

**Speech by Mr. Teimuraz Janjalia, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia in
the Committee of European Affairs of the Irish Parliament**

Dublin, 6 December 2023

*Dear Chairman,
Honorable Members,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is a privilege for me to be here, speaking in front of this Committee about the European future of my country.

The **recognition of Georgia's European perspective in June 2022** created a unique opportunity for us and opened up an entirely new chapter in our relationship with the EU. It has brought to the fruition the longstanding aspiration and civilizational choice of Georgia – the choice, which is underpinned by the shared European values and principles; the choice, which we have been fighting for and continue to defend.

I would like to express our **sincere appreciation for the support that Ireland has rendered all throughout this process**. The ever-strong partnership, which we enjoy with the EU is a gain that has been achieved through our joint efforts and it is only through joint efforts that we can succeed further on this path.

We already have many success stories to be proud of – the far-reaching Association Agreement and the DCFTA, the visa free travel, a strong security partnership and enhanced trade relations, advanced cooperation in various sectors are most vivid examples.

However, to come this far has never been easy. **Russian military presence** on Georgian soil continues, in several kilometers from the Capital; **barbed wires and fences** in the heart of Georgia are constant reminders of occupation, **kidnapping of our citizens** by the occupation forces is a daily occurrence, while Georgia remains a testing ground for **Russian disinformation and hybrid warfare**. Russia has been methodically and step-by-step intensifying the **incorporation of Georgia's occupied regions** into political, military, social, economic, and other systems of Russian Federation; statements regarding the **establishment of Russia's permanent naval base in the occupied Abkhazia region** further confirms the fact that **Georgia is increasingly vulnerable facing high risks for escalation**.

It is more than evident that **Russia uses the occupation of Georgia's regions and these provocations as hybrid tools to destabilize the situation in Georgia and put political pressure on the Government of Georgia**. We are targeted precisely because of our choice to be part of the Euro-Atlantic family. Two days before the Enlargement Package of the European Commission was published which gave the green light to

grating Georgia a candidate status, a Georgian citizen – Tamaz Ginturi, was murdered by the Russian occupation forces. This fact speaks for itself.

Yet, we stand firm and resolved on our path to become a full-fledged member of the European Union.

In this challenging environment, we understand that it will be a long journey, - a journey which we will take together until the ultimate goal of the Membership has been achieved.

This is a watershed moment for Georgia – we are just a couple of weeks away from the EU leaders' major gathering that is going to adopt strategic decisions for our states, but also for the EU itself. **EU's enlargement policy has always been a geopolitical tool generating momentum for closer engagement with Union's partners.** It continues to serve as an investment in peace, stability and prosperity in whole Europe.

We welcome the Commission's recommendation to the European Council to grant Georgia a candidate status. This is a clear recognition of the very intensive work done by Georgia, its government, all state structures, who were engaged in delivering on major reforms and legislative approximation with the EU acquis.

We very much rely on and expect the EU leaders to support this recommendation. The European Council's decision to grant Georgia a candidate status will pave the way towards the accession talks and in this way anchor Georgia's future firmly with the EU. This is historical chance, and missing it could be damaging for Europe – whole, free and at peace. Indeed, we are a European Nation, our place is in the EU and we will strengthen the Union by contributing to its diversity.

There is no doubt that the **EU membership comes with long-term commitments and responsibilities.** Let me assure you that **we are not looking for any shortcuts** – we never have. The Government of Georgia remains fully mobilised and resolved to continue and further accelerate the reforms in order to live up to our commitments on the path of the EU accession.

I think we have proved our commitment and demonstrated strongest will to continue key reforms many times, including those envisaged in 12 priorities, - the Commission's report published on 8th of November recounts the progress delivered by Georgia in detail.

Immediately after the publication of the Enlargement Package, we developed an action plan on addressing the new priorities defined by the Commission, which was approved by the State Commission of Georgia on EU Integration on 27th of November. The plan envisages actions to fight disinformation through strengthening strategic and institutional framework, intensive awareness raising and international cooperation; creating working groups involving all parliamentary political parties and NGOs to discuss and take forward our European integration agenda and the fundamental reforms; reaffirming commitment to continue active cooperation with the EU in the CFSP area, including

continuing Georgia's pro-active cooperation on sanctions. We shared the action plan to the European Commission, as well as our partners in the EU member states. We stay committed to continue the intensive consultations with our EU colleagues on advancing Georgia's EU membership process based on a very good track record of such cooperation that we developed throughout past months. *[Just to note, we plan to design an interagency team involving all relevant state agencies, which will pay visits to Brussels and hold in-depth consultations on enlargement-related reforms.]*

This brings me to the issue of **“progressive” or “gradual” integration**, which is being discussed in the enlargement context. **Georgia support any initiative that can help us progress towards the full-fledged membership of the EU.** Given a lengthy and complex path of membership, which needs all our time and resources, I think, the EU accession process should be supported by concrete prospects of integration into an array of EU policies, primarily the **EU Single Market**. This has been a driver for Georgia since the conclusion of the AA/DCFTA. We also took note of the **Growth Plan proposed to the Western Balkans**. I do not think that we should wait for some time before applying the same approach to our states – on the contrary, we need to learn lessons from Western Balkan experience and support the lengthy and costly reforms by concrete benefits that pay back on steady popular support.

Speaking about Georgia, we have prioritized **enhanced participation in the EU framework programmes and engagement with the specialized agencies** as this is one of the most effective ways to learn and pursue at the same time legal and institutional convergence with the EU standards (*Georgia is already actively involved in several programmes and agencies, such as Horizon Europe, Creative Europe, Customs programme and Fiscalis, Europol, Eurojust, Frontex, CEPOL; furthermore, we have applied to upgrade our status in Erasmus+, negotiate our participation in the Single Market programme and conclude an administrative arrangement with the European Defence Agency*).

Furthermore, **convergence with the EU sectorial policies** through joining different policy mechanisms is an effective way to prepare a country for the membership obligations in certain fields. With this in mind, we have applied to join the **Single Euro Payment Area, Common Roaming Area and the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, as well as launch consultations on the recognition of the Authorized Economic Operator programmes. We rely on the support of the EU institutions (EEAS and the Commission) and the EU member states to grant Georgia access to EU various sectorial policies** as a step towards deeper economic and sectorial integration with the EU.

We are living through extremely turbulent times - the entire world order and the international security architecture is being reshaped. The European Union is at a critical juncture in the context of reshuffling its role as a global actor. In our heavily contested and fragile region, **we continue strengthening Georgia's role as a stronghold of regional peace and stability, democratic development and cooperation; a crucial link on global connectivity map offering alternative routes for energy and freight transportation and trade in the Black Sea and EaP region.**

To facilitate the regional cooperation, **we continue intensive engagement with our partners in Armenia and Azerbaijan**, and we have made concrete steps to facilitate dialogue and functional communication between them, which complement the efforts of the EU. On **26-27 October Georgian Prime-Minister hosted Armenian and Azerbaijani Prime-Ministers in the margins of the Tbilisi Silk Road Forum**. All sides stressed the **crucial importance of peace and stability in the region, which is achieved solely through dialogue, joint projects and cooperation**. I must also recall the **Peaceful Neighbourhood Initiative**, proposed by Prime-Minister Irakli Garibashvili, which envisages full and equal participation of three countries of the South Caucasus and stands to play a key role in normalization of the relations.

These efforts also go hand in hand with our common interest to exploit the untapped potential of international trade and alternative routes of energy and freight transportation in the Black Sea. **Georgia is a crucial partner of the EU when it comes to materialization of the strategic initiatives spelled out in the EU's Global Gateway**.

We are confident that **Georgia's initiatives such as the Black Sea Submarine Electricity Cable and the fibre-optic cable, as well as the intensified ferry-feeder services in the Black Sea can offer effective solutions to ensuring energy independence and security, food security and reliable alternative transportation routes**. To this end, we are resolved to accelerate the implementation of these initiatives and look forward to close partnership with the EU and the European financial institutions.

We are confident that **Georgia as a future member state stands to play a key role to the common good of Europe**.