

H.E. Ms. Nino Burjanadze

Speaker of Parliament, Georgia

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address the NATO delegation, experts, distinguished guests, and our colleagues. It is indeed my true pleasure to welcome you in Tbilisi, in the Parliament of Georgia.

Georgia is devoted to the idea of Euro-Atlantic integration. I strongly believe that the country will remain on its path of building a democracy that will allow it to become a true member of the Euro-Atlantic community. Full-scale Euro-Atlantic integration is considered to be one of the most essential aspects for the future development of Georgia and serves as our long term strategic objective. Georgia's membership in NATO symbolizes the finding of its final place among the European family of nations. The people of Georgia share the common values of democracy and are ready to contribute to the protection of these values.

Georgia has been in the process of implementing the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), which is the first step towards NATO. The Georgian government is determined to pursue its intention to implement NATO standards into its AF and defence system. An interagency working group has been established under the supervision of the Prime Minister of Georgia that will monitor the IPAP implementation process and will keep an eye on the activities schedule. The Parliament of Georgia is actively involved in the process as well. It also makes an impartial evaluation of the ongoing reforms.

It should be emphasized that this goal is not only the task of governmental bodies, but it also involves the non-governmental sector and mass media. The society itself is also actively involved in the dialogue on current reforms. Georgia's integration into NATO has become an idea that has had an impact on the entire Georgian society as

well as the political spectrum. The launch of the Partnership Action Plan on Defence Institutions Building (PAP-DIB) will serve as another powerful mechanism to help the Georgian authorities lead the ongoing state defence system reforms on the right path.

Regarding the next 12 to 16 months, the country's main priority will be the completion of the implementation of the IPAP that will enable Georgia to adopt the Membership Action Plan (MAP) in the summer of 2006. This will be crucially important for the sharing of experience and in order to take necessary steps for entering NATO. Intensive cooperation with the Baltic and Eastern European States will be of help in the previously mentioned process.

The formation of the security system of the Northern Europe was completed after the NATO Prague Summit. It is now the turn of the Southern and Eastern Europe. The Black Sea region should become an undivided component of European Security. The security of the Black Sea will serve as a natural link between the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean security systems.

The American "Training and Equipment Program (GTEP)" rendered invaluable assistance to Georgia to advance the adoption of the AF to NATO standards. Battalions trained under this program have already become the major bearing of the Georgian army. Soldiers trained under this program are actively participating in peace-keeping operations in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. The United States designed a new "Sustaining and Stability Operations Program (SSOP)" which aims at the further preparation of the Georgian army and can be considered as the natural continuation of the GTEP, which in its turn happened to be extremely effective and successful. The country believes that SSOP will be an additional effective instrument to upgrade the Georgian AF to the NATO level.

There are other significant events which bring Georgia closer to Euro-Atlantic integration. The NATO/PfP liaison officer is already in Georgia, working at the MoD in Tbilisi. The Agreement between Georgia and NATO regarding the Provision of Host Nation Support and Transit of NATO Forces and NATO Personnel has been signed. In the first week of March this year, Georgia hosted the preliminary IPAP implementation assessment mission. The country is also working with the EU on the elaboration of the Action Plan in the framework of the

New Neighbourhood Initiative. These activities are aimed at the successful development of a partnership between Georgia and EU and envisage the support of Georgia in joining NATO.

The presence of Russian military bases in Georgia is among the obstacles hampering the Euro-Atlantic integration process. Ongoing negotiations with Russia have been fruitless due to unreasonable conditions offered by the Russian side to withdraw their bases. Georgia calls upon the international community to put pressure on Russia to fulfil its international commitments undertaken under the Istanbul joint statement of November 17, 1999, for the unconditional removal of its military bases from the territory of Georgia. Georgia is confident that the solution of this issue will contribute not only to the improvement of Russian-Georgian relations, but will also aid in the development of NATO-Russian and EU-Russian relations.

Georgia is convinced that its integration in NATO needs mobilized, well-realized and coordinated activities of the entire Georgian government. Regarding pressure experienced by the non-government sector, media, political and social groups, the government would like to emphasize that it is open to criticism from those institutions in order to avoid any mistakes on the country's path to democracy building.

In conclusion, I would like to express my true optimism that the co-operation of NATO officials and experts with their Georgian colleagues be successful.