

*THE CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPEAN
CENTER-RIGHT YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS FORUM:*

“DEMOCRAT YOUTH FOR PEACE AND COOPERATION”

Tbilisi, Georgia, September 22 - 26, 2003

**Welcome address by Mr. David Gamkrelidze, MP
Chairman of the New Conservative Party of Georgia**

Dear friends, it is a pleasure to welcome you to Georgia. It is a particular pleasure to welcome here the representatives of international and national youth organizations. Thank you all for coming.

I am so very glad that the Young Rights, an organization that in many ways, much like its mother party, is still in its infancy, organized this conference, and I wish to thank George, Nodar, Merab and all others with the Young Rights who played a role in putting this Forum together. As well, allow me to expend our deep gratitude to the European Youth Foundation for financing this event.

You represent the future of the world's pro-freedom, conservative movement, and it is a distinct honor to be here with you today, to open this conference and to give you an early introduction of Georgia and our struggle aimed at promoting policies giving every individual the right to use his natural abilities and skills to participate in the workings of the free market for his own, his family's and the society's benefit.

You are the foot-soldiers of the political parties across the world that strive to enhance the ability of each individual to maximize his potential in a free society. While we, political leaders who are older than you, might regularly engage in what many may regard important Parliamentary debate with our left-wing colleagues, you, the younger leaders of our parties are at the front-lines—you help us win elections, you are the source of many of our best ideas. Ultimately, all of our efforts in politics matter only if we succeed in leaving you a more freer, a more responsible, and a more caring polity than the one that we inherited.

Georgia today stands at a historical crossroads—over the course of the next year and a half, the Georgian people, using their democratic right of being the ultimate arbiters of the political process, will elect a completely new generation of leaders.

In a little over six weeks, the Georgians will elect a new Parliament, and in April of 2005, they will elect a new President.

Since becoming independent, Georgia certainly has made important strides forward, yet we have not yet build a country of which every one of our citizens can be proud:

- we have begun to secure our independence, though given the separatism in Abkhazia and Shida Kartli, we still face an uphill climb in this regard;
- we have began to build a democratic society, with a government elected by the people and in the service of the people, yet we have never held elections which have fully satisfied the standards of a free and fair vote;
- we have a vibrant independent business community, yet it is pushed down by high taxes and unnecessary regulations; a very large majority of the Georgian people are either unemployed or unhappy with the jobs they hold, and certainly most do not make enough money to live decently.

Overcoming the problems we face will not be easy; nor should it be—a good life is build on hard work and sacrifice. However, the Georgian people should not be forced to sacrifice without good reason—the hardship they face and the sacrifices they make today, should not go in vain; they should lead to a better life in the future, for the current generation and for the future generations of Georgians.

Those of us who understand the value of human freedom and those who have experience in doing business, be it big or small, understand, just like each one of you does, that building a strong economy, creating jobs, and empowering every individual to reach the fullest of his potential, can only happen when the government lifts the chains of over-taxation and over-regulation. Good jobs and a strong economy require tough choices—we might not today be able to provide all of the services that people wish, but we must prioritize and invest our current scant resources in such a manner as to build a stronger country. Thus, we must invest in education and science, we must invest in business growth and development, we must invest into fighting corruption which drives business into the extralegal environment, and we must invest into key components of national security, because the Georgian economy will never fully develop until our country's territorial integrity is restored.

Unfortunately, many in Georgia prefer to gain votes by promising a good life to everyone today—in particular, by promising better services, higher pensions, and free care to those in our country who are used to the state hand-out from the Soviet days. Unfortunately, our country is not in a position to provide everything to

everyone. It was to provide a unified, sound alternative to what we might call “the free lunch message” that a little over two years ago, we began the process of building in Georgia the country’s first real party. We envisioned a political organization which would be based on a political philosophy and pluralistic governance, rather than an entity put together in the service of its leading political personality. Georgia had never seen such a party, and certainly it had never seen a party so strongly oriented toward the values of maximizing economic and political freedom.

The vision of our party is one that appeals most to the young—those men and women who see the promise of a real market economy, who wish to live in a society which respects their opinion and their freedom. We are very proud to be the party of the young, and our youth organization is the testament to this fact. Though its only two years old, the Young Rights today is one of the strongest and largest youth organizations in Georgia—it stretches across the whole country and boasts a large membership of young people committed to the success of this party and this vision. Tomorrow, as part of the efforts to coordinate the activities of the different center-right organizations in Georgia, you will all witness the formation of the Georgian Democrat Students organization. The leaders of the Young Rights truly deserve to be congratulated for the success that they have achieved, and I wish to use this opportunity to congratulate every one of them. Certainly the next big challenge for them will be to receive full recognition and membership from the international youth organizations as one of the principle center-right youth organization in Georgia. The present conference, I hope, will help advance their efforts on this front.

To close, allow me to return to Parliamentary elections, which are on the minds of all Georgians less than two months before the vote. In order for these elections to have the impact I spoke about, they must, first and foremost, be free and fair. We are encouraged by the international community’s commitment to free elections in Georgia—the United States, European countries, the OSCE have all played a very helpful role in helping set up precautionary measures, such as parallel vote counting, which we hope will reduce potential voter fraud. However, I hope that each one of you will take back to your home country the message of how important international monitoring of the elections will be. We very much look forward to welcoming over 1,000 international monitors that are expected to come to Georgia, and I hope that many of your home countries will contribute to these efforts. If we are able to achieve free elections, Georgians will finally elect a legislature they can trust, and a Parliament which boasts the trust of the people can make very

important, but tough, decisions which are key to brining economic prosperity to our country.

Again, thank you very much for being here. I look forward to hearing about the progress of this conference, and to seeing you tomorrow at our party headquarters.