



Developing Europe's East

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Remarks at Conference

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[Questions and Answers](#)

As delivered

Thank you, President, for these warm words. Thank you for hosting this conference. Madam Speaker, Ministers and colleagues, it is great to be back in Tbilisi. There are many colleagues and old friends here in and out of government, some of whom I've known for decades. There are also journalists here some of whom I have not known for decades so I will choose my words carefully.

It is only fair that I start my remarks by thanking Georgia for inventing wine.

Archeological evidence suggests that it was here that the grape was first fermented 8,000 years ago, and there is a statue outside which is a copy of one of those earliest archeological relics of wine cultivation. Noah famously got drunk not too far from where we are meeting. The rest of Europe of course had to wait for the first wine hangover for more than 1,000 years.

As for myself I do enjoy Georgian wine.

I remember drinking a glass about a year ago with Ambassador Tefft. I remember that because Russia had just imposed an embargo on Georgian wine and I remember Ambassador Tefft and I remarked to each other that Russia's loss was the rest of the world's gain.

The Georgians rose to the challenge, not for the first or the last time, and they learned to market their wine even more effectively to the U.S. and Europe. It's my fortune to buy Georgian wine in Washington D.C.

But we are all here because Georgia is on the frontiers of freedom. Frontiers of freedom began in Poland in 1989 and those frontiers have advanced. This is where the link between freedom and security is being made; where democratic institutions are being built.

Freedom is not a luxury that one looks to achieve as an afterthought. The 21st century faces many challenges-terrorism, the proliferation of unconventional weapons and energy dependence are three important ones. The response, however, to these problems will be found through the expansion of democracy, of free markets, the rule of law, and the willingness to defend them. These values in turn make the resolution of these problems easier.

Georgia has taken strides in all these areas already. Georgians must know that the world is aware of and appreciates their progress.

Georgia's strong progress should not mask the progress yet needed. Georgia's ultimate fate is still to be determined. Much depends on the decisions Georgians and their leaders take in years to come. I can outline an American perspective on the issues at stake. To start, let me quickly deal with a couple of questions where easy answers are in fact available.

The first is simple but profound: are we in Europe this evening? My answer is "Yes, we certainly are."

Geographically, culturally, and politically. Historically? Most certainly.

Georgians were part of the classical world, part of greater Hellenic Civilization, purveyors of their legendary hospitality to Jason and the Argonauts. While religion is a dangerous guide to civilizational choice, it is at least worth observing that Georgia was Christian centuries before Germany, Britain, Scandinavia, and many others.

Do Georgians have the right to be treated as Europeans? Yes, emphatically so.

Are Georgians therefore part of the Euro-Atlantic community? Again, Yes.

Georgians are a part of the transatlantic world, and therefore institutions of the transatlantic world should be open to Georgia as much as to any other European country.

The organizers of this conference got it right when they decided on the theme, "Building Europe's East."

The Georgians themselves seem to be clear on this issue. Georgia has chosen for itself a path to join the Euro-Atlantic community. Polls consistently show that as many as eighty percent of the Georgian people support integration into Euro-Atlantic structures like NATO and the EU.

I can think of NATO and EU members that do not approach 80 percent support for either of those two organizations.

A Euro-Atlantic identity is based on shared values and shared institutions as much as on geography. Georgia's mind is focused on those issues and has been especially since the Rose Revolution that brought a new wave of freedom to Georgia.

What does it mean to be a free nation? What are the responsibilities that Georgia has assumed?

We can debate all night what freedom means. But since we are defining our community as Euro-Atlantic, let us quote a definition from Europe's Enlightenment.

In the words of Thomas Hobbes, "a free man is he that in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do is not hindered to do what he hath the will to do" if he does not deny that same right to others.



Georgians are free to make their own decisions, as long as they do not impinge on the freedoms of others.

Therefore, with freedom comes responsibility.

What happens here should depend on Georgia's choices.

These are not ideal circumstances in which Georgia is to make its choices. Georgia may be in Europe, but this is the rougher end of Europe.

These considerations are not peripheral: for my country our grand strategy for post-communist Europe since 1989 has rested on a deceptively simple principle: that America's interests are best served when the countries which liberated themselves from Soviet control are free and empowered to pursue their own reforms, their own identity, and their own security.

As we believe in human freedom, our interests do not depend on the subjugation of nations, but on the free choices of free people. This approach, from the Administration of President Bush through President Clinton to President Bush today, has yielded spectacular success as we've worked with Europe most closely in this task.

So let us consider Georgia's choices since November 2003, which marked a new birth in freedom for this ancient nation.

The government has reduced corruption in its bureaucracy, beginning with the well-known, in fact, famous dismissal and re-establishment of the traffic police. Small wonder that international indices show a drop in corruption.

And the World Bank named the Georgian Government the world's leading reformer last year. That's number one, with 170 others to follow.

Georgia's government has enacted economic reforms that have vaulted Georgia from number 112 to number 18 on the World Bank's "Doing Business" report and attracted increasing sums of foreign investment.

And it's not just the World Bank. Transparency International recently raised Georgia's standing in its annual assessment.

Georgia deserves praise and credit in other ways. Its energy situation has shifted from massive power outages across the country throughout winter and an inability to pay for natural gas imports in 2003 to the past two years' surpluses of electricity and electricity exports.

Georgia has achieved this by diversifying sources of energy and increasing domestic production of hydro power. Today, electric power is available 24 hours a day to paying customers.

Georgia has made full payment on its natural gas imports, and is sharply decreasing its dependence on Russia as Georgia's sole natural gas supplier, as Azerbaijani natural gas imports kick in.

The four years since the Rose Revolution have also seen advances in democratic reform. Let me mention a few. The Government of Georgia deserves praise for:

- The establishment of new local government units elected by and accountable to their constituents.
- The consolidation of the court system into three tiers.
- The devolution of power to local school districts, the establishment of new standards for accreditation of universities and creation of fairer entrance examination procedures for university students.
- The holding of fundamentally fair local elections in 2006 and the maintenance of active cooperation with international organizations to improve procedures.
- The introduction of such strong efforts against human trafficking that Georgia has moved in United States' ranking system from Tier 2 to Tier 1 in our annual report.

Such progress indicates reforms are deepening and broadening across a broad section of Georgia's economic and political life.

To take the progress on the judicial front, Georgia's courts are working steadily to increase judicial independence, improve knowledge and weed out corruption. The most recent example was the enactment of a new law prohibiting ex parte communications with justices.

We have seen, additionally, the increased use of bail in criminal cases and the opening of new and remodeled prisons.

These are results the Georgians have achieved on their own, and it is Georgians and their leaders who deserve the credit. This country's own commitment to reforms has been enhanced by the active participation, advice and assistance of European organizations such as the EU, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE, and by individual European leaders like former Estonian Prime Minister Mart Laar.

The continued activity of these organizations-indeed, the presence of so many of their senior officials here today-is recognition that Georgia's direction is toward Euro-Atlantic values and institutions.

Almost nowhere else has American and European assistance been as welcomed, and advice as well implemented, as in post-Rose Revolution Georgia.

But let us also be honest and acknowledge that Georgia has a long way to go in building the institutions Georgians themselves expect from a modern, European democracy.

Free nations have strong, free institutions. The government needs to move with vigor to strengthen an independent judiciary. People have a right to expect independent decisions from judges and courts.

Politically, Georgia's opposition remains weak. One demonstration, hopefully peacefully to be held tomorrow, is not necessarily a sign of strength. Although, it may be prophetic for some times to come. A strong, free nation deserves a strong, free opposition. And Parliament needs to play a stronger role in Georgian politics.

Democracy is healthy when those in power share authority with an opposition in joint-albeit competitive-pursuit of the country's greater good, rather than scoring tactical political points.

Georgia has yet to achieve this level.

It is not easy to advance policies, of course, when facing a Parliament controlled by the opposition, as is the case in my country today.

But Democracy does not promise the easy way, merely the better way.

We in Tbilisi are witnessing a test of whether Georgia's political system, as now developed, can find a place for dissenting voices and rational debates. It is also, to be sure, a test of whether those dissenting voices can act responsibly within a democratic system to effect the change they desire and use the mechanisms of democracy to improve that system.

The stakes are high, and the outcome will resonate beyond Georgia's borders. To the Americans and Europeans in this audience I say that we must recognize this and support purposeful dialogue and peaceful resolution of differences.

A normal democracy has one sitting President and one sitting Prime Minister, and many former Presidents and Prime Ministers neither in prison, nor dead, nor missing. A Georgian democracy that allows the rotation and sharing of power through truly free, not formal, elections, will generate stability at home and in its region. Such stability will provide the basis for economic growth and ease for peaceful resolution of separatist conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Let me repeat this point: the problems of Ossetia and Abkhazia can only have a peaceful solution. To achieve peaceful solutions, Georgia needs the Euro-Atlantic community's firm support when Georgia behaves constructively, dealing, sad to say, with embargos, border closings, and strange aerial violations. In this context, I'd like to thank the Governments of Sweden, as well as Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and the UK for providing expert analysis of the August 6 violation of Georgia's sovereign airspace. Provocations of all sorts from whatever source must stop.

The U.S. believes that continuing democratic reform and pursuing a peaceful solution to the territorial questions will advance Georgia's case for eventual NATO membership. This is part of the NATO membership criteria.

And paradoxically, the inverse is also true: Georgia will advance these reforms as it feels greater confidence that the door to NATO will remain open as long as Georgia fulfills membership criteria. These are all interrelated issues.

Now given this, what can we say about Georgia's NATO aspirations?

I'll start with simple words: the U.S. supports Georgia's NATO aspirations. Let there be no doubt.

We in NATO should apply the same approach to Georgia's ultimate goal of NATO membership that we applied to the Baltic States, Poland and all recent members. That is: Georgia's fate should be in Georgia's hands. Membership will be a function of what Georgians are prepared to do to advance the reforms Georgians have begun.

NATO is a military alliance, the greatest the world has ever known. Any country seriously considering joining NATO must understand that they need to be a contributor, not just a consumer, of common security.

And Georgia is doing more than its share in Iraq. You are contributing to the effort to bring security and ultimate freedom to Iraqis, and as a representative of my government, let me again thank you for this. This is not a NATO task, but it is a difficult one and one my government appreciates. Likewise Georgia is doing its share and more than its share in Afghanistan.

But NATO is ultimately an alliance of values. We are all democracies in NATO, we all have free markets and the rule of law. This means any country aspiring to membership must deepen its democracy, and, therefore, so must Georgia.

We have always supported Georgia's NATO aspirations, as I said. But America's support is not a guarantee.

It is true that since 1989, every country which America has supported in its NATO aspirations has succeeded. They have succeeded because of their own efforts and through their own results.

Ask the Poles, the Hungarians or the Czechs. We have never asked for their thanks because they themselves did the work. Georgians will have to earn accession.

The United States and I are not task masters. We appreciate the pressure you face, including, sometimes, unfortunately, from Russia.

Russia and Georgia have a relationship and a history that go back centuries. And it is a complex relationship that cannot be judged solely by the bad times of recent years. Russia is not alone in claiming a special place in Georgia's history. Persia, Greece and the Ottomans, have all had their special relations with Georgia over the centuries.

But my proposition is this: a Georgia that is prosperous, democratic and peaceful at home and in its region will ultimately, and on that basis, be a good neighbor, and a contributor to prosperity, human development, and security in its neighborhood. And such a Georgia would be a natural member of Euro-Atlantic institutions, including NATO. And Georgia being a good neighbor means a good neighbor for everyone, Russia included.

Security is never zero-sum. We need to be clear-eyed about the challenges, and be prepared to meet them. But we must be equally clear-eyed that our goal is to make the challenges disappear, not meet them through conflict.

Russia may not currently admit it, but its Western borders, populated mostly by NATO and EU members, have never been more secure and more friendly in history.

It is the task of American diplomacy to keep Georgia's road to NATO open and unencumbered. It is Georgia's task to take those needed steps: at home, with respect to peaceful approaches to resolve the current conflicts with its breakaway territories, to take that road from its current Intensified Dialogue, through MAP to membership when Georgia's own performance warrants it.

As President Bush said when he visited Tbilisi in May 2005, "We respect Georgia's desire to join the institutions of Europe and we encourage your close cooperation with NATO."

Colleagues and friends, as I have outlined for you tonight, Georgia can walk down this path by:

- Advancing democratic and judicial reforms, especially by ensuring judicial proceedings remain free from political interference and by cultivating - rather than merely tolerating - a viable political opposition, and
- Seeking a peaceful resolution of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts that restores Georgia's territorial integrity through a combination of de-escalatory rhetoric and security actions and aggressive diplomatic efforts to forge negotiated settlements.

Georgia has made remarkable progress, for which it deserves praise. It knows what must be done. We all have our tasks.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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