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Distinguished guests, dear participants and organizers of the conference. Let me welcome you to Georgia, to the 6<sup>th</sup> Silkroad International conference on "Globalization and Security in the Black and Caspian Seas Regions".

Ladies and Gentlemen, Georgia is a right place for holding a gathering on the issue of security, since country's location at the crossroads always was and still is its advantage and disadvantage. Throughout its history Georgia had many invaders and aspiration towards independence as well as territorial integrity was a dominant characteristic of the nation. Country's location caused multiculturalism and high level of tolerance of the Georgian society ensured through the history by the early traditions of statehood and developed institution of citizenship. Thanks to longstanding traditions of intercultural dialogue, religious confrontation rarely grew into ethnic or any kind of conflicts in Georgia. Because of that internal as well as external security was always topical issue and Georgians always knew its significance very well. Short time of Georgian independence in 1918-1921 was interrupted by 70 years of Soviet regime. Georgia was not able to choose its partners or to control its security.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union radically changed the situation in the region.

As the link connecting the East with the West, Georgia restored traditions and obtained a new geopolitical function and a new salient role in international relations. Georgia is a bridge connecting several important economic regions with a total population of over 8 million people. It is a key link in the shortest transit route between Western Europe and Central Asia for transportation of oil and gas as well as dry cargo. At the same time the country became the arena of interaction and opposition of political, economic and other interests of both global and regional scale. Alongside the intensive reforms, the present Georgian government set themselves the following main tasks: building a strong, united and stable democracy, integration into Euro-Atlantic organizations ( a choice determined by-values), the restoration of territorial integrity of Georgia, radical renewal of the failed and rampantly corrupt system, elimination of poverty and unemployment. After the "Rose revolution" in 2003, the overthrowing of Eduard Shevardnadze and his government and the "Palm Revolution" in Adjara, overthrowing a criminal clan headed by the corrupt and authoritarian leader Aslan Abashidze Georgia distanced from its Communist past and started its long and hard way to sustainable sovereignty. The current process in Georgia was characterized as "mental revolution" by The Economist of London. Let me mention some major democratic reforms that helped to fast development of the country:

*Strengthening the independence of the Judiciary resulting in 80% of approval of the court;*

*Electoral Code Reform;*

*Media pluralism (acknowledged by Annual National Program of NATO); Political Pluralism or Strengthening Institutional Guarantees for Opposition (when opposition has more financial support proportionally);*

*Constitutional Reform (ensuring balanced power, increasing of prime-minister's power);*

*Fighting corruption ( This achievement is recognized by all assessments); Equal rights for minorities through education;*

The Liberty Charter:

*Decreasing taxes and adopting a new liberal tax code helped to jump-start the long ailing economy; wide ranging economic reforms were implemented, spectacularly simplifying business startup and improving customs procedures; the number of licenses were slashed enormously (reduced by 84%) as well as of the time for issuing: 30 days for issuing licenses and 20 days for issuing permits). Rapid pace of reforms towards a liberal and open economy generated a strong influx of foreign direct investments and earned Georgia a rank of world's top reformer economic and otherwise.*

The country's progress in improving business climate has been well documented in a number of international indices:

*The World Bank hailed Georgia's commitment to reform over the past four years as "unprecedented" after the country rose from 112 to 12th place in the world Bank's Doing Business 2011 survey;*

*Doing Business Reformer Club awarded Georgia as Top Reformer in Europe and Central Asia during the last five years;*

*According to Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom 2011, Georgia ranks 29' out of 179 countries in the world, surpassing such highly developed European countries as Norway, Belgium, France, Latvia, etc.*

Georgia has a score of zero in difficulty of the hiring and firing indices, according to the World Bank Doing Business Survey 2011. Free Industrial Zones were established in Georgia, promising very attractive conditions for the investors.

However nothing could be possible without a stable and strong security. The security system has not only essentially improved in Georgia but changed completely. The security sector reform comprises law enforcement and defense. Border management includes the EU Special Representative's Office in Georgia, a successful cooperation in the process of Border Management reform. The Border Guard was transformed from a paramilitary force into a police-type agency. All these changes were based on the changes of legislation as well as of the educational system. Corruption, smuggling, money laundering, traffic, terrorism will soon all belong to the past. A corruption - free traffic police became a sample for different countries.

Today USA, EU, European Council, NATO support Georgia's wish to be an equal member of the civilized world. Tolerance, transparency, openness, pluralism, justice, a peaceful resolution of conflicts even if it is unilateral initiative- is our main weapon for achieving our goals. Visa regime in Georgia is very liberal. Visitors to Georgia from EU, Israel, Turkey, Japan, Canada and Switzerland do not need a visa at all, while residents of other countries can obtain it directly at the border at a minimal price. Georgia opened the border for all Caucasians and every day about 3 000 people cross the border being in touch with our people visiting our country. We have passport free customs, joint airport and free trade with Turkey. The citizens of Armenia and Azerbaijan will soon be able to cross our border without passport.

Yesterday Georgia celebrated 20 years of restored sovereignty. These days we are witness to fragility of our sovereignty we once again saw that our security is still at stake. Using the breakaway autonomous territories as a leverage against independent Georgia our northern neighbor systematically breaks peace in the region in some cases by direct military intervention ( as it was in August 2008 ) in other cases by encouraging internal destructive forces pitting them against the Georgian sovereignty, occupying 20% of Georgian territory, ignoring and violating international law. There is no security just in one country there is no even regional security. The globe is shrunk today . In the time of globalization all what happens in one region has



## **Chapter 1: Welcoming Ceremony Speeches**

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repercussion in the most remote areas. Our concept of security is not limited to Georgia. Nearly 1000 Georgian soldiers are risking their lives every day in Afghanistan, protecting the Afghan people from terrorism, but ensuring a terror -free future for Georgians as well, since terrorism is international by character and needs very close and international cooperation. We are proud of them.

Distinguished guests, the Georgian people were distinct by their creative and building activities and not by destruction. To build a strong independent state, which could be a part of a civilized world based on shared values is a challenge.

Security in Georgia is security in the region which in turn means global security. We consider your participation in the conference as an essential contribution to global security. Thank you for your contribution and let me wish you success on behalf of the International Black Sea University.

