creation of the United Nations. At the first Session in 1946, the founders vowed to unite to maintain global peace and security.

While we have made significant advances, we must acknowledge the ongoing acts of aggression against members of this body – the very same types of acts that led to the establishment of the United Nations after World War II.

In 2008, my country was attacked by Russia resulting in the ongoing occupation of 20 percent of our territory. At the time, the international community recognized this aggression. But, as we have learned, the world's democracies must act as one to ensure that freedom and peace prevail.

The UN was founded to "*save succeeding generations from the scourge of war*" and protect state sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is our duty. It is our promise.

Today, I have the privilege of representing Georgia, a strong, proud, freedom-loving nation that has preserved its sacred heritage and history, while also evolving and adapting to the geopolitical realities of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thirty years ago, Georgia became part of the United Nations family. Now more than ever we are committed to protecting our shared values in our region and worldwide.

We seek all opportunities for collaboration with our international partners to advance the cause of peace. In that regard, the Geneva International Discussions are particularly crucial to bring the Russian Federation to the table to address the implementation of the EU-mediated 2008 Ceasefire Agreement. Georgia appreciates the international community's support for its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Though my country is still occupied by Russia, we do not let this difficult challenge define us. We continue to punch above our weight and contribute to the international community.

Since our government came to power in 2012, we have implemented an ambitious reform agenda that brought us closer to our key international partners, the EU, United States, NATO, and the United Nations. For the first time since we regained independence, Georgia has enjoyed an unprecedented decade of peace, prosperity, and stability.

We are continuously working on Georgia's global positioning and are already realizing the rewards. According to the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, Georgia is 1st in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The Open Budget Index ranked Georgia as 1st in the world in terms of budget transparency; and according to the Fraser Institute Economic Freedom of the World 2021, Georgia is among the top 5 economies, along with Singapore and Switzerland. NUMBEO named Georgia one of the world's safest countries, ranking 14th globally.

Our work to align more closely with the US and Europe goes hand and hand with our commitment to continued democratic transformation. 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, values.

We are continuing our unequivocal path towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Our commitment to these goals is backed up by actions and real results, including an Association Agreement, DCFTA, and visa-free travel with the EU.

This year, we applied for full EU membership.

The historic decision of the European Council to give us a European Perspective, created a new set of benchmarks. Just as in the past, Georgia will meet and exceed those benchmarks.

The prospect of acceding to the EU is a strong motivation for our country and our citizens. We are fully aware that the European perspective comes with a responsibility of the highest political, economic, and legal convergence with the EU. Georgia immediately responded to the European Council's decision by presenting an action plan to address the EU's 12 priorities.

This inclusive process ensures full engagement of all branches of government, the opposition parties, and civil society. The working groups have been established in parliament for each priority area with all relevant stakeholders. We are making progress and are well ahead of schedule.

Let me be clear: Georgia deserves EU member candidate status, which will bring us to eventual membership and make the dream of generations a reality.

We have developed a long-term development strategy – Vision 2030 – a nationwide policy document that covers key directives and priorities of our general development by 2030 that fully complies with the Sustainable Development Agenda of the United Nations.

The country has a new National Strategy for Human Rights Protection for the years 2022-2030. The government approved this strategy following discussions with both international partners and domestic civil society organizations. The Strategy aims to further improve human rights protection standards and is in line with the UN sustainable development goals. This comprehensive document covers all fundamental human rights and freedoms.

We are working with the world's leading firms and brightest minds to transform Georgia into a true multi-dimensional regional hub.

Our financial services sector is globally recognized, and now we are attracting international investors, injecting additional investments in the education and healthcare sectors; the startup ecosystem is thriving; logistics and energy potential are now realized. Collectively these created a sustainable and predictable economy for Georgia and its people.

Our government's sound policies led to a strong recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic with economic growth reaching 10.4 percent in 2021 and far exceeding expectations from January-July 2022 at 10.3 percent. According to the IMF, our growth projections are up to 9 percent for 2022, primarily due to our government's proactive measures to minimize the impacts of post-Covid recovery and the War in Ukraine.

We are creating opportunities and giving all the necessary tools to our citizens, including those living in Georgia's occupied territories. For that reason, here today at the United Nations General Assembly, I want to speak directly to my Abkhaz and Ossetian brothers and sisters and once again tell them that

our strength is in unity. We will build Georgia together and peacefully turn it into a prosperous, free and unified European state.

War is waging again, not far from the doorstep of my country. Russia's full-fledged war in Ukraine undermines Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as the UN Charter and fundamental principles of international law.

Georgia stands with Ukraine. Since the start of the war, our government has provided substantial humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, including the allocation of more than 1,000 tons of humanitarian aid. Georgia provides financial assistance and accommodation to over 32,000 Ukrainians currently residing in our country.

The Georgian education system has enrolled more than 1,500 Ukrainian students, many of whom receive general education in the Ukrainian language according to the standard Ukrainian curricula.

We have sponsored, joined, or supported almost 400 resolutions, statements, joint statements and other initiatives made or proposed by all major international organizations and institutions in support of Ukraine, including being a main sponsor of the UNGA76 resolution on the humanitarian consequences of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

As confirmed by the U.S. State Department's report on the investment climate in Georgia, "the National Bank of Georgia and Georgian financial institutions act fully in accordance with the financial sanctions imposed by the United States and others on the Russian Federation."

We have aligned with restrictive measures of the EU against Crimea and Sevastopol since 2014, and this year, with restrictive measures on Donetsk and Luhansk.

As the conflict in Ukraine has shown, the wider Black Sea Security is at the forefront of the Euro-Atlantic Security agenda, and Georgia, as an indivisible part of the regional architecture, is ready to increase our contribution to common security.

As we know well, security brings stability, and stability brings predictability. Predictability is a crucial precondition for sustainable economic development. The more predictable the Black Sea region becomes, the more we can unlock its economic potential for the benefit of our people and the global economy.

For that reason, we are developing strategic transport corridors connecting Asia with Europe. Georgia participates in several international initiatives and infrastructure projects with our European colleagues to improve connectivity and facilitate reliable and efficient commerce across the Black Sea.

Despite the complex situation in our region, we spare no effort to foster rapprochement between our neighbors. We have already had success stories, including the safe return of 15 Armenian detainees to their homeland in exchange for maps of mined territories to Azerbaijan.

This July, for the first time the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia met in Tbilisi. We are ready to serve as a venue for this dialogue to bring much-needed peace and stability to our region.

With this in mind, Georgia has been promoting the Peaceful Neighborhood Initiative, which envisions participation by all three states of the South Caucasus. This new initiative is not substituting, countering, or opposing any other cooperation formats. Georgia serves as an honest broker to aid in normalizing regional relations.

We are also heavily investing in our country's infrastructure to increase Georgian transit capabilities for the benefit of the region. We aim to attract greater institutional foreign investment, facilitate projects of regional importance, and strengthen our infrastructural capabilities - thus becoming an actual bridge between East and West.

Our goal is to transform the South Caucasus into a region of opportunities and economic growth.

We are already discussing with our EU counterparts a list of “flagship projects”, which will bring additional economic synergies and serve as a catalyst for more connectivity and integration with the EU and European markets.

We believe all countries of the South Caucasus and allies from the West will benefit from this collaboration. We must act now to secure the Black Sea, protect energy routes, maintain supply chains, and increase regional connectivity to foster greater economic development. These are all essential to European peace and prosperity.

We are mindful that our regional challenges are happening against a backdrop of global challenges, such as international security, the pandemic, and climate change.

Georgia contributes to Global Peace and the Rules-Based International order. For over two decades, Georgia has contributed to NATO missions around the world, serving as one of the largest per capita contributors to the mission in Afghanistan. We lost many brave soldiers in these missions and suffered significant casualties. Georgia reiterates its readiness to stand by NATO in protecting common security while continuing to support the EU-led missions.

As I speak here today, dangers are threatening all of humanity that we can no longer ignore. The planetary crises created by climate change, from biodiversity loss to pollution, represent an existential

threat. Like many challenges, it affects developing nations first, hindering the ability to realize sustainable development goals.

In Georgia, our government has made significant investments in education, public health, and the environment to ensure that future generations can thrive.

Education systems are critical for empowering prosperous and productive societies. Education in the 21st century means investing in digital literacy and promoting infrastructure to bridge the digital divide to ensure that future crises, whether public health, war, or climate-related, do not create dire situations.

In conclusion, I believe that working together we shall return peace and prosperity to our homes and countries. This is the spirit and the mandate vested in the United Nations from its founding - to support and ensure peace and cooperation.

I am proud to represent my country before you today. After three decades of restored independence, Georgian Dreams are becoming a reality! In recent decades our nation, whose history traces back thousands of years, has become an example of resilience and progress in the face of extraordinary challenges. With our international partners, I am confident that we will build a brighter, more peaceful, and prosperous world now and for the generations that will follow us.

Thank you!