

Georgia and European Security in the Wake of the Ukraine Crisis

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Matt Frei

Hello. Welcome everyone. My name is Matt Frei. I'm one of the presenters and the Europe editor of Channel 4 News and it's a great honour and privilege to be here once again. Thank you for making yourselves available at lunchtime on such a beautiful day. I'm sorry that we're late. We just did a quick interview with the President before we came here.

The timing of your visit couldn't be better, because of course the subject on everyone's mind...

Giorgi Margvelashvili

I think complicated is better.

Matt Frei

Absolutely, complicated is always better. That's why these organizations exist. If we weren't complicated, there wouldn't be a Chatham House, for all sorts of obvious reasons which we will get into after your presentation. But I'd love you to give a big hand – and I'm going to say this very carefully – President Giorgi Margvelashvili. Sorry, I have a very short and easily pronounceable name. Did I do well? Fantastic.

The President has been president of Georgia since last year, since the end of last year, since October and he has taken over this job at a most interesting and challenging time, shall we say? The reason of course why Georgia is particularly fascinating is because you could wear a t-shirt saying 'been there, done that', when it comes to the Ukraine experience, albeit on a slightly different level. We all remember the South Ossetia War and therefore the lessons that you gleaned from that, your country gleaned from that are particularly apposite today.

So I hand the floor to you. You will talk and then we will have some questions, hopefully.

Giorgi Margvelashvili

Thank you. Thank you for being together with us and it's an honour and privilege to be at this distinguished place with this distinguished audience. As we already noted, during the introduction, we are here in a very complicated time, in a complicated time for Georgia, for the region. A complicated time which requires crafting of some new responses, crafting of some new approaches to complicated issues about our region, about Georgia, about Ukraine, about globally security in Europe.

Of course we would start talking about Georgia, but the situation forces us to start talking from Ukraine. The Ukraine nation that we enjoy long and personal communications with, this is a nation that we had an especially friendly feelings, not only during these last events, but long before, in Soviet Union, and starting from those times, we were closely allied and we were feeling that some of the main sentiments for independence, for individuality of our development were the same in Georgia and in Ukraine.

But these friendship and alliances have gotten even stronger, starting from the independence days of Georgia and Ukraine. We were supporting each other, trying to push each other's agenda most actively during these two decades of independence.

Now, with an unfortunate development in the last events, we have become even more stronger allied with our unfortunate problems that we have. What is happening now in Ukraine, we see as a continuation of a policy that has been developing in Georgia in 2008. Now we are sharing the same problem because Ukraine's territory as well as Georgia's territory is occupied.

This is not only an occupation, but this is a response and punishment to the free choice that both of our nations have made and made not only declared, but made it realistic and made our aspirations realistic into the new area, new environment of Europe. We all know that the Ukrainian case was linked with aspirations of the association agreement and the same was done by Georgia, and now we are associate members of European Union.

But globally our independent choice has been responded so harshly by our neighbour, Russian Federation. This is something that even more unites us today and that we are developing a common approach, us and Ukraine together.

What happened in 2008 in Georgia was a punishment for independent choice. What happened in 2014 in Ukraine is a punishment for independent choice. Both of those cases are concrete cases of a global theory, of a global approach to newly created independent and democratic states.

We were discussing during the interview that the politicians from the Russian Federation have very explicitly defined what they want and how they view future of what they call areas of special interest. They are very explicit about on these issues. They say that Russian Federation has the right and has capacities and capabilities to be a decisive player on those independent territories, with those independent nations.

What we are facing right now is not a concrete case in Crimea; it's not a concrete case in Lugansk, but is a development of a geopolitical theory and concrete explications of a geopolitical theory that has been very clearly worded out.

What we are looking at right now on Georgia's side, and it's a coordinated effort with our Ukrainian partners, is to show that there should be a concrete and effective response – not to separate cases from time to time, but to overall approach to nations like Georgia, to nations like Ukraine. It should be an overall approach to this attitude that those countries cannot decide on their own but have to be under a term of being in Russia's backyard.

This approach should be shared by our allies. That is the message that we are trying to give to our allies, that this attitude of privileged interest areas, if this is pardoned, if this is accepted, if Russia's aspirations are accepted and shared, then we will have a much more complicated future, not only with these countries, but with the overall security environment in Europe.

We are talking about further engagement of our countries in European structures. We are talking about further engagement of our countries in NATO structures, and we are talking about those actions as bringing positive environment for our countries, for Europe, but even furthermore, for Russia. I think that this is not rocket science to understand that stable Ukraine, stable Georgia, with stable economies, with stable security environment is an opportunity for Russia rather than a threat.

It's an opportunity that is giving chances to Russian businesses, to Russian population to enjoy better neighbourhood. All of those nations that are around Russia are friendly and have no militant aspirations against Russian Federation and they are not dangerous to Russian Federation.

Neither of the problems in Russia are solved with aggressive activities to Ukraine, to Georgia or to other of their neighbours. Those independent choices that those nations take are bringing better security, stability and that expansion of Europe and expansion of NATO has not brought any complications for Russian Federation. Maybe on the contrary.

The Baltics are a great case in this respect. Those are one of the most safe borders that Russia has. Those are countries with whom Russia trades, and trades not only on the business level but has enjoyed partnerships with NATO on some of the most complicated military issues, because those projects are developed by Russia and by NATO.

So we tried to prove to our partners, we tried to prove the same to the politicians in Russian Federation, although we don't have diplomatic relations with them, that we are not a threat but rather an opportunity. If we talk concretely about Georgia, if we develop peaceful, calm, stable economically viable Georgia, that is development of peaceful, calm and stable and prosperous Caucuses which is a great opportunity for Russian business, for stabilizing and solving issues that are in Russian Federation.

This communication hub of Georgia, which is a potential of uniting Asia and Europe through energy transportation corridors, through communication corridors, that is capable of bringing Asian resources to Europe is not a threat but opportunity for peoples and nations living in the region.

We as a country have done a lot to show this positive development and this positive paradigm as possible to our allies and to decision-makers in Europe and the West as well as all around the world. We have been a very principled and responsible player in international security issues. I should just remind you that Georgia is the biggest non-member contributor to security, to the international security, whether it's NATO sponsored project in Afghanistan or whether it's EU operation in Central Africa.

We have declared, and here our government, same as the old government, are unanimous that we are never going to solve our territorial problems through any kind of militant activities, whether it's in relation to the Tskhinvali region or whether it's in relation with Abkhazia. We try to bring and push this positive and constructive message.

Of course, we are a country that is developing and is in form of transition. We are a nation that had peaceful transfer of power, that is strengthening and deepening its democratic institutions, and of course on this path, there are issues still to be developed, there are

issues still to be deepened and stabilized, but here as well we feel that more engagement, more engagement of Georgia into Europe, more engagement of Georgia into NATO and actually the slogan that we are trying to develop right now together with our allies is 'more Georgia in NATO and more NATO in Georgia' is the right way to go.

Engagement of our foreign partners, engagement of our Western allies is going to create a more stable country, more stable region and more secure region in the world at the end.

With this message, we are going to the NATO summit. We hope that the question marks about firm and stable Georgia support will turn into a very concrete and well spoken and well formulated policy on behalf of NATO, which will make Georgia more stable after the world summit, which will make the region more secure after the world summit.

This is our message. We are in coordinated and alliance in this respect with our Ukrainian partners. We believe that we have a very clear truth to share with our allies and we hope that tomorrow and the day after tomorrow will bring positivity to Georgia, to Caucuses and eventually to Europe as well.

Thank you, and I decided to make it shorter to have more time for interaction and communication.