

## **FITTING THE CAUCASUS INTO A GLOBAL FRAMEWORK: GEORGIAN PERSPECTIVES AND INTERNATIONAL STAKES [Report]**

**1. The Parliament of Georgia hosted the 76th Rose-Roth Seminar in Tbilisi on 23-25 March 2011. The meeting brought together parliamentarians from NATO and Partner countries, government officials, as well as academics, journalists and NGOs, to discuss international strategies in the South Caucasus, and ways to create new momentum for addressing remaining challenges and disputes in the region. The seminar was jointly organized by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) and the Parliament of Georgia, with the generous support of the Swiss Ministry of Defence.**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

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### **II. OPENING SESSION**

2. The Opening Session was moderated by Giorgi Kandelaki, Head of the Georgian delegation to the NATO PA.

3. Welcoming participants, Giorgi Kandelaki, noted that in spite of the war of 2008, Georgia has demonstrated its commitment to reforms and to Euro-Atlantic Integration. Georgia values its constructive relationship with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and it is grateful for the Assembly's continuous support in the process towards NATO membership. Georgia is delighted to host the 76th Rose-Roth seminar, the third such seminar in Tbilisi, which will provide a great opportunity to discuss important issues of the region.

4. Dr. Karl Lamers, President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, welcomed all participants and thanked the Parliament of Georgia for hosting this event. The NATO PA has supported Georgia throughout its transformation and backed Georgia's Euro-Atlantic membership aspirations. Georgia today is a young, vibrant and dynamic nation that has a clear sense of purpose and direction. At the same time, there are some concerns. Undoubtedly, the greatest concern is the legacy of the conflict over Abkhazia and South Ossetia that culminated in the tragic events of August 2008. Dr. Lamers reminded participants that the Assembly had condemned Russia's disproportionate use of force and the violation of Georgia's territorial sovereignty and called for a return to the status quo ante. The Assembly had also denounced Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. At the same time, the NATO PA had stressed the need to resolve the conflict peacefully through dialogue.

5. The Assembly had strengthened its institutional relationship with Georgia by creating the Georgia-NATO Interparliamentary Council, which was designed as a parliamentary counterpart to the NATO-Georgia Commission and is a clear demonstration of the Assembly's solidarity with Georgia.

6. Dr. Lamers said that he did not see any contradiction in supporting Georgia and promoting dialogue with Russia and he regretted that the Russian delegation to the NATO PA had decided not to attend the seminar. Their participation would have sent a truly positive signal and would have been mutually beneficial.

7. The President pointed out that it is crucial for NATO parliamentarians to show sustained attention and support towards Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in their transition process towards democracy, security and prosperity. Georgia could become a role model for other nations yearning to change and democratize their political systems. Therefore, it is crucial that Georgia continues to make progress in terms of free and fair elections, freedom of expression and forging less antagonistic and more constructive relations with the political opposition.

8. In conclusion, Dr. Lamers expressed his hope that this seminar would be a constructive contribution to progress in the region.

9. H.E. Mr. Guenther Baechler, Ambassador of the Swiss Confederation in Georgia, in his welcoming remarks, reconfirmed Switzerland's long-term commitment to the region, as shown by its continued support to NATO's Partnership for Peace and to the NATO PA's Rose-Roth Seminar programme.

10. Ambassador Baechler noted that today's security is very complex because it is composed of a whole variety of levels, dimensions and factors. The levels reach from internal security to border security, to security with immediate neighbours as well as with regional powers and global players. The dimensions may encompass military and state security, but increasingly also economic, environmental and human security. Many factors have an impact on the security system such as old conflict patterns, perceptions and misperceptions and changing economic, social and political challenges.

11. It is understandable that in many Arab and non-Arab countries, social and political movements have a major impact on

security. Today, the world is experiencing a second or even third wave of democratization in the aftermath of 1989. Around the world, people are asking for democracy and freedom. It is a genuine cry for freedom. This cry will not only be heard in the Arab world; it is already being heard in Iran, China, in Russia and elsewhere. Insecurity is very much related to repressive regimes such as in Sudan. Security on the other hand is related to democracy. Without democracy there is no comprehensive security. Security and freedom cannot and shall not be separated and divided. In the future there is no security against, "there is only security with". Mr Ambassador concluded that it is a high time to think about a functioning collective security system.

12. Mr David Bakradze, Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, noted that co-operation with the NATO PA is a high priority for Georgia and Georgia is very grateful to the NATO PA for its continuing support.

13. If one looks at Georgia's development during the past 10 years, then one would see that Georgia has achieved a lot in spite of the Soviet legacy. The most important achievement is visible in the fight against corruption. More than 2000 officials have been arrested during the past 7 years, and some were members of parliament from the majority party. Public trust in institutions rose to a very high level, especially public trust in police. Around 3 % of the population trusted the police before the reforms and now 73% of the population say that they trust the police. Public opinion polls also show that during the last year, 97 % of people polled said that they did not pay any bribes in 2010.

14. Another achievement is modernization, which changed the way the bureaucracy works. If someone wanted to receive a business licence 10 years ago, it would require a large bribe and it would be a very long process. Today, one can receive a licence in three days. Everyone can see the results of the educational, political, institutional, constitutional and election reforms. It is important to note that all reforms are carried out in the difficult context of Russian aggression. But in spite of this situation, Georgia has chosen to be democratic and to continue its reforms on the way to Euro-Atlantic integration.

15. As for Russia's occupation of Georgia, Georgia wants dialogue, said Mr Bakradze, but Russia refuses dialogue. Georgia has been negotiating with Russia for 15 years now and Russia has never given Georgia an answer to the question "what does Russia expect from Georgia?"

16. Mr Bakradze concluded that the aspiration to NATO membership is very important for Georgia, and public support demonstrates this. Small democracies need allies with whom they feel safe. NATO is the only future place for Georgia.

17. In his keynote address, Vladimir Socor, Senior Fellow of the Jamestown Foundation, noted that Georgia has a record for public support for joining NATO among former and present aspirant countries. Romania was leading before with 70% of public support. This demonstrates that joining NATO is a social and public desire in Georgia. In 2008, Georgia received its Annual National Plan and since then has considerably improved in military, defence and civil areas. Mr Socor stressed that the NATO PA should remind NATO to acknowledge political progress in Georgia. NATO's policy towards Georgia is not sufficient, there is a lack of seriousness in the open door policy and NATO has "set the bar higher for Georgia". Georgia's geography should not disqualify the country from NATO membership.

18. Previous candidate countries never found themselves in a vulnerable situation as Georgia. There is a regional deficit of security in this region and this is why Russia invaded Georgia in 2008. The Russian monopoly on peacekeeping was tolerated for a long time during the 1990s, and as a result, the sphere of Russian influence "hardened" in the Georgian occupied territories.

19. In the late 1990s Georgia advanced to become a net provider of security in the region, dealing successfully, for example, with Chechen terrorists in the Pankisi Gorge. Today, Georgia continues to demonstrate that it could be a strong security provider. It is contributing to most NATO operations, including Afghanistan where it operates without any national caveats and in the most dangerous area.

20. Regarding the NATO Summit in Bucharest and the decision that Georgia will become a member of NATO, Mr Socor noted that this was interpreted differently by Georgia and Russia. Russia's interpretation was: NATO did not offer MAP to Georgia because its members were divided and did not want to challenge Russia. This gave Russia a green light to move into Georgia in 2008 and SFE was effectively suspended so there was no monitoring of forces massed on Georgia's northern border. There is also an undeclared arms embargo on Georgia such that Georgia is not even being provided with defence equipment. This sign of deference to Russia effectively supports Russia's policy of seeking to ensure that its neighbours are in a defenceless military vacuum.

21. The Geneva process is not addressing ethnic cleansing. It is stabilizing the situation but there is no fundamental improvement on the ground. Russia wants Georgia to sign an agreement on non-use of weapons with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which would mean that Georgia recognizes the secession and would create an impression that it is a local conflict and not a conflict with Russia. This will also give Russia a guarantee that it could maximize its influence on the process as an intermediary. Georgia should sign an agreement with Russia and not with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, concluded Mr Socor.

22. Georgia's bid to join NATO rests on government performance. After the revolution of 2003, a new group of state builders came to power. They are all young, most of them received western education and they are all committed to the transformation of society. Thanks to this leadership, Georgia became the most de-sovietised country in the post-soviet area (except the Baltic states which never had the same Soviet influence as other republics of the former Soviet Union). Today, Georgia ranks very high when it comes to reforms and its success could be inspirational to other post-soviet countries, including Russia. Russia's political commentators have already talked about Georgia's success in police reform and the fight against corruption as a

positive phenomenon. Georgia could become NATO's success story.

### III. THE GEORGIAN-RUSSIAN CONFLICT

The session of the Georgian-Russian Conflict was moderated by Lucio Malan, Rapporteur of the Sub-Committee on Democratic Governance of the Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security

23. Eka Tkeshelashvili, Georgian State Minister for Reintegration, emphasised that the Georgian government is very eager to find a solution to the conflict with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The resolution of this conflict will help to provide security in the whole region. Georgia developed an action plan where it identified activities for reconciliation such as a possibility of health care, education, people to people relations, development of business relations and connectivity of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons). There is considerable progress, especially when it comes to health care. Georgia finances the medical treatment of Abkhazians and this has a positive impact. "Reconnecting people" and "people-to-people relations" are very important factors in the process of solving the conflict. The problem is that young people living in Georgia do not remember living together in one unified country. This problem should be addressed and young people from Abkhazia and South Ossetia should be reconnected with young people in the rest of Georgia. Development of business relations is also very important. Prices are very high in the occupied territories because they rose to the same levels as the Russian neighbouring territories but locals cannot afford such high prices. They should have the same prices as in Georgia.

24. Concluding her presentation, the Minister said that it was not easy to work with the occupied territories. If Russia were to see Georgia's efforts for reconciliation as a threat, it would obstruct the process. Co-ordination with international organisations is very important. It is a learning process for all parties but there is a firm commitment to achieving results.

25. Batu Kutelia, Deputy Secretary of the National Security Council of Georgia, noted that there were three questions for consideration: Why is there a conflict? What should we do to solve it? And what are the wider implications of this conflict? The answer to the first question lies in Russia's conflict with democratic values. Assessing motives is a challenge, as is finding pro-active solutions to the problem. The main goal for Russia is not to occupy Georgia's territory but to halt Georgia's progress towards irreversible democratic development and prevent Georgia's membership of NATO. To counter this Russian policy, Georgia is firmly proceeding with reforms in all spheres of democratic development - it has been improving interoperability with NATO and it has been developing close relations with the EU.

26. The answer to the second question ("What should we do?") lies in an international format, primarily with the UN and the OSCE. Unfortunately, Russia has a right of veto in these organisations and also has an indirect influence on NATO and the EU. The EU mission in Georgia is very important but should be transformed into a fully pledged peacekeeping force. Georgia needs solid security guarantees to continue with reforms, stressed Mr Kutelia. NATO should give clear signals and international organisations should clearly refer to "occupation" as "occupation" and "ethnic cleansing" as "ethnic cleansing".

27. The answer to the third question is very simple. The implications of this conflict will influence other conflicts in the region and will have a negative effect on the democratic development of the region.

28. H.E. Mr Hansjörg Haber, Head of the EU Monitoring Mission, emphasized that the conflict was not progressing towards a resolution and that the conflict was broader than just a conflict with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

29. Russia used the two de facto entities to gain leverage over Georgia but in fact Russia has lost great part of its influence over Georgia. The Ambassador noted that in October, 2008 when the EU Monitoring Mission was deployed in Georgia, officials in Tbilisi told him that Russia had three goals: to topple President Saakashvili; to undermine Georgia's role as an energy transit route and to forever bar Georgia from becoming a NATO member. The Ambassador left it to the participants to judge the credibility of the last argument but he said that the first two have been on the agenda constantly over the past two and a half years.

30. Regarding the Geneva talks, the Ambassador noted that Russia is trying to move from its role as a party in the conflict to the role of peace-manager, claiming that it was not a party in the conflict. Russia also started again to insist on a non-use of force agreement to be signed between Georgia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but at the same time refusing to make itself part of such agreement. The Ambassador noted that at this point, the Russians do not really know how to regain influence over Georgia, so they are trying to get the guarantor's role.

31. Georgia's policy towards Russia is quite one-sided. Basically it consists of using international leverage to demonstrate the continued character of the principle of territorial integrity. The Ambassador underlined that Georgia was not engaging directly with Russia and instead was doing so through its American and European partners.

32. The Ambassador warned that some of Georgia's demands would hardly promote Tbilisi's objective of the reintegration of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He cited the example of Georgia's position on Russia's WTO bid, wherein Tbilisi in exchange for consent to Russia's WTO entry wants to have some sort of control over the trade at the Abkhaz and South Ossetian sections of the Georgian-Russian border.

33. In his presentation, David Smith, Director of the Georgian Security Analysis Center, warned the participants about a big geopolitical game being played in the region, including the militarisation of the occupied territories. He noted that the conflict did

not begin in 2008 and Russia's invasion was long and well planned. There were clear messages during the Russian invasion. Russia hit the port of Poti, the town of Gori and a railway bridge, and "bracketed" a pipeline with deliberate near misses to show who was in control.

34. Russia continues to militarise Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Latest additions include: BM-30 Smerch MLRS, SS-21 Tochka and S-300 air defence system. Russia could move to the Gali region, which would allow it to control an entry to Georgia. Military bases have been built to create a barrier between the North and the South. Russia occupied Akhgori because it is located on the high ground, 30 km closer to Tbilisi than Tskhinvali and beyond a river, which would have been a military obstacle. Mr Smith reiterated that the conflict did not end in 2008. There are three Russian military bases circling Georgia, which could be used in the future. There is also the modernisation of the Russian fleet in Sevastopol, including potentially a "Mistral" class ship to be purchased from France.

35. Mr Smith emphasized that all western countries have an interest in the region and it is not only energy, there is also a NATO Northern Distribution Network Corridor to be taken into an account. Concluding, Mr Smith stressed that if NATO has said that Georgia "will" become a member of NATO then Georgia should become a member of NATO.

36. Dr. Sergey Markedonov, Russian political researcher and a Visiting Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, USA, gave his presentation via a video conference from Washington.

37. He began by saying that against the background of the events in the Middle East, the situation in the Greater Caucasus has lost its acuteness. The new escalation of violence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia with possible complete annexation of Georgia by Russia, which was expected by many in the West, has not occurred. The "revanche" by NATO, anticipated in Moscow, has not happened. The implementation of the idea of the North Atlantic Alliance to enlarge at the expense of the South Caucasian states has been set aside for a long time. The Armenian-Turkish reconciliation has also failed.

38. A detailed analysis of the geopolitical trends in the Caucasian region demonstrates that a new status quo has been shaping up in the region. The old status quo was established in early 1990's as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and a series of armed and latent conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Chechnya and Nagorno-Karabakh. There were several unsuccessful attempts to solve the "frozen" conflicts in Chechnya by Russia, in 1999-2000, by Georgia in Abkhazia in 1998 and 2001, and in South Ossetia in 2004. Unlike Moscow and Tbilisi, Azerbaijan targetted its efforts to change the diplomatic format of the peace settlement and achieved quite good results, making the negotiations on Nagorno-Karabakh bilateral between Yerevan and Baku without Stepanakert.

39. August 2008 became the point of the qualitative break of the old status quo. The principle of the inviolability of the borders between the entities of the former Soviet Union, which had remained intact for no less than 17 years, was questioned. A precedent of recognition of the new states on the Eurasian territory among former Soviet autonomies was created. Serious redistribution of internal and external policies has taken place. The Russian economic and military-political presence became priority for Abkhazia while for the South Ossetia the priority is in organizing the control over the financial aid, provided by Russia, for rehabilitation of the Republic. Russia lost leverage on Georgia, pushing Tbilisi closer to the United States at the same time pushing Abkhazia and South Ossetia further from Georgia. This consolidated a new status quo.

40. This new status quo influenced Armenia and Azerbaijan. This is why there is such growth of interest in the Armenian-Turkish relations, which has not been seen since 1991-1993. The Armenian-Turkish dialogue has become a serious factor of influence on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement. Turkey signed two Protocols on the normalization of relations with Armenia in October 2009, which professional optimists called "historical" and "breakthrough" but have not yet been ratified by the parliaments. Turkey is playing a parallel game in the Middle East. Ankara's swift reorientation towards this region actualizes Israel's interference in Caucasian affairs. Jewish lobbying circles of the United States are already discussing the thesis of the possible recognition of Armenian Genocide (or at least a serious promotion of this theme) in Israel and in the United States by means of establishing co-operation with the Armenian lobby.

41. Iran has also been playing a role in the formation of a new status quo in the Caucasus because it does not like the emergence of various external actors in its neighbourhood. In April 2010 the Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki announced that Tehran worked out some proposals that might be considered as alternatives for the "renewed Madrid principles," signed by the US, Russian and French Presidents. Iran is not interested in a conflict resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh with the engagement of international peace-keeping forces. It has already insisted on the presence of only regional forces.

42. Regarding the role of Russia, Dr Markedonov noted that while Russia has been claiming a role in the Caucasian hegemony, it faces some problems in its own North Caucasian field. Having crashed Chechen national separatism, Moscow now faces the problem of radical Islamism in Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya. Agreeing to unilateral support to the Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov, Russia has got a new challenge in the form of republican particularism. And finally, having recognized Abkhazian independence, Moscow faces growing Cherkessian nationalism in Adygea, Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria.

43. Concluding, Dr. Markedonov stated that there is a serious regrouping of forces in the Greater Caucasus. Old rules of the game, formats of talks and the UN and the OSCE missions in Georgia are not effective enough. Iran and Turkey are actively getting back into the big geopolitical game while Moscow's relations with Armenia and non-recognized republics are changing, probably for the worse. New concerned players such as Israel might appear in the region, while the US and EU might also

assume a bigger role.

#### IV. THE EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION OF GEORGIA

The session of the Euro-Atlantic Integration of Georgia was moderated by Assen AGOV, Special Co-ordinator of the Georgia-NATO Inter Parliamentary Council, NATO PA

44. Giorgi Baramidze, Vice Prime Minister of Georgia and a State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic integration emphasised that Georgia is moving towards Euro and Euro-Atlantic integration in spite of the occupation of its territory, in spite of the ethnic cleansing and in spite of the conflict with Russia. Why is integration so important to Georgia? Because the country needs security in order to continue its democratic development and to continue with its reforms. Georgia is now the number one reformer in the world, according to the World Bank and is ranked the third highest in fighting corruption, according to the EBRD, but of course, there is still a lot left to be done.

45. Russia still thinks there is a chance to re-take Georgia. When the Russian people see the results of successful reforms in Georgia, they will ask their government why they cannot have the same. This is what the Russian government is trying to avoid. Georgia is ready to co-operate with Russia but in an atmosphere of respect for Georgia's territorial integrity. Georgia and Russia share a common interest in co-operation in the fight against terrorism, and in co-operating in the spheres of economics, education, science and culture amongst others.

46. Georgia is preparing itself for membership at NATO through the Annual National Programme (ANP), which highlights the reforms that need to be addressed. The NATO-Georgia Commission is another instrument, helping Georgia's integration. Georgia needs 2-3 years to be eligible for NATO membership and then NATO should follow its Bucharest commitment.

47. European integration is also moving forward successfully with the neighbourhood action plan. It is now the 5th cycle of implementing reforms under this plan. The EU and Georgia are now negotiating the associate status.

48. "All reforms that Georgia does, it does for itself, and not for the EU and NATO. Reforms help Georgia to be united and democratic", concluded Mr Baramidze.

49. Andro Barnovi, Head of the Military Academy of Georgia, noted that we have a new era of partnership and shared responsibility but of course, this new era is facing a lot of challenges such as terrorism, extremism, isolationist philosophy of former empires, nuclear proliferations, ecology and many others. Georgia is facing the same challenges. The entire South Caucasus region is split by mistrust and irrational fears. There is a need to solve these challenges. Georgia could be a good agent for peace and security in this region, acting together with the western partners. The political and strategic orientation of Georgia requires a strong co-operation with NATO. This would be a very important component for the identity of Georgian citizenship in years to come.

50. Education is the cornerstone for Georgia. Reforms are now underway in the National Defence Academy. The Georgian Army today is much more competent and disciplined than before. Georgia is building a "sandwich model" for its Armed Forces, which means interchangeable periods of service and education throughout an officer's entire career. There are significant reforms in administration, which will help to manage three schools: Army Officers' Basic Training School; Captains Career School and the Command and General Staff College. Officers and civilians from the entire Armed Forces and Ministry of Defence will undergo language training in the NDA Language School.

51. Mr Barnovi concluded that every endeavour is aimed at regional and Euro-Atlantic co operation with a very clear focus on NATO membership. The National Defence Academy wants to contribute to peace, democracy, trust building and co-operation in the region and to best contribute to NATO goals of wider partnership.

#### V. PANEL OF AMBASSADORS

The panel of Ambassadors was moderated by Assen AGOV, Special Co-ordinator of the Georgia NATO Inter Parliamentary Council, NATO PA

52. H.E. Mr John Bass, Ambassador of the United States to Georgia, began his presentation by confirming the US support of Georgia's membership in NATO. The question is not "if" but "when" and most importantly "how", said the Ambassador. Georgia is a net contributor to security, and it provides more security than liability. Georgia is an excellent contributor to the Alliance's collective security as it participates in almost all NATO's operations. Georgian troops are serving in Afghanistan together with US troops in the most dangerous area. Under the Annual National Plan, Georgia is proceeding with successful reforms and it demonstrates its readiness for membership by continuing its reforms.

53. The US invested over 55 million dollars in democracy, governance and economic programmes in Georgia. "We expect a lot from Georgia but Georgia has a right to expect from us too", noted Ambassador Bass and ended his presentation by confirming that the US will continue to provide political support to Georgia.



54. H.E. Mr Linas Linkevicius, Ambassador of Lithuania to NATO, reminded the participants that at the Lisbon Summit, Heads of State agreed to further enhance existing partnerships. NATO's partnership mechanisms have evolved substantially over the past 20 years. Today, NATO is in partnership with 70 countries. The Council has been developing a more efficient and flexible partnership policy, which would be ready for the April 2011 Foreign Ministers' meeting in Berlin.

55. At the 2008 Bucharest Summit, NATO Heads of State agreed that Georgia will become a member of NATO and this decision was reaffirmed in Lisbon. Practical co-operation with Georgia continues successfully through the NATO-Georgia Commission and the Annual National Programme, which is the same as the Membership Action Plan.

56. Georgia is in a better position today than Lithuania was before joining NATO. Lithuania did not have any programmes and did not have any feedback. There are some opponents of Georgia's membership but this only means that Georgia should convince the sceptics with its successful reforms, particularly democratic, electoral and judicial reforms, as well as security and defence sector reforms. It is important not to get frustrated and continue moving forward, concluded Ambassador Linkevicius.

57. H.E. Philip Dimitrov, Head of the EU delegation to Georgia, confirmed that Georgia is moving ahead in its co-operation with the EU. Georgia and the EU have started negotiations on the Association Agreement and on the Comprehensive Trade Agreement. A lot has been achieved during the past 7 years but a lot remains to be achieved.

58. Some Georgians say that Europe has not been interested in Georgia since the war. It is not a fair statement because the European Union is engaged in hundreds of programmes with Georgia. Georgia is not abandoned.

59. Ambassador concluded by encouraging Georgia "You should be able to appreciate being that close. Being a part of family is not a gift but a fact of life, it means sharing the same values and common efforts".

## VI. GEORGIA'S DEMOCRATISATION AGENDA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

The session was moderated by Eden COLE, Deputy Head, Operations NIS & Head, Asia Task Force, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of the Armed Forces (DCAF)

### A. INTERNAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS, CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM, ROLE OF OPPOSITION

60. Ghia Nodia, Chairman of the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, stated in his presentation that all parties have two points of consensus: 1) democracy is the only way of development for Georgia and 2) Georgia is not fully democratic. International experts say that Georgia has a mixed system – it is not democratic and it is not authoritarian. Why does Georgia have a democratic deficit?

61. Some say that Saakashvili is too authoritarian and that the government is too arrogant. But when you ask the Georgian people if they should be replaced, the people have doubts. Another aspect is the Constitution, which is not democratic enough; it gives too many powers to the President. But the problem is partially solved with new Constitutional changes of October 2010. These changes provide for a mixed system with more emphasis on the parliament. They will come into force in 2013. The speaker thought that Georgia would not have a consolidated democracy in 2013 but it is moving in the right direction. The priority is to disperse power and to develop democratic processes.

62. Giorgi Targamadze, the Parliamentary Minority Leader, noted that today, Georgia is at a crossroads. If political parties succeed in changing the election environment fundamentally and restoring trust towards the election process, the winning political force in a fair competition will continue to govern the country. It is highly likely that this governing force will be mixture of different political forces as all previously conducted surveys indicate, and the present ruling party might also be a part of this coalition.

63. Improvement of the election environment means a number of reforms in the following fields: administration resources, media, finances, transparency, system for electoral disputes, etc. In this regard, the government needs to consider all the internal and external factors and start relevant reforms immediately. Otherwise, Georgia will continue to be governed either by a usurper of power with a soft authoritarian model or by radical forces which will come to power by toppling the current government as a result of revolution.

64. The two most radical political parties in Georgia are talking intensely about inevitable revolutionary changes, therefore, a real threat emerges that demonstrators may escalate the situation in Tbilisi streets by burning cars and breaking shop-windows. In this case, the law enforcement bodies will unquestionably attempt to stabilise the situation which might easily cause casualties, detention of opposition leaders, and the closure of pro-opposition TV stations. Finally, it will result in a full de-legitimization of the Georgian government, and this is where the threat lies of Russia's military engagement in the process.

65. Russia will take "responsibility" for stabilising the escalated political situation in Georgia, and will try to justify its actions saying that they are helping Georgians to get rid of their illegitimate government. It is quite possible for the situation to escalate in Georgia in the immediate future, which could be followed by a second wave of Russian aggression.

66. The Christian Democratic Movement of Georgia, which Mr Targamadze represents, fully supports Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and openly champions Georgia's participation in the joint efforts for strengthening global security, including the ISAF

operation.

## B. MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN GEORGIA

67. Louis Navarro, Head of the National Democratic Institute in Georgia, said that NDI has worked in Georgia since 1994, and has conducted programs in political party development, parliamentary strengthening, safeguarding elections, civil society development, women's political participation, local governance and conducted public opinion research examining citizens' attitudes toward reforms.

68. In July 2010, NDI conducted an opinion poll on public attitudes towards elections in Georgia, which showed that the most important national issues of concern for population are: unemployment, territorial integrity, poverty and pensions. The poll also showed that the economic development was not related to the democratic development. 46% of people polled said that Georgia was not a democracy yet, while 33% believed that it was. For most people polled democracy meant "freedom of speech", "equality before law/protection of justice, and "liberty". 38 % of people polled identified "independence of judiciary" as the most important reform for Georgia to be carried out and 20 % identified "electoral reform" as the most important on the agenda.

69. Mr Navarro also commented on the development of the NGOs in Georgia. He noted that there is a considerable improvement in transparency and accountability. Today it is much easier to start an NGO. There is a new NGO liaison office, which can develop legislation. However, there is also a disproportional reliance on international funding and a lack of culture. The Government sees NGOs as the opposition force and it made it difficult for private sector to support NGOs (taxes are too high).

70. Robert Parson, Director of PIK TV channel, noted that the Georgian media are "partly free", according to Freedom House's annual index of global media freedom in April 2010, a view pretty much adhered to by Reporters Without Borders, which ranked Georgia 99th out of 178 countries in its annual survey last October.

71. The government does not have a monopoly over the news. Kavkasia TV and Maestro make no secret of their anti-Saakashvili position, although their reach is limited to the Tbilisi area and a few other key cities like Rustavi and Batumi but that makes up at least 30 per cent of the population.

72. The same can be said of radio and the print media. If you're a Georgian, it's not difficult to find a wide spectrum of political views in the national and regional media. The problem with the Georgian media is that they so accurately reflect the national political culture. This is a polarised society in which the media behave like rival cheer-leaders at a football game. Georgian television not only reflects the polarisation of society but also plays a critical part in sharpening and hardening its divisions. There may be pluralism of views but it is not contributing to freedom of speech.

73. There has been some attempt to correct this. The Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) now has a board of governors that makes some attempt to reflect the spectrum of political views. The GPB has launched its very own C-SPAN, Channel 2, which gives every political party or group the airtime to state its views but the format in which it operates is so indigestible that no one wants to watch it. This is also true of the GPB in general. Despite efforts to improve its output, viewing figures remain depressingly low - 3 per cent of the national audience, according to President Saakashvili himself.

74. Beyond the GPB the picture is bleaker: the two biggest commercial stations are Rustavi Ori and Imedi, which both broadcast nationwide. These are slick, professional organisations that devote considerable attention to presentation of their product - although the accent is more on entertainment than news. Professional standards in the news area are no better than anywhere else in the Georgian media - and the content is very pro-government. There are no strong media unions to defend the rights of journalists and faith in the independence of the judiciary is weak. Other problems include: the pressure to conform, the temptation to self-censorship, the lack of professional pride, the absence of a middle-ground and the absence of an institutional support base for high quality objective journalism.

75. Kanal PIK - Pervyi Informatsionnyi Kavkazskii (First Caucasian News), which Mr Parsons represents, is a part of the national media environment but its prime audience is not in Georgia but beyond Georgia's borders - and it broadcasts in Russian not Georgian. Part of the purpose of this channel is diplomatic. The only way the channel can gain the trust of its audience is by being honest, open, fair and balanced.

76. And there is a need in the Caucasus for a channel like this - one that is open, independent and impartial in a region that is dominated by the Russian media. The Kremlin has enjoyed a virtual monopoly over information in the North Caucasus and, albeit to a lesser degree, through the penetration of Russian television to Armenia and Azerbaijan. To a very large extent, the peoples of this region - outside of Georgia - receive their information about this country through the distorting prism of the Russian media. One of the aims of Kanal PIK is to present a fuller, more nuanced, more honest and less aggressive picture of Georgia.

## VII. REGIONAL SECURITY PATTERNS

The session was moderated by Dennis SAMMUT, Executive Director, LINKS

#### A. SOUTH CAUCASUS

77. Richard Giragosian, Director of the Armenian Centre for National and International Studies, warned the participants of the danger of escalation of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh because there was a high level of provocation. He noted that it was not a zero-sum game. There is the question of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. There is a high level of frustration due to a lack of progress and the status quo is unacceptable for both sides.

78. Armenia has demonstrated that it could be a contributor to security but it has never claimed NATO membership. The threat to Armenia is related to its isolation and the possibility it could become a Russian garrison. Mr Giragosian stressed that the Armenian-Turkish relations should be improved and all sides should focus on the present and future and not be locked on the past. Georgia should play a more significant role in the process of finding a solution to the problem.

79. Russia benefits from tensions in Nagorno-Karabakh because it wants to deploy its peacekeepers. Mr Giragosian warned that if tensions continue, there could be another war.

80. Erkin Gadirli, legal researcher and civic activist from Azerbaijan, noted in his presentation, that Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have in the past been in the Persian, Turkish, Russian and Soviet Empires. All these Empires influenced these countries differently. Today, Russia has a bad relationship with Georgia but a good one with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Turkey has good relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia but not with Armenia. Iran has bad relations with Azerbaijan but good relations with Armenia and Georgia. Azerbaijan and Georgia have strategic interdependence when it comes to energy security. Without Georgia, Azerbaijan does not have entry to the world market. Azerbaijan-Armenia relations are very complicated; there is no co-operation in any area. Azerbaijan is ready for co-operation as soon as Armenia frees the occupied territories.

81. Role of Russia is very significant in the region with a Russian military base in Armenia and its investments in Armenia's economic sphere. Russia owns Armenia both economically and politically. If Azerbaijan wants to talk to Armenia, it has to negotiate with Russia. When Russia asked the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to come to Moscow for negotiations, people started to believe that something might change after these talks but the Presidents came back and nothing happened. Then there was the Turkish initiative, which was welcomed by the Azeri people. If Turkey could improve its relations with Armenia, then it would be the only country to have good relations with all three countries of the South Caucasus. Turkey could have used soft power to influence the process. However, the Turkish initiative failed and the only country that gained from it is Russia because it guards the border between Armenia and Turkey.

82. The EU should play a more important role in the region. The EU lost an opportunity by abolishing the position of the EU representative. The EU should not endorse the political elite in both countries.

83. Mitati Celikpala, Associate professor of International Relations at Kadir Has University (Istanbul, Turkey), emphasized that Turkey has concerns about this region and it has changed its position recently to be involved more in the region as a soft power. However, it is not an easy task because Turkey is a member of NATO and it is negotiating membership with the EU. Turkey finds itself more in the West, although Black Sea security is very important. Turkey acts in the region as a representative from the West.

84. Turkey is trying to change to multi-dimensional diplomacy and it is a learning process. Turkey supports Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration and its territorial integrity. Georgia is one of Turkey's most important trade partners after Azerbaijan.

85. Frozen conflicts have a direct effect on Turkey's domestic situation. After the war in 2008, Turkey's economic infrastructure was damaged considerably (pipelines stopped, roads were closed and trade ships could not get through).

86. Mr Celikpala regretted that the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement was not a success. He said that more positive public opinion should be created in both countries and that talks should be reconvened.

#### B. NORTH CAUCASUS

87. Andrei Piontkovsky, Leading Researcher at the Institute for Systems Analysis at the Russian Academy of Science, noted that the violence in the North Caucasus was becoming less a serious regional conflict and more an existential threat to the entire Russian Federation. The war against separatism in the North Caucasus has now evolved into the war against Islamic fundamentalism. Ignited by the violence of the Chechen wars, Islamic-sponsored terrorism spread widely in the region, as Russian policies, similar to those during the Chechen war, are increasing the number of Islamists. President Medvedev, for example, is regularly calling for the extremists to be "burned to ashes" and for everybody to be punished, including those "washing linen and preparing soup for terrorists." Such appeals could only result in a significant increase in brutality.

88. Russia has lost the war against Chechen separatists. The winner is Ramzan Kadyrom, although he is a Putin appointee but in reality he is virtually independent from the Kremlin. The tribute that the Kremlin pays Kadyrom and the corrupted elites of the other Caucasian republics has purchased palaces and gold pistols for men who are driving the region's young, unemployed and disadvantaged down the path of Islamic revolution. Across the Caucasus, young people have grown up absolutely lost to Russia and increasingly susceptible to recruitment in the ranks of Allah's warriors. There is a big mental gap today that separates



Russian and the youth of the Caucasus. Young Muscovites hate the Caucasians, who behave increasingly provocative on the streets of Russian cities.

89. But neither the Kremlin nor its North Caucasian allies are ready for formal separation. The former remains wedded to its phantom imperial illusions about a "zone of privileged interests", while the latter are happy to take handouts from the Russian state budget.

90. Alex Rondeli, Chairman of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, said that the North Caucasus remains not only the most insecure area of Russia but also on Europe's borderland. Continuing instability and violence in the region poses serious security problems to the neighbouring South Caucasus states.

91. Since the collapse of the USSR, the North Caucasus has never been calm and Chechnya remained the primary trouble spot of the region. The first and second Chechen wars made the region known to the whole world. Former President Putin succeeded in convincing the world that Chechnya had been calmed. However, in reality, a low-level insurgency continued and violence and terrorist attacks escalated in 2009 and 2010.

92. Several issues contributed to further deterioration of the situation in the region: "chechenization" policy, confrontation between Ingushes and Ossetians, territorial mergers, and the Russification of the region. The most important change in the political and security situation in the North Caucasus is the growing Islamization of the anti-Russian resistance. The fact that the new generation that grew up in Chechnya had very few ties with Russia has contributed to the spread of radical Islamism in the whole region. Radical Islamization resulted in its institutionalization with the creation of the so called "Caucasian Emirate", which was announced by Doku Umarov in 2007. It marked the transition from a nationalist-separatist Chechen resistance to a diffuse regional Jihad. The military capabilities of the Emirate so far do not allow for serious military actions but are sufficient for attacks on security forces as well as suicide attacks.

93. Russia's strategy in the region has been mainly the use of force and suppression. Only recently, Russia changed its strategy into a more sophisticated approach: improving the general atmosphere and developing business in the region. Economic and social conditions in the region are one of the worst in Russia. Even during the Soviet times, Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan were the most heavily subsidized (up to 70%) regions of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the USSR, the region's socio-economic situation was further aggravated. Without improving the economic and social conditions, not much can be achieved politically and in the security sphere.

94. The situation in the region will deteriorate more if Russia: 1) fails to improve governance and socio-economic conditions and give jobs and hope to the region's population; 2) if security fails to neutralize radical and terrorist networks with more sophisticated methods and not simply brutally reacting to events; 3) if radical Islamism strengthens its positions in Afghanistan and other countries.

95. For Georgia, peace and stability in the North Caucasus is of primary importance. Any negative development in the North Caucasus may have dramatic consequences for Georgia. Georgia is trying to re-establish good relations with the North Caucasus by improving Georgia's image and abolishing the visa regime for the inhabitants of North Caucasus.

## VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

96. Giorgi Kandelaki concluded that the seminar was a success and that it was informative and useful. He agreed that Georgia should play a more active role in developing independent media, civil society and NGOs as well as continuing reforms in other important areas.

97. He reminded participants that there was a threat of further escalation of the conflict due to the militarization of the occupied territories.

98. Mr Kandelaki reiterates the words of Ambassador Linas Linkevicius that Georgia successfully fulfills the Annual National Plan, which is basically Membership Action Plan. And he concluded by saying: "Georgia does not have a plan "B", it has only plan "A" – membership in the Alliance. Georgia's success will help the region and its failure will damage the region".

99. Assen Agov noted his regret that the Russian delegation was not present to participate in the discussion. He reiterated that this seminar was a demonstration of the Assembly's sustained commitment and support for the region and Georgia in particular. The progress Georgia had made in reforms is remarkable but challenges remain, particularly in relations with Russia. Georgia has to find the way, with the help of the international community, to normalize relations with its neighbour. The resolution of this issue would certainly remove the major roadblock on the path towards implementing the vision of a secure, free and prosperous Georgia.

100. In terms of domestic politics, Mr Agov noted that the greatest challenge was reducing polarization. The normalization of the political dialogue is not only important as a value in itself, but also because of the possible implications for the regional security situation.

101. However, despite problems and setbacks, the principal message that the participants will bring back is that Georgia is

largely and fundamentally on the right path. The Euro-Atlantic Community should send more signals of encouragement to Georgia, including acknowledging the progress made on the NATO Annual National Programme. As it was said several times throughout the seminar, Georgia's membership in the Alliance is not a question of "if", but "when and how".