

**OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE (OSI) LECTURE BY MR. DAVID GAMKRELIDZE, MP
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Introduction

Before I begin, I would like to express my gratitude to the Open Society Institute for inviting me to speak here, to Erin for all of her assistance in organizing this event, and to thank everyone has taken time from their busy schedules to attend this discussion.

I think that in order for all of the guests to best understand my remarks, I must begin first by saying a few words about my political party, given that our character shapes our vision. In 2001, we decided to launch a party which would be different from anything that Georgia had ever seen—a political organization created not to support one leading political personality, but to spread a vision based on a reasoned political philosophy. As well, we aimed to build a party which would go outside of Tbilisi, into the regions, working with Georgian citizens who are most often ignored by our political leaders. We believe that vision for this different party has been very successful, given that in the only electoral test that we have faced thus far, the local government elections in June 2002, our party won 40 percent of the total national vote, twice as much as our closest rivals. The number of deputies that we elected to local councils as compared to other parties is also quite telling—the governing CUG won about 75 seats; Zurab Zhvania’s team four, Saakashvili’s team 25, Labor Party 125. Meanwhile, we won over 800, out of 2000.

Georgia’s New Role

Turning to today’s topic, my hope is to examine the unique opportunity for stability, democracy and economic growth that the changing global landscape post-September 11 presents for Georgia and for the consolidation of our democracy. To this end, I wish to examine US policy toward Georgia, and then discuss the internal challenges that we must overcome in Georgia to find ourselves a serious global role.

Early into the Clinton Administration, to a large extent due to pressure from Congress, especially Senators John McCain and Sam Brownback, the Caucasus-Central Asia became an area of significant interest to the United States. The interest was largely due to Caspian Sea’s energy resources, and the need to find routes other than Russia through which the oil and gas could be transported.

Georgia presented an important element of the energy corridor, through which oil and gas could move from Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and other countries into Turkey and rest of Europe. At the same time, Georgia was of particular interest to America because of the man who has been our leader since independence—Eduard Shevardnadze.

As a result, much aid was committed to Georgia, the impact of which was important in a number of areas, as I will examine later. However, throughout the 1990s, in the areas of most importance for Georgia—strengthening the Georgian state and its ability to exercise control over all of its territory, as well as helping end Russian pressure on Georgia—the Clinton administration often talked the talk, but seldom walked the walk. Assistance to the military was very limited, while US policy toward Russia ignored its actions in the Caucasus and the significant anti-US policies that it was pursuing in the region.

Based on my observations, the Bush Administration came into office with a plan to increase US involvement in strengthening the Georgian state, and promoting further economic and political reforms. Influential members of Bush's team recognized that a region we might broadly call central Eurasia—starting in Ukraine, going through to the Chinese boarder in Central Asia—might very well represent the area of the new geopolitical center of US policy, the same way that Europe played this role in the 20th century. It is no accident, I believe, that Paul Wolfowitz, Bush's foreign policy tutor as they say and Deputy Secretary of Defense, helped establish an Institute for the study of the region when he was Dean of the School for Advanced International Studies in Washington.

September 11 attacks gave the US an opportunity to actually put this vision into practice. Immediately after the attacks, US set up military bases in Central Asia, but these will likely remain in the region for much longer than after the campaign in Afghanistan is fully completed. The level of financial support for the countries in the region has grown dramatically; this I think is very important and useful. However, I must mentioned that US non-governmental groups who are fearful of the Human Rights records in many of these countries must continue to press their case, at least to help ensure that the record on fundamental rights begins to improve in Central Asia.

In Georgia, last Spring US began a so-called “Train and Equip Program” to train 2,000 Georgian soldiers which will form the basis of the future Georgian army. This 64 million dollar program is an exponential increase in US military support for Georgia, and one of the reasons for my trip to Washington now is ensure that

this sort of a relationship continues after the program runs its course in 2004. The program is arguably the most important thing that can be done to strengthen the Georgian state, which in turn is necessary for defense of the Georgian democracy. At the same time, discussions are now underway about Georgia's likely future membership in NATO—something that was never viewed seriously three years ago. Indeed, I sponsored a resolution in the Georgian Parliament making this the principal priority of our foreign policy. Meanwhile, President Shevardnadze followed on Parliament's unanimous support of this resolution, by announcing last month that Georgia plans to seek NATO membership at the Prague summit.

The Bush Administration's strong stance in relationship to Russian pressure on Georgia is also of importance. While Presidents Bush and Vladimir Putin have clearly formed a friendship, this relationship has not stood in the Administration's way of sending a very strong message to Russia to stop pressuring Georgia. For example, this summer and fall, Russian planes bombed Georgian territory, ostensibly as part of the war against Chechen separatists. Moscow also threatened to send forces into Georgia, in effect menacing to annex the country once again. Ultimately what stopped Russia from acting was America's unequivocal commitment to Georgia, which President Bush and other officials at highest levels expressed almost on a weekly basis in August and September. Through this policy, the Bush Administration has helped make Georgia the litmus test for Russia's new foreign policy which President Putin claims to be implementing. If he truly wishes to be what we might call "pro-Western," and no longer wishes to play the "Great Game" for the dominance of Eurasia, he can demonstrate his commitment by ending his pressure tactics on Georgia. Otherwise, it becomes clear that his commitment to this new pro-Western foreign policy is in name only.

I believe that the Administration's policies to Georgia are not accidental, and are all aimed at giving our country, and its region, a new role in global politics that goes far beyond supplying energy to Europe. There are long-term strategic US interests in the region, including influencing the Middle East and potentially needing to contain a rapidly strengthening China. Turkey has served as a key US outpost in the Middle East, but many of its internal problems, including the growing Islamic radicalism which some analysts argue manifested itself in the latest elections, has certainly created a need for another staunch ally geographically close to Turkey. Meanwhile, President Bush's National Security Strategy states that US will not allow any nation to even contemplating a challenge to US military dominance. This is aimed directly at China, because realistically speaking only China can contemplate a challenge to US military dominance, probably not today, but in a decade or two. Central Asia is a vital part of containing the growth of

China, and there are only two routes into Central Asia for America—Pakistani-Afghanistan route, problems of which are quite clear, and the Georgia-Caspian route.

As well, there is another critical element that accounts for America's increased level of support for Georgia which has to do with democratic values. Writing in the Fall issue of the *National Interest*, Gary Schmitt argues that the Bush National Security Strategy, with its clear focus on the character of political regimes, necessitates America's constant and very strong commitment to promulgation of liberal democracy and open society around the world, because only that sort of a free regime can be viewed as a true US ally. Georgia presents a unique opportunity in the former Soviet Union to become a truly consolidated liberal democracy. Three significant accomplishments of the 1990s, each of which was achieved with significant Western, largely American, support give me the right to say this:

- First, by all standards, Georgia has a strong and vibrant free media, both print and television. It is unfortunate that in recent months the first channel of state television has become a government mouthpiece, but the media as a whole is nonetheless open, serving as a serious check on the government.
- Second, Georgia has an influential civil society, both in the non-governmental, non-profit sector, as well as the business community.
- Third, Georgia has an open public sphere and active political parties. This is a development of recent years, since the collapse of the CUG. All of us who are associated with the New Conservative Party are very proud of our role in helping collapse a political force which suck the energy from opposition forces by completely dominating political life for much of the 1990s, in many ways like the Communist party of the old.

These three points are indications of Georgia's unique opportunity for consolidation of democracy which exists in Georgia, and given Schmitt's analysis of the Bush foreign policy vision, the increased interest in Georgia from this Administration seems sensible.

In Georgia, few have fully grasped the special opportunity that President Bush's new policies present to our country. Some still believe that our country's role in the world should be simply to serve as an energy corridor. Certainly that is important, both for our economic well being and for our security. Still others do not want to take advantage of this opportunity because it would forever solidify the Georgian democracy and prevent certain non-democratic elements from taking hold of power in Georgia.

I believe that there is an opportunity for Georgia to become a special outpost of democracy, a country through which pro-freedom vision can be spread throughout central Eurasia region. Because Georgia presents a very good opportunity for planting and spreading the seeds of liberal democracy in Central Eurasia, the U.S. not only is willing to support our country, but also is interested in reaping the rewards from this young and growing ally. Because Georgia is surrounded by countries that are either not moving in the direction of this vision, or if moving at all, doing so very slowly, Georgia has a special opportunity to become the outpost of U.S. foreign policy and interests in central Eurasia.

Georgia's Future

To achieve this, however, we cannot simply rely on Western, primarily American, support, financial or otherwise. We have much to do ourselves. I wish to touch upon four issues in particular:

First, we must begin with constitutional changes and reforms which are essential for strengthening of our democratic institutions. There are several areas of focus:

- First, establishment of real separation of powers and true checks and balances, giving the legislative and the judiciary enough powers to serve as real checks on the executive.
- Second, development of symmetric territorial federalism, giving each of the Georgian regions significant and equal political autonomy.
- Third, implementation of the real rule of law, where laws are supreme and where fundamental rights are protected through the courts. Particular areas of importance are laws governing the rights of religious minorities and laws governing the maximization of freedom in the business environment.

Second, in addition to constitutional changes, we must end corruption. However, this process must begin by instituting a real free market and real free trade to allow for the business community to live in the legal sphere. Today, the business community is challenged from two different ends, forcing it to live in a corrupt manner. On the one hand, it has to live under bad laws, which create far too many artificial barriers, and has to pay taxes that are far too high given Georgian realities. All of this creates a **demand** from the business community to exist in the corrupt, extralegal market. On the other hand, the business community is under a constant attack from corrupt officials—the police and security forces, tax police, and customs. These individuals are paid very little, often with months delay. Thus

the government is in effect telling them, go take bribes. This is the old, Soviet-era model, one which Shevardnadze is very familiar with, and which he uses to stay in power. However, to end it, we must not only end the old mode, but we must create an environment in which there will not be a demand for special treatment on part of businesses by ensuring that the cost of legal operation is less than the cost of illegal operation.

Third, we must increase spending on defense and build a real army. This must happen even at the expense of every other government program, because without a real army we can never be certain of our security and we cannot contemplate NATO membership. Georgia must enter NATO, I believe, not simply as a consumer of security from the alliance, but as a contributor of security as well. For example, in Prague, NATO approved a new 21,000 person rapid reaction force, and as a NATO member, Georgia can and should be in a position to contribute one or two thousand men to this force on a constant basis. That will show our commitment to the alliance, and our ability to play a role alongside far more powerful and richer countries.

Fourth, we must secure for fair, free and truly democratic transition of power over the next two and a half years. Georgian people face a very simple choice—either a pro-Western political force, which believes in democratic values in its soul and not simply because of convenience, OR a populist, pro-Russian force which will promise everyone everything without being able to deliver. The forthcoming general elections in November 2003 will decide the future of our country—they will decide whether Georgia will be on the path toward greater democratic consolidation or toward authoritarianism.

In preparation for these elections, we face a great danger in the face of the revival of Citizens Union of Georgia. CUG's collapse was critical to the creation of new public sphere in Georgia, and the process of its revival is reminding us of the dangers associated with this party. Led by State Minister Avtandil Jorbenadze, the CUG has been using the state budget, public property, and other governmental resources to build the party. CUG's leadership is forcing individuals all across the country to join the party's ranks, threatening them with loss of jobs and arguing that government officials must be members of a so-called "state" party. The party is trying to discredit the Parliament, by having its leadership, especially the President, ignore the legislature's decisions and resolutions. It wishes to limit political freedom by stopping translation of Parliamentary sessions. Again under Jorbenadze's leadership, the governments has pursued a witch-hunt against business associated with opposition political parties and leaders. Finally, the

party's leadership is standing by while the Georgian political process is criminalized. Criminals, some guilty of murdering political leaders, have been freed from jail. The Interior Minister, Koba Narchemashvili, whom many hoped would bring important changes to the Ministry, has often joined with criminals in corrupting the Ministry even further. People have the sense that the country is returning to 1992-3, when there was no protection and security in the streets, and when everyone feared to be outside.

The fact is that notwithstanding these difficulties, Georgian people must be given a chance to elect their government. The international community, but especially the United States, can do much to help promote free and fair elections. The Bush Administration must pressure President Shevardnadze to allow for democratic elections, and threaten to cut ties with him if he permits ballot stuffing or other electoral criminality. Many in the West still recognize Shevardnadze as a guarantor of political stability, and do not yet see a political force which will be able to defend democratic values in Georgia. Fortunately, there is a force which has power all across the country, which truly believes in democracy, and not just because it is a popular thing to do.

Much can be done inside Georgia in the area of helping ensure free elections as well. The role of the media and civil society in monitoring the electoral process and putting pressure on the government is vital.

At the same time, cooperation among different parties is also essential. Today, our party is participating in a dialogue with a number of parties about developing a united front to formulate strategies for securing of democracy in Georgia. We have serious political disagreements with a number of individuals and parties involved in this dialogue. We will nevertheless continue to be a part of these conversations, so long as parties that are part of this dialogue continue to truly stand for democracy—not simply out of window-dressing, but out of belief. However, we will participate in the forthcoming elections as a philosophically-based individuals political force. We wish to present our vision of limited government, maximization of individual freedom and opportunity, unequivocal support for private property, and movement of power to local authorities to the citizens of the elections. Our intention is to win these elections, and we believe that our current standing with the people and our past performance gives us an opportunity to achieve this. However, much like in preparation for the elections, after November 2003 we will work with those parties that are committed to freedom, democracy and natural rights to govern the country. After the election this might require a coalition form of government, if we or another party are not

able to gain a majority. However, the dialogue today is aimed at developing for united front for strategies to secure democracy, and not to establish a grand coalition.

In a liberal democracy, Madison once wrote, the power of the government must be “derived from the superior will of the people.” This is the fundamental principle of good and just government that we must install in Georgia. The people are the supreme authority and arbiter in a democracy. The forthcoming elections will give our government a chance to prove whether it stands true to this fundamental principle. I and my friends intend to do everything to ensure that it does, and I call on all of Georgia’s friends to play a role in this process as well since your support is of outmost importance.