

Statement for the Record  
U.S. Helsinki Commission  
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By  
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I would like to extend my sincere gratitude for your gracious invitation to submit written testimony for inclusion into the official record for your hearing on NATO Enlargement and the Bucharest Summit organized by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission).

As you are well aware, Georgia is firmly committed to integrating herself into Euro-Atlantic institutions. This is demonstrated by the overwhelming support shown in the plebiscite held in parallel with the snap presidential election on January 5, 2008 where there was overwhelming support for joining NATO. We anticipate that Georgia is on the brink of a major step towards this goal as we hope the alliance will offer my country admittance into the Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the Bucharest Summit in April

You rightfully underlined that NATO is a values-based organization. It encompasses the full range of military and political issues necessary for ensuring the security of its member states, including the promotion of democracy throughout Europe and beyond Europe's traditional borders. The Alliance's enlargement, under a values-based system, promotes peace, stability and security. In short, democracies are disinclined to wage war or violate human rights either internally or externally. As more nations achieve NATO political, social and military standards and gain entrance to the organization, the sphere of peace and security is expanded.

When it comes to Georgia, I would like to underline the progress made by my country in an amazingly short period of time when we have faced monumental challenges difficult for the most developed of nations. Georgia has demonstrated a long list of political, economic and security reforms since our Rose Revolution in 2003. I am proud to say that this has taken place under democratic governance—at times we have stumble, but we have always caught ourselves and through political dialogue, elections and most important the rule of law, Georgia continues to strengthen its democratic institutions.

I would like first to draw the Committee's attention to the military and security aspect of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration and our achievements in those areas. Georgia-NATO cooperation has led to important achievements. Georgia has been supporting NATO in its efforts to provide security and stability by contributing its troops to KFOR and ISAF. The Government of Georgia has decided to commit significant resources to ISAF. Moreover, Georgia stands ready to provide support to NATO's operation "Active Endeavour". Also, our contributions to building peace and security in Iraq have provided valuable

experience to our forces. As you are well aware, Georgian ranks the third in Iraq with troops' level at 2000 militaries. This is a significant pool with which Georgia will proudly meet future commitments to its international obligations.

Georgia has been effectively using IPAP, PARP and other partnership mechanisms in support of a comprehensive reform processes within our military and civil-military (oversight) structures. Intensified Dialog (ID) on membership issues strengthened Georgia-NATO cooperation and was a gateway for close dialogue and consultations on many issues. We were given a high assessment in the ID process, which has served to flesh out a plan for addressing the next steps as we stand on the doorstep of MAP.

Since the launch of ID in September 2006, NATO and Georgia have conducted all necessary rounds of consultations with NATO's International Staff (IS) on military, political, economic, legal, security, resource, and science issues. Moreover, Georgia and NATO Allies have held a number of 26+1 meetings at different levels on a variety of issues based on our common interests.

In parallel to the ID process, Georgia has been implementing steps outlined in the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) during the past four years. IPAP is a document that clearly outlines objectives and relevant actions to meet these objectives in different spheres, such as defense, security and military issues, public information, science and environment, civil emergency planning, and administrative, protective security. IPAP implementation is subject to annual and interim assessments from the NATO International staff experts. Hence, we have already had four regular assessments (plus one unofficial) demonstrating strong performance from the Georgian side in meeting its IPAP objectives. The last IPAP assessment by the NATO IS was conducted 26-31 January 2008. The IS emphasized strong Georgian performance. This provides additional credibility for the arguments in support of Georgia's admittance into MAP.

The latest new elements recommended in our advance towards MAP have been the adoption by President Saakashvili in November 2007 of a Strategic Defense Review (SDR) – the cornerstone of any defense reform process. Georgia now has a clear vision on the structure of the Georgian Armed Forces that highlight short, middle and long term goals critical to placing well-trained troops in conflict areas where they can integrate smoothly with NATO forces. One of the elements of these reforms is the professionalization of the Georgian Armed Forces (GAF) by the year 2009, along with establishing modern management (Planning, Programming, and Budgeting) and human resources systems, restructuring Land, Air, Naval Forces and National Guard, modernizing logistics and infrastructure to meet NATO standards, and enhancing interoperability with the Alliance. In this regard, I would like to point to one important achievement – our Air Operation Center has been fully modernized and is prepared to join NATO's Air Situation Data Exchange system.

Mr. Chairman, along with significant transformation of the military, Georgia has carried out a number of vital reforms aimed at strengthening state institutions in order to ensure the irreversibility of democratic development. Georgia has also achieved significant

progress integrating into Euro-Atlantic institutions. However, we fully recognize that as a developing democracy many challenges and, therefore, areas of improvement still exist.

Georgia has begun implementing a number of political reforms with regards to our electoral process. Comprehensive consultations between the ruling party and opposition are serving to strengthen these critical areas. The ultimate aim of these reforms are: to eliminate predictable sources of procedural difficulties in the elections; to further improve a campaign environment that allows voters to make their choice without any interference from the state or political party; to ensure that the public perceives the environment surrounding any political campaign as fair by placing clear red-line restrictions on the campaigning activities of civil servants; to further strengthen media freedom and openness for all competing parties, including by monitoring compliance with free airtime legislation; and improving the administration of elections by allocating more resources to the Central Electoral Commission. Georgia stands ready to take all necessary measures to ensure the successful conduct of free and fair parliamentary elections scheduled for this coming May.

Georgia has been implementing a wide-ranging set of judicial reforms under the Criminal Law Reform Strategy and Action Plan, which was developed in cooperation with the European Union (EU) program EUJUST THEMIS—that has been underway for several years. It will be fully implemented by 2009. In line with this reform package, constitutional amendments have limited Presidential authority over the judicial system, including eliminating the President’s right to appoint or dismiss judges thereby providing greater judicial independence. The courts have also been restructured in line with European standards, and salaries have been raised significantly to reduce incentives for corruption. These reforms have significantly changed the nature of the judicial system in Georgia by transforming it from a tool of the state to a legitimate and independent branch of the government. Proof of judicial independence can be found in some interesting statistics. For example, the courts have ruled in favor of the government in only 40% of all cases. Specifically, the constitution was modified to reintroduce jury trials in 2004; the average trial period for civil and administrative hearings has been significantly reduced, 37% and 40% respectively, placing Georgia well above the European average; the court of appeals has institutionalized a clear separation between first and second instances reflecting strict adherence to European standards; the Supreme Court has been established purely as the court of cassation, thus enabling the Court to create common judicial practices based on legal argumentation and judicial norms. Furthermore, the government increased judicial assistance in 2006 to cover all criminal and administrative proceedings, to provide free legal consultations and drafting of legal documents, and hired new defense lawyers.

Another area of judicial reforms centers on the issue of appointing, disciplining and educating our judges. The High Council of Justices, which is responsible for appointing and disciplining judges, is now a completely independent institution and in line with the European Charter on the Status for Judges. The Parliament adopted a new Law on Independence of the Judiciary and Communication with Justices, which prohibits *ex parte communication* with judges by or on behalf of interested parties. Justices are

currently selected through an examination process and are required to hold a high degree in law and have at least five years' work experience in their specialization. The government is developing a High School of Justice to select, train and appoint future judges. This school will also provide regular on-the-job and in-service training courses for current judges. In parallel, the Office of the Prosecutor General has introduced training and education courses for prosecutors throughout Georgia.

Most significantly, the political leadership, starting at the top with President Saakashvili, has made the fight against corruption a key focus of its reform efforts. The results of this fight have been one of the Government's biggest achievements. Georgia has made significant strides in reducing corruption at all levels through effective implementation of its Anti-Corruption and Strategy Plan. The Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) report gave the government a positive evaluation and 14 new recommendations on follow-on steps to help ensure the integrity of the public sector. These were approved well ahead of the June 2008 deadline. The government's vigorous anti-corruption drive has led to the sentencing of 1,225 high- and mid-level ranking officials ranging from ministers to police officers—in short, no one guilty of abusing the public trust has been spared. The government has established a Code of Ethics for officials of the prosecutor's office. Investigations into violations of this Code have led to 330 officials being disciplined since 2004. The public has acknowledged the success of the program, with 97% of respondents in a recent Gallup poll citing zero encounters with corruption in the past year. We fully realize that corruption can never be stamped out, but with many levels of oversight and transparency coupled with hard-hitting laws as a disincentive to abuse a government position at any level, we will always be aggressively working to ensure the integrity of government.

Another core priority area discussed in the framework of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration is a conflict resolution processes to peacefully address the issues surrounding the two areas not under Georgian government control. Georgia is fully committed to the peaceful resolution of conflicts on its territory. We strongly believe that our peace process is results oriented. The Government of Georgia's top priority is the safe and dignified return of all IDP's/refugees as prescribed by numerous ceasefire agreements, UN Security Council resolutions and other international documents, with the final goal being to confer on the people of South Ossetia and Abkhazia the full rights and protections guaranteed under the Georgian constitution and allow them to exercise their will in free and democratic elections—something they are not allowed to do now.

The reforms listed above need a substantial resource base. Much of this comes from Georgia's own coffers. The fight against corruption, downsizing bureaucracy and making it responsive to the public has served to spur economic growth and tax remittances to the government. The economic reforms undertaken by the Government of Georgia are targeted at liberalization of the economy, deregulation and economic growth based on private sector development. The pro-growth economic policy introduced by the Government in 2004 coupled with cleaning up the bureaucracy yielded impressive results expressed in high economic growth, increased Foreign Direct Investment and trade turnover, moderate inflation, reduced poverty and a trend towards lower unemployment.

In terms of figures, real GDP growth in the first three quarters of 2007 constituted 12.7%; the average annual inflation rate in 2007 is 9.2%; while FDI in Georgia four years ago was just a few hundred million dollars, today it is up to \$2 billion. I take great pride that the World Bank places Georgia ahead of developed countries like the Netherlands and Germany in anti-corruption efforts and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) ranks Georgia as a global leader among transitional countries; the share of population living below the poverty line has decreased from 52% to 24%. Now that serious achievements have been registered in fighting corruption and laying the ground for economic development, the Government is turning to address important social issues such as poverty alleviation and unemployment.

Mr. Chairman, in the view of the strong support extended by the Georgian people to integrate with the North Atlantic Alliance, the strength of the democratic processes in my country, and our demonstrated ability to be a contributor to Euro-Atlantic security makes Georgia ready to step forward on the way of NATO integration and receive MAP. Furthermore, we —The Georgian people—are confident that we can help NATO expand the sphere of freedom, democracy and security that I spoke of earlier. We are hopeful that NATO will understand that it will benefit from further strengthening their relations with Georgia by offering my country MAP. This step will help consolidate the tremendous gains that have been made while accelerating a reform process already well underway. I would like you, and NATO, to look at Georgia as a catalyst for facilitating democratic reforms in the easternmost part of Europe and into Central Asia. We hope that the NATO Summit represents a historic moment for Georgia. Admittance in MAP will serve to validate international recognition for all we have accomplished and set us on our unalterable course for joining the greatest alliance in world history—an alliance that is dedicated to promoting and most of all protecting, the values we both hold so dear: Freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you again for this opportunity to present our case for MAP. I also want to thank your staff for all their efforts on behalf of Georgia would also like to include for the record a letter by President Saakashvili addressed to NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer on 13 February, 2008.