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THE POLITICAL CRISIS IN GEORGIA:
PROSPECTS FOR RESTORATION

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PROCEEDINGS

MR. PASCUAL: Good afternoon. My name is Carlos Pascual. I'm one of the Vice Presidents of Brookings, and the Director of the Foreign Policy Studies Program, and it's a real pleasure to welcome you to this discussion with Irakli Alasania on Georgia, its democratic roots and its future as an independent state and the future of his democracy.

It's a real pleasure to welcome you to this discussion and to welcome Irakli here to Brookings. He, as an individual, is actually a symbolic of a new generation, and what is easy to call the former Soviet states but in fact is something different, and we still are in search of a better name for it. But he's someone who has lived his professional career in an independent Georgia, which is in fact a startling transition and new reality. And it's one that despite all of the challenges and difficulties that we have seen over the years, is one from which we should take encouragement that Georgia has gained its independence, it's sustained its independence, and that there is now a new breed of young professional who are accomplished and whose reality is an independent Georgian state, and they will never go back from that independent Georgian state.

And so its, I think, particularly important and appropriate to have this discussion now in the context of how Georgia continues to move forward in the political stream that it began, particularly with the Rose Revolution in November of 2003.

Since then, we've seen a number of dramatic events. Many of us remember well in April of 2004 the dramatic events in Adjara, and then when President Saakashvili and his Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania, who tragically was later killed in an accident, managed to work through that extremely tense situation to resolve it in a way that was good for Georgia and was understood by Russia.

There were many other challenges that proceeded afterwards, including on how Georgia continued to refine its own economic reform program and to create a foundation for significant growth, growth in double digits for a number of years. And there have been tensions internally within Georgia, tensions where increasingly the opposition and the media felt that they had not been able to get the kind of open and free voice that they expected under the government of President Saakashvili.

And, of course, all of those tensions rose to a new peak and very dangerous one in August of 2008 with Russia's incursion into Georgian territory and then later declaring Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. And it's in this context in which the opposition in Georgia needs to find its feet and to demonstrate its direction; one in which the reaffirmation of the Georgian state and democracy in the Georgian state has to be seen in context is also being a democratic and a nationalistic move, something which is in fact going to strengthen Georgia as a state rather than challenge as a state, and I think that this is one of the things in which we particularly look forward to elicit a hearing from Irakli.

Many of us knew Irakli when he was here in the United States. He, in fact, had served in the United States in the embassy some time ago. He was the Georgian Permanent Representative at the United Nations. He had previously served as a Special Representative and Negotiator on Abkhazia. He, for someone so young, he's also been a Deputy National Security Advisor and a Deputy Minister of Defense. So he truly has seen the world of international politics, the world of diplomacy, and the world of security issues, and we're extraordinarily pleased to welcome him back in a new context as a politician who has become the head of the Alliance for Georgia and will talk to us about how that Alliance sees Georgia's future.

Irakli, it's a pleasure to welcome you here.

(Applause)

AMBASSADOR ALASANSIA: Well, good afternoon, everybody, and I really want to thank the Brookings Institution and Steve and Carlos for allowing me to have this opportunity to talk with such a distinguished group of people.

And I also want to congratulate our friend Carlos on the nomination to the very important diplomatic post, and as he mentioned, it is a very important time and very vibrant time for Georgia to be on the international scene.

And we believe -- at the beginning I want to make sure that everybody understands -- that no matter we have some very fundamental differences, with the government and inside society, who is the best

political force to lead my country, we don't have any disagreements, internally, about where Georgia belongs.

We truly believe that Georgia has to be a part of the European security architecture. I believe the foreign policy that was dedicated to integrate Georgia more closely to the Euro-Atlantic community, has to be adhered, has to be followed, and certainly we all do agree that the existing threat, especially from the occupied forces in Georgia has to be viewed in a prism that the only way we can deal with this is through the unified society.

So we don't have any questions, internally, about Georgia's future as a viable democratic and independent state. But, of course, there are a lot of discussions and debates internally now in Georgia about why we ended up in such a political crisis. What can be done to bridge the differences that we have with the government and inside the polarized society about how we proceed from here?

For past months Georgia has been in a center of the attention from the Washington and other capitals when we staged in Georgia the peaceful protest, and everybody -- a lot of people, actually, were questioning why cannot Georgian society, after the 20 years of such a remarkable and very dangerous path that we took up to the gaining of the independence to sit down really and talk about, civilized manner, how we can bridge the differences.

But it cannot be taken out of the context for past years how Georgia developed, what brought to Georgia the Rose Revolution, how we

started the very remarkable and good reforms after the Rose Revolution, and how we ended up that the government today is pretty much mistrusted from the wider part of the society, and why we need the dialogue and the initiated, actually, talks with the government to end up these political crises and to move beyond the confrontation, and how we see these happenings in Georgia.

In spite of the tremendous threats that we have around us, especially again I want to mention the regional security threat and the threat that is emanating from the occupied zones. I think no one should mistake that the building the vibrant democracy can be only way that Georgia can be stable and Georgia can regain the characteristics of the strong statehood. And we believe, and my political force believes that the only for building the true democracy Georgia can stay relevant to Europe, stay relevant to United States as a viable partner, and to build the Georgia that my people deserve.

At this point I want to say a few words about how we ended up in this kind of crisis. After the Rose Revolution, there was a lot of good reforms initiated in the government, especially in the part of the easing the entrance from the foreign investors, curbing the corruption in the law enforcement agencies, and other reforms that also showed us the population and those who joined Saakashvili's endeavor that we were building the right state, we were building the democratic state, and that's why a lot of us not only supported him but joined him in this endeavor.

He had, and the Administration had a tremendous support

from inside, credibility from the international community, and we all felt that it was an extremely good opportunity for the country to develop itself as a democratic state. We started very efficient ways of coordinating with European Union and NATO on our integration process, but the government made one very big miscalculation, and this miscalculation was that by reforming the country and the putting forward the fast-track reforms, they started centralizing power in one branch of the government, which was the president.

By centralizing power in the presidency, it started weakening the other branches of the government like judiciary, independent judiciary, and we also had problems of the property, that the property rights were ignored. There was a redistribution of the wealth in the country, and it was done in a manner that really made a lot of people and Georgians not inclusive in the building of the society and new country.

For the past two years we've been watching increased concentration of the power in law enforcement agencies, again in the presidential institution, and it weakened sufficiency the parliament, which has to have the authority to check and scrutinize the president's decisions and to debate the policies of the government. This led too much into an institutionalized decision-making system around the president. And this, I think is a core reason for the miscalculations and mistakes that government made that offered a tremendous pretext for the Russian Federation to start and implement their own policies to weaken Georgian state.

At the same time, our approach towards the help of present resolution issue which we started with direct talks with the Abkhaz side offering, you know, ways of bridging our differences and building confidence between Abkhazis and Georgians and the Ossetians and Georgians failed because of there was too much mistrust between the sides at the same time there was a mistrust in the international mechanisms that were employed to resolve the conflict.

I would like to emphasize also about the current situation inside the country. The opposition that went to the streets, they had a lot of history of dealing with the Saakashvili's Administration. November 7 in 2007 and then the presidential elections, then parliamentary elections proved to be for the better part of the Georgia, that the way it was conducted and transparent way of having the elections, the media that was crashed up in November 7th, the outcome of the presidential election when the President makes the threshold of the first round only by three percent, and there was a 23 percent as it was reported by the OAC and other monitors that the balance was reached, it gave the reason for another huge mistrust from the society towards the government.

So I believe that after the elections, the President should have changed the course of action, and he should have really concentrated on more sharing of the power with the parliament and also given the opportunity for the opposition to breathe in a new political space.

I believe that the course of action that was taken by the government also towards the reunification of Georgia was misguided

because we all understood that the provocation that was staged by the Russian Federation against Georgia, and we all remember the provocations around the Tskhinvali region and in Abkhazia where it's specifically designed to get Georgia and derail Georgia from the path of integration to the Euro-Atlantic community to effectively block our integration process and at the same time also to show and demonstrate to the region that the path Georgia took for them building democracy and being part of European structures is not the path the others should follow.

So I believe that when we achieve the certain agreement with the Abkhaz side -- for example, when we were negotiating with them the nonresumption of the use of force and the return to (inaudible) peace, it was the good instrument to be used to lessen the chances of the provocation from the outside and to really get the political process with the talks with the Abkhaz side and, respectively, with the Ossetian side more effective. But this path was not followed.

At the same time what we are seeing today in Georgia is the demonstration of the people's will that they want to change things, only change things for the peaceful means. And for two months that we had these demonstrations in the city, we came to the conclusion the opposition and my political force as well, that the -- only through-the-street demonstrations that things cannot be changed. And we now took the path to change dramatically our political approach and to transfer the discourse towards more political dialogue.

And I believe there is -- tremendously important to have

United States as a partner be engaged in this because the recently signed charter with the United States and Georgia, it envisaged the very strong structural influencing Georgian democratic institutions. And the help and assistance that is coming to Georgia through this charter and the allocated money has to be really transferred to the more democratic institution-building and has to be very specific benchmarks how and how specifically the Georgian side would be held accountable for the agreements that was forged between the United States and Georgia, and as well our commitment towards the European Union to integrate us more closely towards the structure.

I believe that also the recent situation that as it is at this point in Georgia really requires a more systematic approach to the dialogue with the government. We had a few meetings that was conducted three times: one with the Chairman of the Parliament, and twice with the President which hasn't produced any tangible results at the beginning. And, of course, the situation is dramatized when the incidents like what happened two days ago when the independent media also was crushed together with the opposition leaders, and one of my very close associates were badly, brutally beaten up.

These kind of things, of course, widens the distance between two sides, but there is no alternative to the dialogue, and that's why we will not detail ourselves from the path that we picked to have more constructive dialogue with the government. I think we realize, as the opposition, that there is no -- it's not possible to change things are on hold

by only demonstrating in the street. At the same time, there is a more and more realization on the government's side, not on the top level but on the other officials, that by ignoring what's happening in the streets, by ignoring the political crisis, it will not give them any chance to resolve the conflict, and these people will not just disappear.

So I think there is an opening now, especially after the last meeting with the President and one of the leaders of the opposition we have to explore. But at the same time I want to emphasize that the United States is a strong and strategic partner. The European Union as a partner has to be engaging themselves more and more in facilitating these talks, especially when there is such a big mistrust between the -- towards the negotiating process itself. We need to have the solid guarantors of the forged agreements in the future that the both sides would heard it.

I was having the meetings that State Department and the other agencies here and have heard that it was very pleasant talks that the United States will continue assisting Georgia in the democratic institution-building as well and building our armed forces and security and defense. And this is very important to have a very strong signal to the region that even after the August 1, we are receiving the help and assistance from the United States, and European Union will be always involved in the Caucasus and in Georgia, especially after what happened a few days ago at the U.N. Security Council when, methodically, another international organization's presence was killed in Georgia.

We don't want to be left alone without the international

monitoring and international -- credible international security structures in the administrative board with Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region. And this is why we have to emphasize now more and more on European monitoring mission and to expand and enhance their capabilities on the ground to deter any future provocations or military escalation.

At the same time, we need to keep engaging United Nations, and I believe the resolution that was passed last year at the G-8 which calls for the Secretary General to prepare the reports on the status of return over the IDPs, the property rights and human rights will be also useful to be used to keep engaged U.N., at least on a human rights side, especially in the Gali region where we have our Georgian populated area which are totally unsecured and under the pressure of the de facto government.

So what I would like to see in the future in terms of the conflict resolution first of all is to have the credible security arrangements not to get any more provocations and escalation, at the same time to have very strong nonreunification policy towards Abkhaz and the Tskhinvali region which is sustainable because, actually, Russian Federation failed to be successful in ever persuading their own. their (inaudible) important to recognize Abkhaz and South Ossetia.

What they are doing now is building their own military capabilities on the ground and trying to legalize what they gained by the military force. But if there's going to be a very strong stance from the United States and the European Union on this issue, and I believe they

will, and at the same time also support Georgia to become a really credible democracy and sovereign state, I believe in the future we will get a chance to talk with the Abkhaz directly and South Ossetians directly. It's not going to happen overnight; it's going to take time, but I truly believe that if we're going to demonstrate that we are solidly on the path of the European integration, our present Ossetians will be more leaning towards being the part of Europe with Georgia together rather than stay under the military control of the Russian Federation.

Internally, we have debates even among the opposition how we should proceed. There are leaders of the opposition who have more faith in a negotiation; there are people who believe that the negotiations will not lead to increased results of better state and pressure government from the streets. I believe my personal view is that we have to work closely with the international community but at the same time, first and foremost, to work closely with our own people and constituency.

The responsibility for the reforms in the country, of course, lies within the government that opposition also has to demonstrate that there is more that they are offering rather than removal of the Saakashvili. They are offering the revival -- we have to offer a revival, substitutes, and to the policies that failed the Georgian democratic development. Namely, we are intending creating our own party, at the same time have very solid platform for the society to understand what are the fields that the government failed, and its economy and security defense -- agriculture failed -- and also provide the alternative how we're going to change these

things. How we're going to offer the transformation that will really help Georgian people to get prosperity and to move on to be the part of the democratic community in Europe.

So all of these requires hard work from the opposition side, but also we need to be mindful that the government has to show the political will, that they are willing to transform the country.

What I believe in also is that when Saakashvili came to power and that Administration came to power, the main goal they declared was the unification of Georgia and the bringing Georgia closer to the NATO and even membership of the NATO. Unfortunately, these past years have proved that neither of these goals will be achieved under the present Saakashvili's term. So the only thing that can really be remembered for and the legacy that he can really leave behind him is to creating a really democrat state and to help to transfer the, peacefully, power towards the next government, only for the election.

So I think there is a natural interest to Saakashvili to be engaged in pragmatic talks with the opposition and to have the more space for the opposition to be involved in a pluralistic debate. And this gives me the cautious optimism that the talks that we kicked off a few weeks ago will prove to be more successful in the future. I think more and more opposition leaders will be joining me and the other forces to be for the dialogue and to engage themselves in an issue-based criticism of the government.

We're also going to have more and more involvement in the

process of changing the electoral environment, and in the near future we're going to present to society and to the Commission that was creating the amendments that we would like to see in the Constitution to get the balance of the power between the presidency and the parliament and the judiciary. We're going to have our own, and we already have our own suggestions on the electoral code and the electoral commission, and I think the very important thing as well is to have the civilian controls of the law enforcement to distance them from the political process and electoral process.

If these three areas will be covered by the government and the opposition and will come to the understanding, then, of course, it's important to get the agreement on the new electoral calendar. What I mean by that, we have to negotiate it with the government how will be the best to bring these political forces, those who are more strong, into the parliament and to continue debate and to take this discourse from the streets into parliament when we can really, then, have the checks on the -- and scrutinize the policies the government is making.

So I believe the Fall which will be very tough on Georgia's economy, if these agreements will be forged between the government and the opposition, then we're going to have a lot of enthusiasm and the potential combined from the opposition and from the government to face the challenges of an economic nature, face the challenges that we are having security-wise from the Occupied Forces. And I think it will make Georgia stronger rather than weaker to really create the pluralistic

environment that will really be the base for the democratic Georgia.

Overall our situation is getting tense; on the other hand, the incidents like, as I mentioned, a few days ago when they had brutally beaten up the opposition rally, and the incident before that as well as the parliament when the -- some of the young people actually went more aggressive and they attacked the -- part of the -- Chairman of the Parliament. This cannot be allowed, of course, and we all condemned this kind of act.

But we have to be mindful that so far there was no accountability from the government on these attacks that happened for the past two months, and the roundup and the arrest that the police was actually conducting against the members of the opposition, which no explanation why they were rounded up, why they were beaten up. So this is also funneling the mistrust between the government and the opposition.

But nevertheless we should not be derailed from the political process that we choose, and I believe that the process will be joined by the other opposition leaders as well, and the government has to be put in a position, internally and from the friends and honest strategic partners from the outside, that the only way we can deal with the crisis and we can overcome this should be on a negotiating table.

In general, I also want to touch the U.S.-Georgia relationship in a more specific way. I believe that this strategic partnership charter again that was signed in January is a very useful tool for the United States and Georgia to transform the process in a more institutional way and to

really have the assistance of United States and European Union. And later we're going to talk about this as well, be more focusing on the concrete results we want to achieve, especially on the media side, especially on the electoral environment side, also building Georgian security and defense and at the same time help Georgia to avoid and to be more prepared for the economic crisis that's going to hit us in the Fall by all the predictions that we have now, indicate that.

So now on that I might leave the room for the questions, and I'll be more than happy to answer any questions you have. And again, thanks for inviting me and it's very privileged to be here and to discuss the very important issue of Georgia among this distinguished crowd. Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. PIFER: Irakli, thank you first of all for a very cogent explanation of both what's going on inside Georgia, but also some of the key foreign policy challenges that Georgia faces. And there are some things -- I'd like to pose one question for you. You've talked about, I think a fairly difficult situation on the one hand, trying to have a rigorous democratic space within Georgia, but also the importance of maintaining a united front vis-à-vis Russia. And I wonder, obviously, Russia's a player and the United States is a player.

How do you see the reactions in Europe to this democracy, this effort? What sort of policies are you looking for from the Europeans, who I think have had a hard time over the last year sorting out exactly how

to engage Georgia? So what's your view into really some --

AMBASSADOR ALASANSIA: Well, up to this point the European Union and a special representative and the European representatives are all engaged in this process. Well, the President Sarkozy's presidency, they were very hard to get involved in and contributed to forging this agreement that Russia and Georgia signed later to put the end to the armed confrontation and then to proceed to the de-escalation and demilitarization of this two Georgian regions.

And I think in the future we have to emphasize on the agreements that were forged on the 12th of August. At the same time, the European Union also pledged a lot of support, financial support, to Georgia after the August war, and I believe that we have to utilize the tools that were provided to us to build the democracy inside the country but also strength in other state institutions. We appreciate the help that is coming from both the United States and European Union.

There was a hesitation from some of the countries of the European Union to continuing engagement with Georgia in the fact of the confrontation with Russian Federation, but nevertheless -- nevertheless this hesitation was past. But I think a stronger policy from the United States will be very helpful combined with the leadership of some of the European states to be very tough on the Georgia's territorial integrity, nonreunification policy, and they have Georgia agenda on the strategic discussions with Russia.

And I think this is pretty much sustainable. Georgia again

survived the pressure from the Russian Federation to other allies to recognize the Abkhaz and Tskhinvali regions, and we have to more be focusing on strengthening the European monitoring mission to again prevent any escalation from happening in the occupied zone.

So I don't see the damage that was done to Georgian credibility in August can be a factor now in preventing from the Europe to be engaging Georgia in that regard. But at the same time if Georgia will continue in Georgian leadership being increasingly autocratic, of course, the appetite in Europe will fall to continue supporting Georgia. And this is why democracy and democratic democracy-building in Georgia is very much interlinked with our security, how we're going to provide our security. The only way to be relevant again, to stay relevant to European Union and United States is to be truly democratic in nature.

And that's why we are demanding the change not only in personnel in the government but the nature of the government. And that's what we want to offer to our society when we're going to state the campaign in the region demographic level with my party and other partners to explain.

So I believe overall the future of Georgia lies, of course, with the European security architecture, being the credible partner and the neighbors in the region. We built, try to rebuild the neighborly relationship with Russia Federation as well, but it's not going to be easy, and it's not going to happen overnight. We all understand that. And the only thing that we can improve the relationship with Russia is also to have the

Russia to uphold to its international commitment to withdraw from the Occupied Forces.

That's why it is tremendously difficult from these government for Saakashvili to achieve these goals, but during the transformation, and we are looking forward in Georgia, I think, eventually the Russians will pull out from the occupied zones. It will take time again. It's not going to be easy, and it's not going to be fast, but international pressure to uphold Russia to the international commitment, especially the August 12 agreement, and nonreunification policy will be key to achievement.

MR. PIFER: Let's open up the floor to questions now. Please wait for the microphone. Right here in the third row. And if you could state your name, affiliation, and please have the question end up with a question mark.

MR. HARRISON: Okay, I won't make a statement. I'm Ross Harrison from Georgetown University, and my question is, you've outlined the steps that your group has taken to curtail or counter or roll back some of the concentration of power that has aggregated at the presidency level. What has -- can you speak to some of the particular responses that the regime has -- how they have responded to your initiative? How effective has your initiative been in terms of response of the presidency?

AMBASSADOR ALASANSIA: Well, unfortunately, you remember that the first time when President mentioned the new wave of democratic changes, it was in September of 2008 at the G-8. But since then no steps was made really to achieve any changes in an independent

judiciary, electoral system, other fields of democratic nature.

Not until there was it declared that the process would start 9 of April. So in a sense it forced the government to be more proactive in offering the changes. at The same time we don't see any increased proposals from the government side except just creating the commission about the constitutional change, amendments, and about the electoral code.

So why I see the process has the potential because before that there was no direct channel of communication between the government and the opposition. We were blaming each other; we weren't coming out in the streets and talking about the changes we wanted to have. Government was just on the TV and through the national channels declaring that they're ready to talk but no concrete suggestions were made.

But after the meetings, we laid our positions in front of each other, and nobody expected that the three meetings would have been enough to square out our differences. So sustained dialogue, sustained channels of communication will get us to the point when we can agree on certain things. And the most important thing is independent media, changing the electoral codes and commission, and distancing the law enforcement from the political process.

These other three things we are prepared to work with the government, and, of course, it should be a part of the package to change the electoral calendar later to more to approach the general election. Only

this way I see the political crisis resolved and to build a more inclusive political process when the other opposition parties will be joining in.

MR. PIFER: In the front row here?

MR. KRAUSE: I am Robert Krause with Quatrex Energy. Mr. Ambassador, I was working in Georgia back in 2003-2004 after Abba Zhigi packed his bags to go live with Luzhkov. Many serious Georgians and bright Georgians suggested that the best way to get reunification with Abkhaz and South Ossetia was to provide economic incentives so that they would want to reunify.

And you have made a remark about movement toward the European Union and providing some sort of an incentive for the Abkhazians and South Ossetians to come back to Georgia. Do you have any concrete proposals on the economic incentives for reunification?

AMBASSADOR ALASANIA: Thank you. Well, yes, the part of the strategy that we devised in 2005, a new approach for the state of conflict resolution issues was first to get the direct talks with the Abkhaz to gain the confidence with each other and to offer not just politically motivated, political status-related talks but also talks first of all about economic and other humanitarian and cultural projects that will get people-to-people in directions more efficient.

And part of that was reopening the railroad, and we almost started a project when the assessment team was also sending Abkhazia to assess the condition of the railroad. And we were thinking about also opening up the markets from the Georgian side through the pass.

But, unfortunately, the lot of circumstances, mistrust, and all of this played in hands that we were not successful in achieving this. So in the future, of course, I do believe that the real process of the reintegration can be started with offering the Abkhaz and Ossetia's alternative. Alternatives they don't have at this point. But to have this alternative, Georgia has to be economically stronger. And unless Georgia is democratic state, unless Georgia has the free market and there is no interference from the government into business development and the business and investors will have confidence in investing in Georgia.

Of course, we will not attractive to Abkhaz and Ossetians, but again everything comes to decentralize the power in the presidency, to have more inclusive democracy which can help to rebuild the Georgian economy, and then, of course, together we ask Abkhaz and Ossetians try to be part of the European Union and European community.

Of course, it's easier to say it than done, but we had the talks with the Abkhaz. I was representing Georgia and really see potential there. Of course, August war complicated things, but when the illusion will fade away, and the Abkhaz and Ossetians that they can be surely independent because their -- none of traditional policy will be sustained. I do believe so.

Then I think there's going to be more concrete things to talk with the Abkhaz and Ossetians, how to be a part of the mutually interesting projects, economic projects and others that they can be part of the more wider European community.

So that I think is in the future, and I strongly believe that this is possible.

MR. PIFER: Over here?

MS. (Indistinguishable): I'm Nina Japetti Georgian Association . It seems that in the recent crisis in Georgia Washington has been detached, has been watching, waiting for the internal process to work itself out, and we've been hearing there is reasons why that's happening. Some say it's because, thank goodness Europe is involved now. It's been long waiting for the European Union to be engaged in developments in the Caucasus.

The second reason that we hear often is that the opposition outside of the Parliament hasn't really requested the role of the United States to act as mediator in this crisis. Have you had opportunities to bring this point to home here in Washington, these very bureaucratic institutions here? Thank you.

AMBASSADOR ALASANIA: Thank you. Well, from the very beginning of this crisis, we've been talking with the United States representative, locally, and here as well with the European Union representatives to be engaged more actively in restraining the government, and also giving the opportunity for the talks to reappear because the main destruction of the talks was the huge mistrust between the -- to the negotiations and between the parties.

So we felt that if there's going to be a trusted

mediator/facilitator and then guarantor of this agreement, that the people will be more comfortable with the talks or with the government, and it will really elevate the trust between sides.

I believe, personally, that the mediation from the United States side in a mediating role, I don't believe that's what we want. I think we need more support than facilitation of the talks because, surely, the talks and the positions that we want to work on with the government has to be internal political process. Ourselves, we have to learn to communicate, to talk with each other, and to find ways out, but if we're going to have the trusted guarantor of the agreement like the United States and European Union, then, of course, all things will be easier to achieve.

So what I talked with the United States officials here is to be more actively engaged in the facilitating these talks, encouraging the two sides, and then, of course, be monitors of the forged agreement between two sides. So I think this will enhance our own capabilities and our own belief in the talks and each other, and, of course, it will elevate, of course, the importance of the international community's assistance and the help that they are providing to Georgian states, because it was very clearly stated by the officials here and by European officials as well that what they are doing is helping Georgia and Georgian nation, not the Georgian -- any political force in Georgia. It is very instrumental and important to have this declared by both United States and European Union.

So I see them as a part of the process. I see them as facilitators, as guarantors of the agreement that will be made by the

opposition and the government, not actually as a mediator in this.

And the second point, I would like to see the high level special envoy from the United States to get the agreement that will be forged between sides guaranteed.

MR. PIFER: The woman here in third row.

MS. HARRISON: Hi, Monas Harrison. Thank you for the wonderful explanation.

I'm going to ask a very hard question for somebody who daily reads the news that's coming out of Georgia and quite distraught into what I see. I'm asking you to tell me when one can expect the street demonstration, for lack of a better word, end, and what has Georgia, as a nation, gained as a result of these street demonstrations when you see the economic situation, down economic situations in Georgia three times more than the rest of the region. And then you're looking at really destabilization in the country and lack of interest in the outside world wanting to invest in Georgia and to sort of almost (inaudible).

So I'm interested in knowing that, when can one expect Georgia will return to something that could be more appetizing to want to invest in and what have you? Thank you.

AMBASSADOR ALASANIA: Thank you. Well, it's not that tough question, anyway, because we already started the process of moving the street process into more political process, and we opened up - the opposition opened up the streets, and the cell phones removed from better part of the occupied, so to say, the streets. So I think we made the

steps to acknowledge to the government that they're coming to the negotiating table with a good faith.

At the same time from the government, there was some kind of offer which was a lot of criticism towards that, their offerings imposed to the opposition inside the government. Of course, the coalition government is not the viable answer at this point, but, of course, this is something that we are moving and we're looking forward for. And the steps are already made.

And I also want to answer the question about economic situation. The April event was not the cause of economic problem. It is actually the result of the failed policies in economy and security that the government was following for past years. And the drop in the FDI started -- FDI started for indirect investment before even August war, and August war actually was the key in dropping that, the effectiveness of the Georgia for the foreign investors.

And, of course, one of the main points as well is, as I pointed out, the points that the property rights are not guaranteed properly. There is no arbitrary court. There is no free judiciary. This all contributes to the investor confidence other than just rallies in the streets.

Of course, the political instability is playing its role in that, but then again it's more reason for the government to be really meaningfully engaging itself in the talks, not just for the cameras what they are offering, but also be really showing the political will they want to engage.

And interest that was coming before that from the

government only widened this sort of the gulf between the society and the government. So I believe that the economic hardships will continue, but if we're going to get this political sort of say agreement with the government, it would be a lot easier for us as a nation to stand in front of these challenges and to overcome these challenges.

So in the near future is the talks will continue, and I do believe it will continue, and we will have -- we will see the end on this three process and transferring all the discourse into a more meaningful political process.

MR. McCARTY: Hi, my name is Ryan McCarty. I'm from the Office of Senator Jack Reed. My question is one actually to, on your political focus that you're moving each political focus. Is there a plan, or is it part of your plan to go out and get people in your organization into the parliament, you know, into, you know, into the government, essentially, so that you can go to the current Administration and talk and say, you know, we have the will of the Georgian people behind us. You know, we have, you know, this is our opposition party, we're growing strong.

It that part of your focus and, if not, why not?

AMBASSADOR ALASANIA: This is exactly what we intend to do, and this is why this coming month will be youth from our side to go out in a region, to go out in the grassroots, explain to the people which has lack of information because of the controlled national media what is happening, and why we need to change what we are asking.

And the key here will be: What are we going to offer them?

The opposition was -- had made a mistake in the past, not because we were just demanding the change, but we were not offering the viable alternative. And this is exactly the point of transformation that we're seeing now. We're going to be more critical on the issue-based things, and there is a lot of issues in every field of the government that we are looking the crisis.

So we have to come up not only with the critical remarks, but also we have to come up with the concrete proposals even to the government for them to see that this is how we think things should be done.

And again, we are focusing now to go outside the capital, to work with the people on the ground, and I think -- Georgia is a small state, and we will cover most of the regions in a pretty fast nature in a couple of months, and building our own political structure in the regions, as well in the capital, of course.

So, yes, this is our intention of what we're going to do.

SPEAKER: Ambassador, you mentioned in your remarks that some of your supporters were beaten up recently. Can I you, Mr. Ambassador, on the use of force in Georgian society?

AMBASSADOR ALASANIA: Sure.

SPEAKER: In the early days of the revolution, the forces used in Ajaria and your courageous work in Pankisi in getting the criminals out. The United States applauded that, and it was completely justified.

But more recently there have been disturbing reports that of

use of force from the presidential side against critics, civic society, opposition media, and, obviously, the military response to Russian provocation, which was something nobody wanted.

Can you comment on this tendency, or this trend in Georgian politics and its association with the President?

AMBASSADOR ALASANIA: And that's true that we are observing this very dangerous tendency in the oppression and political motivated harass and -- abuse and harassment of the opposition.

Recently, my very close associate was beaten up, and he's in a very difficult health situation, and there was also for the past two months, there was more than 80 incidents when the protesting rally members and participants were beaten up by the un-formed, masked people. And we don't really know who these are. And these people are associated in other direction of some of the governmental branches and, yes, this is a tendency that we are observing, and we are also informing the international community. And the human right organizations are well informed about this issue.

And I know that this government here in Washington is raising this in talks with the government. I think the most dangerous part of this is that when you're going to indulge the group of people on your side to go and attack someone, then this group will demand from the government some things that they're going to have -- for example, some things of the criminal nature, and they're going to get obligations. The government will have the obligation towards these groups, and this will --

can be easily translated into civil confrontation because those who are abused by them, they might be attacked back from those people who were attacked. So this will really translate the situation in more explosive situation.

And this is why our demands right after these kind of attacks was that there is an urgent need to sit down and negotiate with the government. First of all, the commitment from their side, they're not going to use, use the force against the demonstrations in a political opposition.

And international community and the United States as a partner can be very instrumental in stopping this. So far this is still continuing. The incident that I mentioned just happened day before yesterday, and there was attack not only on the political opposition but on the media. They confiscated the cameras, they confiscated the tapes, and in reality this is the most dangerous escalation that I've ever seen for past months and days.

So again, the restraint that we need to see from the government side is not there, and they are losing the control of some of the groups they feel they control who are attacking the protesters. So this is one of the main issue on the negotiating table with that.

MR. JONES: Yes. Bill Jones from The Executive Intelligence Review. Irakli, good to see you again.

AMBASSADOR ALASANIA: Thank you.

MR. JONES: I wanted to ask you, you mentioned that President Saakashvili, one of the things he would not achieve in his

presidency is this NATO expansion, Georgia being a member of NATO, and I would like to ask you, isn't this really, for all practical purposes, a dead issue at the present moment? I can tell you the reaction that people had after the August events interpreting, you know, Saakashvili's actions as something of a provocation, that the question was, what would have happened if Georgia had been a member of NATO? And that a lot of people drew back after that as a result of that.

And given the task that you have set yourself, if there were new leadership in terms of trying to deal with the situation of Ossetia and Abkhazia, and creating some kind of a rapport with Russia, isn't that NATO really on the back burner for some time to come?

AMBASSADOR ALASANIA: Well, on NATO I would first say that this is the choice of Georgian population and citizens which was decided on the plebiscite a year and a half ago. So it's not something that only government was actually doing and approaching the NATO for the membership, it was the public demand to have Georgia part of the Euro-Atlantic community.

And I believe that the August war derailed us a little bit from the being more efficient in getting closer to NATO, but at the same time after the war, the NATO-Georgia Commission was created. And I think the process itself of being in the process of integration helped us to form our security defense architecture to be more compatible with the Western partners, and I don't think that the war should be used, and Russian factors should be used to block Georgia's aspirations towards the NATO.

How this is going to play out and to what extent we will be getting closer to NATO is depending on the process. But it's very important to make everybody understand, and especially the occupying force in Georgia, that they have not and will not have a say in deciding whether Georgia is willing to join this military block or not, and also NATO, which extended its offer, the open door to Georgia, then will not be blocked for offering this kind of thing to the free independent state because Russia is unhappy with that.

In terms of the Russia-Georgian relationship, as I mentioned, at this point there is not much room for flexibility on both sides unless Russia will be upholding its international obligations to withdraw from the occupied territory. But in future, I do see that the long-term stabilities in Caucuses for Georgia as well as for Russia cannot be achieved unless we have some kind of modus operandi with Russia.

So, definitely, the improving relationship, neighborly relationship with Russia is very important, but not only on expending Georgian territorial integrity, and our sovereign right to pick and choose which organization we want to be a member of.

MR. JONES: Thank you.

MR. KRALASHRILI : My name is Gil Kralashrili. I'm associated with the James Dental Foundation currently. Mr. Ambassador, thank you for your very nice presentation.

I have a question. You omitted several points that have been developed in recently. That's not only attacking Georgian Parliament

members and Chairman of the Parliament's car, but also attacking the police precinct, and also engaging other unlawful actions that opposition activists have been engaged recently, blocking roads and many other things constantly for two months.

And my question is not only about that. You might comment on that, if you wish, but, second, the most important thing that I believe it's true that there's a crystallization within the opposition of a big, big group of very anti-Western, very anti-American. Some of them made comments against the U.S. ambassador in Tbilisi, and some of them against Czech Republic and also French ambassador, using offensive words and so on.

Many of them, in fact, described the war last August as the war that Georgia starts. I want to ask you this question: I understand your moderation. I appreciate that, but why would you never comment on your colleagues' openly anti-Western and antidemocratic sentiments thinking?

AMBASSADOR ALASANIA: Thank you for the question. First of all, what happened at the Parliament was condemned by most part of the opposition leaders and myself as well when I said that it is unacceptable, it shouldn't repeat itself. And I think it was also well received in the society because nobody likes when the officials are personally attacked, and this is something that we will never allow our forces to do.

At the same time, you have to understand that for two months the process in nature have been peaceful, and there was no major incident except what happened at the police precinct when one of the

artists actually climbed over the fence. But the reaction from the government was not proportional. I mean they could have arrested this man. They should not let them in, but using the bullet that they used against the peaceful demonstrations outside the fence was not the right answer, I think, to the situation.

At the same time, we are totally against all the violence in the streets, and that's why our involvement in the streets actions was predominantly sort of say because of to make an impact on the processes to go with a more peaceful way. And a lot of my associates, other political leaders were doing the precisely that thing when joining the opposition which were demonstrating in the streets.

And, fundamentally, this is the right of the Georgian people to, in its constitutional right, to demonstrate, to express their disposition towards the government policy.

Now we are entering into the new phase, the phase when we see that what happened in two months was the demonstration of the, so to say, feelings towards the government policy, but at the same time we understand, and now we have to focus more on the political process and the dialogue. That's why the roundup on the street action side is visible now, and so there are a lot of streets are open and more and more political leaders are talking about the dialogue.

Those who are anti-Western, as you characterized, I mean these are the people who have their own opinion they can express, and I don't see any problem of support towards that kind of prejudice against the

United States. The United States is widely seen as a most credible strategic partner who actually helped us in, and from the beginning of our - - beginning of statehood in the early '90s, but was very vocal in -- towards to support Georgia after the August war.

So I don't see any danger of anti-American sentiment growing in Georgia population. There are people who will criticize the United States; there are people who are criticizing the Administration here as well, but it doesn't mean that we have to galvanize this and to talk about this and to criticize those who are doing this kind of, or making this kind of criticism toward the United States.

I can say that some of this criticism is founded in the unbalanced way that some of the diplomats actually approached this statement. For example, when you're talking about that how damaging it is when the parliamentarians are attacked, of course, we have all rights and reason to do that, but at the same time they expect those who are critical, the diplomats will be dead vocal and express it when they see 80 cases of the brutal attack on the demonstrators, when they see, for example, a political leader beaten up like they did two days ago.

So the people expect that the diplomats will also be that decisive in condemning this kind of attacks, which we don't see often. So I can see where this criticism is coming from, but the personal insults towards the diplomats and the respective representative of Czech or French or United States is, of course, not the right thing to do, and nobody in the responsible political circles will approve that.

MR. PIFER: Back there?

SPEAKER; (No microphone -- inaudible)

AMBASSADOR ALASANIA: Well, if I got you correctly, you were asking how I see the more civilian control over the law enforcement agency, right? And, well, that's, as I mentioned, this is one of the key issues when we're talking about creating new opportunities for the opposition to be successful in an electoral process to create the electoral environment in which they can picture -- can compete.

And the law enforcement is one of the central issues here because as too much power is concentrated in the presidential institution, there's even more power concentrated in the law enforcement ministry, which is Ministry of Internal Affairs. Counterintelligence, counterterrorism, law enforcement, border guards, all the operational resources are allocated inside this ministry. And there is no -- I would say absolutely not control from the even parliament, not only talking about the civilian control over this agency, that can really demonstrate how they are using these operational resources.

There are a lot of facts that the opposition leaders, opposition members of the opposition on monitoring. Their cell phones are tapped, so all of these really needs to have the serious discussions over the oversight of this ministry.

So this is why, this is the key issue that we are talking with the government. This is a key issue we're also talking with the friendly governments about, and I believe that unless the situation will be

changed, unless we're going to see the real political will from the government to change this, to have more oversight over the operational and intelligence resources that these people, these agencies using against the political opposition as an oppressive mechanism. Then, of course, the faith in negotiations will not be there.

So that's why this is so much important to get this right if we want to get the resolution of this political crisis.

MR. PIFER: Okay, I think we have time for one last question. Right up here.

MS. BARLETT : Karea Barlett, University of Florida, formerly a (inaudible).

I'm asked the same question I asked in Tbilisi in 1991 to a group of the then opposition to President Gamsachurdia, which was this: Which would bode better for Georgia's democratic development to wait until Saakashvili's time is just legitimately up and his Administration, or to take him and throw him in the river? Which would bode better?

AMBASSADOR ALASANIA: The answer is very simple. No. We will not take him and throw him into the river. What we want to do is change the system and nature of the government so we can have more opportunity as an opposition to develop ourself to have more inclusive democracy, to have the opportunity for the opposition to get a free and fair election to get to the parliament and scrutinize his decisions from the parliament.

Of course, from the very beginning we stated we are looking

forward for the change in the government, but not the military overthrow or any way that we can be viewed as an overthrow of the government. We will not have this happen because we have the terrible and tragic history of '90s.

So again, our main political goal is to get the political process running, help the opposition and the society to be included into this political process, and, of course, the other things can be negotiated when the government onto the negotiating table. This is what we look forward that. And I want to make sure that I got it right here that I do believe that the process will be successful.

I think that the new Administration from here will be very instrumental in getting a process in a more efficient way to the help and assistance we're going to get from European Union and United States as well. But the main decision-maker here is the Georgia people, and we have to allow them to be part of inclusive democracy to changing the institution. And we are not here to change the persons in the government; we are here to change the nature of the government by including the opposition and other stakeholders in this process.

And I do believe that Georgia will emerge more stronger rather than weaker from the political process.

Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. PIFER: Irakli, you've been an excellent -- you took an excellent speech, and you complimented it with a series of very clear and

straightforward answers to a wriggling sense of questions. It just like we like to have to have here.

AMBASSADOR ALASANIA: Thank you.

MR. PIFER: And thank you very much for joining us.

AMBASSADOR ALASANIA: And thanks for the crowd.

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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