



Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC

Caucasus Project Meeting Notes:
The Caucasus: Challenges Ahead
Georgia

with

Zurab Zhvania, Former Speaker of Parliament
and

Revaz Adamia, Former Chairman of Committee on Defense and Security
Mikhail Machavariani, Former Minister of Revenue
Mikheil Saakashvili, Former Minister of Justice

On February 14th, 2002 former Speaker of Georgian Parliament Zurab Zhvania spoke at the CSIS Caucasus Project meeting, *Georgia: Challenges Ahead*. Revaz Adamia, Mikhail Machavariani and Mikheil Saakashvili were also present and contributed to the discussion.

The members of this delegation are often referred to as representatives of the “young reformers” and all are former members of President Shevardnadze’s government. The purpose of their Washington trip and the CSIS address was to explain why they left Shevardnadze’s government, how they perceive the future of U.S.-Georgia relations, and the problems facing Georgia, including internal instability, corruption, and terrorism. While Zhvania is a leader of the Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG) party, and Saakashvili is leader of the New National Movement, they stated their intention to form a broad based democratic alliance, and pointed to their joint address at CSIS as a clear sign of this cooperation. Below are the meeting notes from the formal presentation.

Zurab Zhvania:

The Goal of the DC visit

- We all have come to Washington DC over the last six/seven years and advocated President Shevardnadze’s policies; this is our first time here as members of the opposition.
- Our goal is to remind everybody of “the specific importance of Georgia in the region, which includes not only the South Caucasus, but also Central Asia.”
- One year ago it would have been impossible to imagine U.S. military presence in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. If we are now thinking of building totally new security architecture from the Black Sea, across the Caspian and to the Chinese borders, Georgia can be an exceptional partner to the U.S.

Historical Georgian-American Partnership is growing

- Thanks to President Shevardnadze’s initiatives, and very active U.S. support, bilateral and regional cooperation has been growing over the years.
- The new pipelines from the Caspian to the Mediterranean and Black Sea shores serve as the main pillars of this relationship.
- Georgians are committed to seeing Georgia’s future in the West, and in order to achieve security, stability, and peace we want to see much closer cooperation with NATO, the United



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States and its allies.

- We are in agreement with President Shevardnadze on these goals

Georgian Democracy and Civil Society are Strong

- Georgia's main independent TV channel, Rustavi 2, broadcast pictures of villas built by high ranking government officials during the last years; when ordinary Georgians were getting poorer, these people were getting richer.
- When representatives of the Ministry of State Security tried to shut down Rustavi 2 for elucidating such corruption, the public took to the streets in Tbilisi to defend their freedom of speech
- Civil society forced Shevardnadze to dismiss these corrupt officials

The Split With Shevardnadze

- Shevardnadze played an absolutely outstanding role in founding Georgia as a sovereign state and overcoming the incredible difficulties that Georgia was facing in 1992-93. After a civil war, collapsed economy, and completely destroyed state, he managed to build a strong democracy in just over a few years.
- We used to be his most vocal advocates: I (Zhvania) was head of his Presidential election campaign two years ago, and Saakashvili, who is now one of the most radical members of the opposition, campaigned for him all over Georgia.
- The protests made it clear to us that we had to join the people in defending democracy and further development of civil society
- On foreign priorities and the vision for Georgia's strategic development we are still absolutely united with Shevardnadze
- The main difference is on issues of judiciary and economic reforms. None of the reforms have had any positive results for ordinary Georgians.
- This is mainly because of corruption, and Shevardnadze has not done enough in this area.
- We need to restore hope in Georgia, and we finally decided that our ability to push for change from inside the government was exhausted and we needed to try our best from outside the government.
- We are now working to build a very broad democratic coalition, and build political power not just around another strong individual, but to build strong political institutions constructed around ideas, values, and visions.

Georgia is Not a "Failed State"

- Georgia is a healthy state, with a society committed to building its future based on democratic values.
- We need to bring back hope to the people that democracy is not just going to be an abstract term, but will guarantee the basis for a better life, if not today, then in the future.
- In addition to security matters, Georgia can also be an exceptional partner to the U.S. by being another viable and strong democracy in a part of the world where there are few successful democracies. We want the U.S. to consider increasing our cooperation to a higher degree.



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Georgia-Russia Relations and Terrorism after 9/11

- Georgia has experienced international terrorism over the past seven years in three assassination attempts against Shevardnadze and a number of covert actions aiming to destabilize Georgian democracy
- Over the last years, Georgia had become the target of Cold War style Russian propaganda that portrayed Georgia as a harbor for Chechen terrorists.
- We have about 100 km common border with Russia, and when Chechen refugees were fleeing from massacres, we could not turn them down
- Together with thousands of women and children, we also received some fighters and/or terrorists
- While the Georgian side made mistakes as well, the larger responsibility of the Pankisi Gorge problem certainly lies with Russia.
- Ruslan Gelaev and his people penetrated Georgia's territory from the neighboring Ingushetia. Russia's security forces control that border. One morning, without any warning from our Russian counterparts, we discovered that Gelaev and around one hundred fighters with him appeared on our territory. A lot of people in Georgia believed that they were sent to Georgia on purpose.
- People in Georgia are now united to deal with the Pankisi gorge problem much more responsibly, because we do not want to be seen as indirectly allowing terrorists to transit or stay in our country.
- Especially during the last days we have all been extremely alarmed by the information that there could be some terrorists who are connected with Al Qaeda.
- We cannot allow Russia's direct involvement in operation in Pankisi Gorge, because no Georgian leader will want the country to be pulled into bloodshed in the Northern Caucasus
- This is in fact a specific area where we are looking for much more assistance and cooperation with United States.

Mikheil Saakashvili:

- There is a correlation between events in Pankisi and internal Georgian problems—Russia maintained control over certain political forces in Georgia, mainly the previous Minister of the Interior.
- He was not only courting his fellow generals in Moscow, but he was also involved in international drug and illegal arms trafficking
- The only reason he was fired was because the people took to the streets and demanded his resignation after the Rustavi 2 events
- When he and other corrupt people were fired, the situation in Pankisi started to improve as well
- This is a clear example of correlation between civil society and democratic institutions: people themselves managed to force out the people who were creating long-standing problems for Georgia.