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OPEN DOOR POLICY

– Your Excellency, in September 2017 you came to Ukraine and granted Credentials to our President Petro Poroshenko. You have discussed the obvious intensification of relations between the two countries – Ukraine and Georgia – as well as the opportunities to join attempts in the de-occupation process. Could you provide us with details regarding this topic? What mechanisms of interaction will be implemented in the near future?

– Ukraine and Georgia are fraternal nations, we have many things in common, we have similar mentality. Our nations are friendly and hospitable. Unfortunately, we have the same problems that need to be resolved. The common direction chosen by our people is the way of integration and joining the Euro-Atlantic structures. I am very glad to know that high-level visits were organized in Georgia and Ukraine last year and this trend continues now. Currently we develop new mechanism for communication at the government level. In particular, we plan to form a commission that will deepen cooperation in various fields. Therefore, the dynamics of relations is very positive. We stand each other internationally, in many organizations and in public discussions. Ukrainian support is of great importance for us. I still remember how Ukraine has allocated a special plane to fight the fire, when there was a difficult emergency in Georgia. Then your people gave us the helping hand. We will continue to make every effort to ensure the development of dialog in all fields of growth of our states.

Many business-meetings have been organized during the visit of P. Poroshenko and V. Hroisman to Georgia. The Government representatives, executives of both countries met and discussed cooperation issues. The year 2018 is rather significant for us, as Georgia celebrates the centenary of its independence and the centenary of diplomatic relations with Ukraine.

– You have mentioned that many business meetings had a ground for discussion of different cooperation directions. Please tell us whether there are any areas of bilateral relations, which, in your opinion, little attention has been paid to? And whether they have significant potential?

– I suppose there is no special area which was left behind. The tourist flow to Georgia from Ukraine has increased recently. We welcome Ukrainians. The restaurant business rapidly develops in Ukraine, in fact, there are a lot of Georgian restaurants in Kyiv. This also means a lot. The interest of our countries to



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each other is very high. That was always the case. I believe it is worthy to intensify professional meetings at different levels in order to discuss in detail the nuances that are needed to develop both countries, to use those resources that have not yet been used and to move forward.

In this aspect, the Embassy always supports a variety of Ukrainian initiatives. Last week we gathered your compatriots, prominent political scientists, political technologists, representatives of non-governmental organizations and held a big round-table discussion, during which we considered these issues. Together we were looking for ways of sufficient development of our relations. The Embassy will always keep an open door policy.

We invite Georgian students who study in Ukraine for meetings. I often read lectures in different Ukrainian educational establishments. I like it because Ukrainian youth is very sincere, smart and pragmatic; we managed to establish the fruitful dialog between us. Sometimes we turn to various and specific areas. I believe the exchange cooperation in the area of education is of particular importance, since we have common problems, the same social development. It should be noted that there is private education sector that is developing actively in Georgia. Today there are high schools, whose diplomas are recognized by the Western countries. This means a lot in the modern world. Such experience may be useful for Ukraine. Your students are often interested in this topic, so we are absolutely open, we are trying to help arranging contacts with Geor-

gian representatives. Investments are an important and attractive area of mutual interests. Ukrainian citizens often turn to us for legal help. We direct them and try to develop this interaction in every possible way. I suppose it is worth working on specific area that will bring useful and positive results to both sides rather than trying to cover everything and right now.

– *A great example of such interaction is the exchange between the MIA of Ukraine and the MIA of Georgia. What does this cooperation look like in practice?*

– First of all, it is intensive communication of representatives of the state institutions and exchange of information among them. The Embassy conducts work regarding the visit of the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia in the near future. We make every effort to support this dialogue, to make it permanent, because we have many common issues aimed at deepening of our mutual interactions. In particular, we are going to develop a base for the recognition of drivers' licenses between our states.

– *In other words, will it be possible to drive a car in the territory of Georgia with Ukrainian driver license?*

– Sure, Georgians will have such opportunity in Ukraine. During the official visit of the Prime Minister of Ukraine V. Hroisman to Georgia the importance of the issue of crossing the border from Ukraine to Georgia and from Georgia to Ukraine with ID-cards was emphasized. Perhaps this issue will be resolved in the near future. Currently, an urgent task is the fight against crime. There are problems that require an early resolution, so I hope our dialogue will continue. Communication with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, as well as with all other ministries and state bodies, shows positive dynamics.

– *It is known that before coming to Ukraine you have long been working as the Ambassador to different countries. Please tell us about your formation as a diplomat.*

– Recently, representatives of the Embassy have made a surprise for me and we celebrated the 20th anniversary of my diplomatic service. I was a diplomat to several countries, namely Azerbaijan (counsellor of the Embassy of Georgia in 2011–2005), the Russian Federation (counsellor of the Embassy of Georgia in 2007–2009). Since 2009 until 2013, I was a senior counsellor of the Embassy of Georgia to Ukraine, so I worked in Ukraine before I had become an Ambassador. In 2013, I was appointed to the post of the Acting Ambassador of Georgia to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

After the diplomatic period, I became the State Minister for Diaspora in Georgia. It was my choice to return to Ukraine. In my opinion, this was the right decision. I have always remembered Ukraine. In 2014, with the assistance of the Government of Georgia, I organized a special charter flight to Kyiv to pick up 120 Ukrainian children whose parents died in Luhansk and Donetsk regions. We arranged a special two-week rest in the youth camp of Georgia near the Black Sea for them. When they returned to Ukraine full of impressions, I told



Друга зустріч глав Урядів країн ГУАМ. 05.10.2018
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that Georgia had just received 120 new ambassadors. The same year I set up a mini-marathon in Tbilisi dedicated to the support of Ukraine. I also ran with Georgian and Ukrainian flags on my chest. Allies of Ukraine ran with us. Our route stretched from the Embassy of Ukraine, which is located on I. Chavchavadze Avenue, to the Victory Square. It is about 7 km distance.

– *Mr. Ambassador, please tell us whether have you been dreaming to become a diplomat since your childhood or the destiny decided so?*

– I studied at the diplomatic academy. This is my second university degree. Later I became the President of hearers club of this academy in Tbilisi, and finally I started working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I have passed all stages starting from the intern. I am very glad to have obtained this kind of education because I still have skills in working with all computer programs and communications, I know how to write notes and reports in the relevant format.

At this stage of my life, I try to share all my knowledge and skills acquired during 20 years of work in the diplomatic service with the new generation. As I have already mentioned, I often communicate with students and young colleagues sharing my experience. It takes time, but I think such a thing is necessary in order to help youth to use their opportunities in this life. Very often the younger generation has a small experience of communication and work with specialists of the profession they acquire. People shall convey their experience and lead a new generation. This is the standard of living.

– *Having learned about the appointment to Ukraine, did you set some goals that you had to achieve?*

– Everything went automatically at that time. A significant part is that I respect and love your people. I feel them. I realize that my primary aim is to protect interests of my country, to promote Georgian culture and all the reforms that are being implemented as well as to develop Ukraine, namely to promote Georgian culture and positive changes. In other words I open Georgia to the world and first of all to Ukraine. This is my mission.

– *Presence of Georgian culture in Ukraine is rather visible, as there are active Georgian diaspora, dances, cuisine. The Embassy always supports all initiatives in every way, organizes many events on its own. Please tell us, whether this year Kyiv citizens and guests of the capital also shall expect many festivals?*

– Sure, we always promote the organization and conducting of various festivals. ‘Sukhishvili’ ballet and ‘Mgzavrebi’ band, ensembles ‘Kutaisi’ and ‘Batumi’ regularly come to Ukraine. I sometimes joke that it is not necessary to propagate Georgian culture, because it is already widely presented. I would like Ukrainian groups to visit Georgia more often because you have great performers, dancers, pop music artists. Georgians, for example, like ‘Okean Elzy’ and other modern bands. Cultural interaction should always be par excellence.

This year a festival ‘Tbilisoba’ will be held traditionally. Last year I opened this magnificent event, which visited nearly 20 thousand people. I am extremely happy to know that all Ukrainians present at the festival were extremely pleased with the event. They tasted Georgian food, drinks, participated in master classes. I am very glad that it has become a good tradition. The main feature of every nation is sincerity and spiritual affection.

Georgians especially like Ukrainians. Relationships between people are like a good Georgian wine. So we have to cherish and appreciate friendly relations, strive to know more about each other, be interested in history and culture of our countries. The reverence of the memory of the geniuses of our peoples is the good example of strengthening of cultural exchange. During the visit of V. Hroisman to Telavi, we together laid flowers to the monument of Ukrainian poetess Lesia Ukrainka. She is known and respected in other Georgian cities as well. In Ukraine David Guramishvili, is an example of such a cultural respect of the people. In the city of Myrhorod there is a museum of the life and work of this poet with a preserved library. Moreover, a tomb of the poet is always well kept. I am very glad that people of Myrhorod care about this cultural heritage. I am also very happy to know that in the centre of Georgian capital, just in front of the Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University which celebrated a centenary of establishment this year, there is a marvellous monument to Taras Shevchenko. This prominent Ukrainian poet was highly respected by Georgian poets and thinkers. Recently I have visited a residence-museum of this genius and read his poems written in Ukrainian and Georgian.

– *Please, tell us about your family. We couldn't but ask you this question, as it is known that your wife was born in Ukraine. You have been leaving in marriage for 30 years already that is worthy of respect. Do you have any family traditions, namely Ukrainian?*

– I am proud of my family. My wife's name is Iryna Sultanishvili. Her grandparents were buried in Chernihiv. Her mother is Russian and her father is Georgian. We have a daughter Salome who has a daughter and a son. Our grandson is a big boy already. His name is Nikolz, he is 6 years old. He is younger than Liza for only 10 months. Children is a special kind of happiness. I miss them so much as they live in Tbilisi. My daughter graduated from Bremen University majoring in social-cognitive psychology, she worked as a psychologist, in particular, in an organization that worked with homeless persons and low-income elderly people and children. She has prominent experience. I sincerely rejoice that we are not only the father and daughter, but also the friends. My family, consisting of my wife and daughter, have always supported me and understood me. Family for Ukrainians and Georgians is of great importance. Sustainable traditions in the family is a solid foundation for the state and its development. Family is an important factor in the formation of a personality. I used to be a director of one of the first private schools in Georgia and I have always told parents that children are brought up not only in school, it is a joint activity. Community, school, family – everyone is responsible. Therefore, I wish happiness to all Ukrainian families and mixed Ukrainian and Georgian families, as the number of latter has increased recently.

– *Is it true that you like to cook?*

– Yes, sometimes when I have time.

– *Of course, you have not very much spare time, but what do you cook when you get some free minutes?*

– I noticed while staying in Kyiv without family, I practically do not cook at all. I eat like a student: bread, butter, cheese, sausages, something light to keep strength. However, I like cooking special dishes for my wife, daughter, guests, and grandchildren. I invent new names for that dishes. For instance, 'Imereti drawings' or 'Student's dream'.

– *It is interesting. Please tell us about one of such dishes.*

– During the cooking I always make something special and like to improvise. Especially I like cooking for my daughter. For instance, one of the latest dishes that I cooked for her I called 'Three nuts for Cinderella'. The dish consists of three components: eggplants, tomatoes and cheese, seasoned with sauce pesto and basil. So here is the name. If you remember, there is such a wonderful fairy tale.

I have always contributed to the development of my daughter, I told her fairy-tales, mythological stories, made little surprises. I remember how I took her once for fishing. Having caught a little fish she asked me what shall she do. I told

her to make a wish and let it go. That day she made wishes to three fish she had caught. So how we live.

– *I must say that these are extremely beautiful and warm traditions. Probably your daughter will introduce them to her family.*

– Sure. I hope that this is the way it will be.

– *Do you have any favourite places here in Ukraine?*

– Of course, I have. First of all, I like the park of the Polytechnic Institute, which is not far from the Embassy. I also like Andriivskyi descent for its variety of Ukrainian crafts. There are a lot of similar souvenir-trading places in the world, but Ukrainian ones are special, because they have a century-old tradition and history. Ukraine has a well-developed science, also Ukrainians have a knack for craftsmanship, it is very inventive and gifted nation. I buy a lot of souvenirs and send them to my friends in Tbilisi.

– *Mr. Ambassador, thank you for interesting and sincere conversation.*

– I would like to express gratitude to the Directorate-General for Rendering Services to Diplomatic Missions, since it is very important organisation. You always contribute to the activities of the diplomatic corps, help to maintain friendly relations of many countries with Ukraine. I would like to wish the leadership and the entire team the further development, and Ukraine and Georgia – peace and cooperation between our countries and cultures for the sake of happiness and wellbeing of nations. This is the main goal of diplomacy and politics.