

Welcome Address by H.E. Tamar BERUCHASHVILI to the Diplomatic Corps

within the Diplomatic Trip to Georgia 2015

May 23, 2015

Tbilisi City Assembly

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished ambassadors,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome all of you in Tbilisi.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to you and your governments for your support and commitment to Georgia. Needles to stress the special role that you – diplomats of our friendly states – have been playing in the critical moments of our recent history.

Ministry of Foreign affairs has established a good tradition of organizing Cultural Events for the Diplomatic Corps that gives you opportunity to experience rich history and culture of our country. This year the program includes also your participation at the celebration of Georgia's Independence Day.

It is symbolic that today we gathered in a historical building of Tbilisi City Assembly, which has witnessed Georgia's relentless fighting for freedom and independence since the 19th century. This struggle continues even today and Georgia meets the serious challenge to maintain sovereignty, territorial integrity and defending them we stand firm on our choice toward building the democratic state, its economic development and European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Today's Georgia is the vivid example of the transformative change in the Eastern European region through political association and economic integration.

Despite increasing external political challenges, economic and security cost - including moves toward the outright annexation of the occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by the Russian Federation - Georgia continues to move forward on its European integration path, which is the choice of the people of Georgia and is irreversible. Georgia is a stable, democratic and reliable partner in a key strategic location, promoting trade and energy security.

Last year, we made important steps to strengthen democratic institutions, good governance and rule of law. We adopted and been implementing an ambitious Human Rights Strategy and Action Plan. We have continued to scale international rankings for media freedom, for transparency, for anti-corruption, for ease of doing business, and more. We have enhanced our contribution to European and international security by contributing to EU CSDP and NATO missions. We have deepened judiciary reforms and continue to work with the support of our partners in this key priority area.

The signature and start-up of implementation of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement was a major milestone in this process. We are committed to fully and timely implementing this agreement. We trust in turn that the EU will continue its support for Georgia by matching our reform efforts with new prospects for greater integration, in line with the principles of differentiation and “more for more”.

In this sense, yesterday’s Riga Summit was another important step. By all means, we would favor more vocal statements upholding the European choice of Georgia and other Associated partners. At the same time, it is important that that the Summit Declaration reaffirmed the joint commitment to the principles of the Eastern Partnership and renewed the EU’s commitment towards Europe’s eastern neighborhood in general. In addition, the Summit Declaration created solid ground to accelerate the finalization of the implementation of the Visa Liberalization Action Plan that will lead to establishment of a visa free regime for the Georgia citizens next year.

There is further progress on the path to NATO. In parallel, timely implementation of Substantial Package obtained at the Wales Summit is a key priority for the Government. We are confident that our membership in the Alliance will support security and stability not only in Georgia but in the whole Euro-Atlantic space. The Warsaw Summit in 2016 will be crucial in order to appropriately reflect Georgia’s progress in the Euro-Atlantic integration process. It would be a powerful signal that undermining freedom of choice of sovereign countries and redrawing the European map has no future in the 21st century.

Georgia is proud to be committed contributor to the global security. We continue our participation in EU-led operation in the Central African Republic, NATO’s Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, have already joined NATO Response Force and are ready to take part in EU Training Mission in Mali.

Although Georgia has achieved tangible success in its foreign policy and democratic transition, the occupation of the 20 percent of our territory remains the major challenge. Despite our efforts to normalize relations with Russia, the provocative policy against Georgia continues, including through installing barbwire fences along the occupation line. Following the annexation of Ukraine’s Crimea, Russia undertakes further steps towards the annexation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia. The new, so called “treaties“ with Sokhumi and Tskhinvali envisage further integration of Georgia’s occupied regions into the Russian Federation covering all areas, be it military, political, economic or humanitarian dimensions. These steps of Russia’s far-reaching policy of undermining the sovereignty and freedom of neighbouring countries, in order to derail them from their European and Euro-Atlantic path.

The creeping annexation seriously affects the situation of hundreds of thousands of IDPs by placing a permanent obstacle to the implementation of their right to return. On 3 June, we plan to re-table the resolution regarding IDPs and refugees from Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions within the current UN GA session. This is a humanitarian resolution supporting the internationally recognized rights of the population displaced from the country’s occupied territories. Thus increasing number of states voting in favour of the resolution will strengthen the call of the international community for their safe and dignified return.

In this regard, I would like to thank your Governments for continuing support of Georgia's UN resolution and express hope that the number of supporters will further expand this year.

On a final note, I would like to once again underline that Georgian foreign policy aims at further development of global partnership. Up to now, we maintain diplomatic relations with 184 countries and continue active cooperation within the existing international formats, for defending the international norms, principles and universal values.

Excellencies,

At the end, I would like to express my outmost gratitude to you for joining us in this fascinating tour and express hope that this pleasant tradition will continue, with our mutual support, for years to come.