

Proposals for Strengthening Political, Economic and Cultural Ties Between the State of Georgia and Georgia (the Country)

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The country of Georgia is a beautiful country located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, but most U.S. Georgians know as much about the country that shares a name with our beloved State as they do about some of its bordering countries, such as Azerbaijan and Armenia. However, the country of Georgia also borders Russia, Turkey and the Black Sea, making its position on the map extremely important. To avoid confusion going forward, this memorandum will refer to the country of Georgia as “GE” and the U.S. State of Georgia as “GA.”

Despite its pure beauty and fascinating culture, GE is not without its fair share of issues. The trouble spots, however, represent opportunities for GA to assist and influence GE in a manner that is mutually beneficial to both sides. This memorandum sets forth concrete recommendations in ten topic areas for the leaders of

GA to consider in order to develop a direct relationship with GE that will benefit not only GE and GA, but also the United States of America and western society as a whole.

1. EU AND NATO MEMBERSHIP

As a bit of background, GE is not currently a member of the European Union (EU) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). That is not for a lack of want, however. According to the Congressional Research Service report titled “Georgia: Background and U.S. Policy,” as updated on October 17, 2019, “The Georgian government has long made closer integration with the EU and NATO a priority. According to recent polls, almost 80% of the Georgian population supports membership in the EU and over 70% supports membership in NATO.” This sentiment is obvious when speaking with Georgian people.

Unfortunately, GE’s path to membership in the EU and NATO is unclear. GE entered into an association agreement with the EU in 2014, and the EU granted

GE visa-free travel in 2017. The EU also provides significant foreign aid to GE, but the EU is slow to add new members, due in large part to internal disagreements among current EU members about the appropriate qualifications. GE appeared to be on the cusp of gaining membership in NATO in 2008 when NATO members agreed that GE and Ukraine would become members of NATO. However, GE still has not been granted a NATO Membership Action Plan, and there is no indication of when that will actually happen, if ever.

One of the main issues holding GE back from membership in the EU and NATO is its strained relationship with Russia. In particular, approximately 18% of GE is currently occupied by Russia. The history behind the Russian-occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is complex. Abkhazia sits in northwest GE and accounts for over half of GE's Black Sea coastline, while South Ossetia is located in north-central GE and has a major transportation route to Russia as well as proximity to the main east-west highway in GE. The strategic importance of these two regions is clear to all parties involved.

As a brief historical overview, the Russian Empire began to obtain control over various regions of GE in the 1800s, culminating in GE's forced incorporation into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR, or Soviet Union) in 1921-1922. Perhaps the most famous person ever born in GE was none other than Joseph Stalin, who ruled the Soviet Union from the mid-1920s until 1953. In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, and GE gained its independence.

The two Russian-occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia broke away from GE in the early 1990s during the time when GE was gaining its independence from the Soviet Union. Then, in a 2008 war, Russia invaded GE to prevent GE from reestablishing control over the two regions. Russia unilaterally recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia following the war and now treats them as Russian protectorates, with military forces stationed in each.

Since the war between Russia and GE in 2008, Russia has boldly moved the borders in each of these regions to gradually encroach upon GE's territory. In an all-too-common scenario, Russian forces build a fence through the middle of a GE village overnight, leaving some Georgians trapped on the Russian-occupied side of the "new" border. Many GE residents have gone to sleep one night as Georgians and then woken up the very next morning as stateless people. It is a brazen strategy, and it is shocking that it is even possible in this day and age.

Due to GE's troublesome relationship with Russia, GE is largely left in limbo with respect to the EU and NATO. However, according to the U.S. Department of State, the United States "supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and does not recognize the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions of Georgia, currently occupied by Russia, as independent." Furthermore, the United States "is committed to helping Georgia deepen Euro-Atlantic ties." It makes sense for the United States to gain as much influence as possible in GE and expand its activity there to serve as a buffer to Russia's creeping border and influence.

GA could certainly assist with GE's Western leanings by putting its political might behind the promotion of GE as a member of the EU and NATO. Achieving success on this front will take the joint efforts of many high-ranking GA politicians, military members, businesspeople and even celebrities over the course of years, including assistance from former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who hails from the great State of GA. With the United Kingdom recently Brexitting from the EU, it would appear that the EU could be open to adding at least one new member in the imminent future. With President Carter's support, GA can help make that happen.

2. TRADE

GA, and Atlanta in particular, has long been known as a transportation and trade hub in the U.S., resulting in

tremendous population and economic growth. Following up on the strength of GA's railroads, Atlanta built an international airport which is now the busiest airport in the entire world. GE has a similar reputation as a focal point of an expansive transit network, largely because of its location between Asia and Europe. GE has been at the crossroads of the East and West throughout its history, and goods from both directions continue to flow through its borders.

Construction of the deep water port in Anaklia began with much excitement in September 2018 under the Anaklia Development Consortium (ADC), which was a consortium of GE's TBC Holding and Conti International, a U.S.-based construction and development company. The project was expected to be GE's largest infrastructure investment to date, and the GE government committed to major investments in GE's road and rail infrastructure to support the project. The ADC had even appointed Seattle-based SSA Marine, one of the largest terminal operators in the world, as the operator of the port.



While there have been periodic trade discussions since 2012 between the U.S. and GE regarding the possibility of a free-trade agreement, there is one specific trade-related project which could be the perfect way for both GA and GE to work together to enhance their historical legacies as key transportation nodes. That project is the construction of a major deep water port and industrial zone in Anaklia, GE.

For frame of reference, the town of Anaklia sits on GE's Black Sea coastline, just below the Russian-occupied region of Abkhazia. The Black Sea sits northeast of the Mediterranean Sea and is connected to the Mediterranean Sea via two successive straights through Turkey. The Mediterranean Sea then connects to the Atlantic Ocean via the Strait of Gibraltar.

However, in August 2019, Conti International, the primary U.S.-based investor, pulled out of the Anaklia project. According to reports, Conti backed out of the project due to sluggish progress, particularly with respect to the negotiations between the GE government and the banks involved in supporting the deep sea port. That disconnect came to a head when the GE government charged the head of TBC Holding (an affiliate of TBC Bank, which is GE's largest bank), with money laundering in July 2019. TBC Holding was the ADC's principal GE partner in the Anaklia deep sea port, and the head of TBC Holding resigned from both the bank and the ADC following the money laundering charges.

While the future of the port is now on hold and quite uncertain, the opportunity awaits. The GE government has already allocated the land and marine territory to the project, plus there is significant interest from investors around the world to help cover the development cost. There is now a clear chance for GA to get involved in seeing this project through to completion. It just so happens that SSA Marine, the company appointed by the ADC to operate the Anaklia port, also operates GA's largest port located in Savannah.

In order to help push the project along and create a direct trade connection between deep water ports in GA (Savannah) and GE (Anaklia), the Georgia Ports Authority in GA should assist by locating GA-based investors with sufficient interest and capital that would stand to benefit from the new opportunity to receive goods in Savannah from Asia via GE. For example, perhaps UPS, which is based in Atlanta and is one of the biggest logistics companies in the world, would be interested in expanding its ocean freight business in such a manner.

Another way for GA to line up new investors for the Anaklia deep sea port and to encourage trade between GA and GE more generally is for the Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDEcD) in GA to appoint an "International Representative" to GE. According to the GDEcD's website, GA already has "international trade, investment and tourism representatives in 12 strategic markets located throughout Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the Americas, connecting Georgia to the world." In order to foster the trade relationship between GA and GE, the GDEcD should certainly add a GE representative to that group.

Many other U.S. companies from across the U.S. stand to benefit from increased trade with GE, including in the natural gas industry. The U.S. is now the largest producer of natural gas, and it exports liquified natural gas by vessel to countries all over the world. GE was able to escape its dependency on Russian natural gas starting in 2008 by turning to one of GE's other bordering countries, Azerbaijan. This

transition has dramatically reduced the cost of GE's natural gas by cutting Moscow out of the equation, but now almost all of GE's natural gas supplies come from Azerbaijan. It would be in GE's best interest to have a second reliable source of natural gas to avoid significant price hikes in the event that the supply from Azerbaijan is ever unavailable or limited (at least at a reasonable price), and the United States is the perfect alternative source.

3. TOURISM

The city of Tbilisi, GE's capital and largest city, lies on the banks of the Kura River and has an interesting array of new architecture scattered throughout its old town. The background behind a lot of the new architecture is almost amusing, in that it is the result of two competing GE political leaders (one of which is a multi-billionaire whose fortune was accrued in Russia and one of which had to flee GE to escape criminal charges) who each tried to flex their power and influence through the construction of trophy buildings in and around the historic district.

Not far from Tbilisi is GE's eastern Kakheti region, which is famous for its wine production. GE is actually known as the birthplace of wine, as the earliest archaeological evidence of winemaking dating back to 6,000 BC was found in GE. One can explore the history behind GE's wine and food with a knowledgeable guide leading the way. Any American tourist would enjoy sitting on a balcony drinking wine in the mountainous village of Signaghi, simply relaxing and soaking in the expansive view of the fertile Alazani River Valley and the Greater Caucasus mountain range.

GA also has much to offer for tourists. From the North GA mountains to the beautiful coastline, GA is an outdoor paradise that also happens to have a thriving, world-class city in the middle of it. The city of Atlanta boasts the largest aquarium in the Western Hemisphere, Stone Mountain Park, the World of Coca-Cola and the Martin Luther King Jr. historical sites (MLK was born and raised in Atlanta). GA is

also known as a sports destination, with world-class facilities including the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta and the Augusta National Golf Club, home of the Masters Tournament. Outside of Atlanta, tourists flock to the Golden Isles, Okefenokee Swamp and Savannah, a city which was too pretty for Union General Sherman to burn when he finished his March to the Sea during the Civil War.

Given the tourism draws in both GE and GA, it is disappointing that there is not a steady flow of tourists between the two. A major part of the problem is that there are no direct flights between GA and GE. Atlanta is home to Delta Air Lines, the world's largest airline by revenue, yet there is still not a nonstop flight from GA to GE. Delta's reasoning is probably that there is insufficient interest in direct flights from Atlanta to Tbilisi to justify the cost. To solve this problem, the governments of GA and GE could team up to subsidize a portion of the cost of these direct flights to make it happen.

If GA and GE can work together with Delta to create the nonstop flights, the demand will catch up as a

result of the other strategies and initiatives suggested in this memorandum. There is an American Chamber of Commerce in GE with many U.S. companies as members that might be willing to contribute funds to help achieve this goal of direct flights, and the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation is another potential funding source. A perfect example of how to combine government funding and private funding from individual philanthropists, organizations and communities is Birthright Israel, which is a not-for-profit educational organization offering free, ten-day heritage trips to Israel for Jewish young adults, aged 18-32. That model has worked since 1999, and it is about time that American Georgians have a "birthright" (even if it is not free) to visit the other Georgia, and vice versa.

4. UGA PARTNERSHIP

The U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission described in more detail below has already been doing some great work on student exchanges with GE, with a focus on various initiatives such as the



Fulbright Program, the Future Leaders Exchange Program (FLEX), Undergraduate Exchange (UGRAD), Legislative Education and Practice (LEAP), the International Visitor Leadership Program, and the English Language Teaching and Learning Program. Also, Emory University has long had an Atlanta-Tbilisi partnership focused on collaboration between physicians and health care institutions in GE and GA. Other exchange programs assisting former Soviet Union countries include the Open World program and Friendship Force International, and there is even an Atlanta-Tbilisi committee that sends professors from Atlanta to lecture in Tbilisi universities on the subject matter of their expertise.

While the idea of university and educational partnerships between the U.S. and GE is not a new one, there is an angle that has not been developed yet that could be particularly impactful. According to the International Monetary Fund in its April 2017 report on GE, GE needs to (i) improve its agricultural productivity, quality and standards and (ii) take advantage of its biodiversity to diversify its agricultural exports beyond items such as wine and nuts. The IMF indicated that the low agricultural productivity in GE “reflects fragmented land ownership, poor rural infrastructure (such as irrigation and drainage), and lack of knowledge, technology, and investments.” Fortunately, the University of Georgia in Athens, GA has a highly ranked agriculture department that can assist on those fronts.

The UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) is particularly well-known for plant breeding, and it provides science and research that help countries and companies around the world develop better, more adaptable, and more advanced plant varieties. Among the majors available from UGA’s CAES are Applied Biotechnology, Agribusiness, Agricultural and Applied Economics, Agriscience and Environmental Systems, Biological Science, and Food Science. There is no shortage of knowledge related to agriculture at UGA, and that is the knowledge that GE desperately needs in order to achieve the appropriate amount of GDP for the approximately 40% of GE laborers that work in

agriculture. An exchange program of agricultural professors and students between UGA and one of the top agricultural programs in the GE university system would really go a long way.

Furthermore, some sort of collaboration between the University of Georgia (Athens, GA) and the University of Georgia (Tbilisi, GE) needs to happen, given the shared name. Each university has a school of law, and the legal professors and students of each university could collaborate to further advance the rule of law in GE (see more on that below), including in connection with property rights that are essential to expansion of the agricultural sector. GE is working to improve its land registration process, which is crucial to protect property rights and ease land transactions. Without a proper land registry, it is more difficult to provide land as collateral for borrowing, and the benefits of developing agricultural land plots become far less certain if not fully protected by law.



5. THE EMPTY TUBES

Right in the middle of Tbilisi sit two massive, empty, glass/steel buildings in the shape of tubes that face the river and the old town situated directly across the river. Built as an impressive concert hall and exhibition center designed by Italian architect Massimiliano Fuksas, the heartbreaking part about these tubes (which are conjoined at the back) is that they have been left unfinished and abandoned for

years ever since former GE President Mikheil Saakashvili lost power and funding evaporated.

In 2012, while Mikheil Saakashvili was President, billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili established a new opposition party, Georgian Dream. The Georgian Dream party defeated Saakashvili's United National Movement party in the 2012 elections, and Ivanishvili was elected as the Prime Minister of GE. Saakashvili, who was responsible for several modern architectural developments during his tenure as President of GE which started in 2004, including the nearly complete concert hall tubes, was prohibited by the GE constitution from running for a third term and left office in 2013.

In 2013, Ivanishvili voluntarily left the post of Prime Minister based on an earlier campaign promise to do so. However, many believe that he continued to exercise control behind the scenes due in large part to his wealth. In 2018, Ivanishvili returned to politics after several years in the civil sector and was elected as the Chairman of the Georgian Dream party.

On the other hand, things got complicated for Saakashvili following his departure from office. In 2014, Saakashvili was charged with abuse of power among other things, which he claims to be politically motivated. He was forced to flee GE to avoid prosecution, and he moved to Ukraine, where he entered politics and gained Ukrainian citizenship. In 2015, the GE government stripped Saakashvili of his GE citizenship. After growing critical of the Ukrainian government while living in Ukraine, Saakashvili then lost his Ukrainian citizenship in 2017 and was forcibly detained and deported in 2018. After spending time as a stateless person in Europe, Saakashvili returned to Ukraine in 2019 after a new Ukrainian President reinstated his Ukrainian citizenship.

The political rivalry between Saakashvili and Ivanishvili has led to the empty concert hall tubes remaining unfinished to this day. Since 2013, Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream party has kept the concert hall tubes from ever being completed. It is disheartening to see such an impressive venue left unused when it is capable of bringing so many people

together to appreciate musical and cultural performances. Withholding funding from a musical and cultural center that is almost complete (note that the tubes appear to be completely finished on the outside) seems quite petty.

Ivanishvili needs to release his party's control over the tubes and allow the concert hall to be completed and enjoyed. Completion of the tubes would represent not only a victory for the arts, but also a symbolic victory on the path to more democratic reforms that are free from political rivalries. Ivanishvili could even name the concert hall after himself if that is what it takes to get it open. Every visitor to Tbilisi will inevitably ask about the empty tubes, and, upon finding out why they are not open, will think less favorably of GE and its politics.

Another way to potentially get Ivanishvili comfortable with finishing and opening the concert hall is to allow GA a certain amount of control or influence over the programming as part of the overall GA/GE partnership. For instance, the University of Georgia in Athens, GA could schedule its own events in the concert hall to complement the GA-GE university relationship proposed above. Similarly, symphony orchestras, bands and theatrical groups from universities across the entire country of GE would love the chance to perform in such a large space in the heart of Tbilisi, and there is no excuse to deprive students of such education-related endeavors. Finally, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and countless world-famous performers from GA (including Usher, the Zac Brown Band, Widespread Panic and opera singer Jennifer Larmore), would likely welcome the opportunity to headline a show at such a venue to facilitate the GA/GE relationship.

6. RULE OF LAW

It is no secret that GE has had its fair share of issues enforcing the rule of law. There have been allegations, and proof in many instances, of official pressure on state employees to support certain political candidates, ballot box stuffing, vote buying,

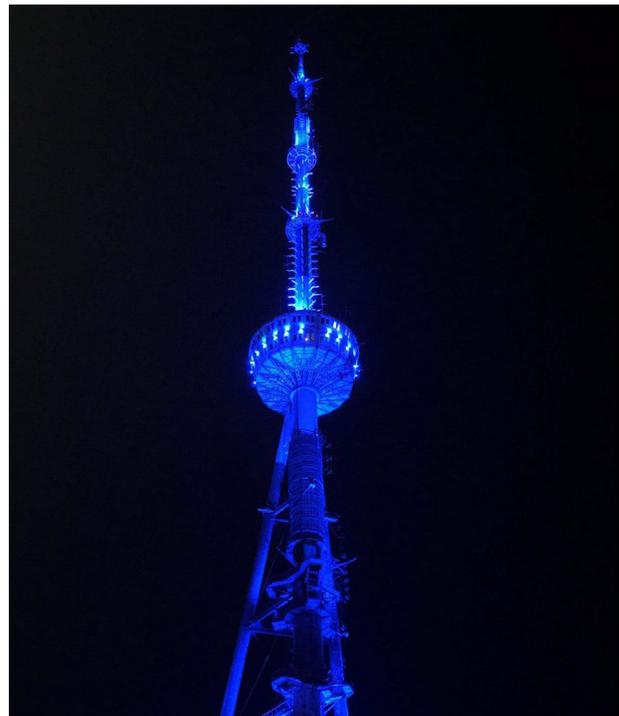
politically motivated pardons, money laundering, disputed judicial appointments, and even restraints on media freedom. However, GE has also shown some signs of progress, including the recent March 2020 memorandum of understanding between leaders of GE's ruling and opposition parties regarding reforms to the electoral system for the upcoming October 2020 parliamentary elections.

The United States is admittedly far from perfect when it comes to avoiding corruption, but it is clearly the goal of American society, with most of our institutions and laws built around the idea of eradicating corruption in the States and around the globe. Many Americans may believe that corruption in a foreign country is a local problem in that country that does not impact America. However, as the U.S. Department of State aptly describes it, "Around the world, corruption saps economic growth, hinders development, destabilizes governments, undermines democracy, and provides openings for dangerous groups such as criminals, traffickers, and terrorists. The Department of State has made anti-corruption a national security priority and works across the globe to prevent graft, strengthen investigation and prosecution of corruption, promote accountability and transparency, and empower reformers." Corruption is a threat to our national security, as well as the economy and democracy, and it must be taken seriously.

The rule of law is an area where GA can take specific steps to assist GE. It would be great for there to be interactions between judges from GA and judges from GE, but the best way to really change the culture in GE is to focus on the next generation. Therefore, it would be best to start with future lawyers while they are still in law school. The collaboration between the law schools at the University of Georgia (Athens, GA) and the University of Georgia (Tbilisi, GE) mentioned above could include investigations by law students and professors from both universities into rule of law issues in GE. The resulting reports from the investigations could offer concrete suggestions for the appropriate responses to such rule of law issues and how to prevent such problems

from happening again by passing and enforcing appropriate laws which may be similar to laws already in place in GA and/or the U.S.

Furthermore, it would be very beneficial for young professional groups in GA and GE to partner together to network, advance ideas and discuss current rule of law issues in GA and GE. The open dialogue between the younger people as they prepare to become tomorrow's leaders in business, politics, etc. will help turn the tide with respect to the rule of law in GE, because that change will not happen overnight. For example, the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar of GA could partner with the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association in GE, and young professional organizations across a range of industries that are based in Atlanta could coordinate with their respective counterparts in Tbilisi.



7. HOLLYWOOD

As described above, GE is a country with recent stories and scandals that are fit for a Hollywood film. Potential GE-related scripts aside, GA should take Hollywood to GE. For those who may not be aware,

GA is known as the Hollywood of the South. In fact, GA is in the top three U.S. States for film and television production in the U.S., behind only California and New York. This tremendous accomplishment is thanks in large part to generous film tax credits offered by the GA government, and 2019 film and television productions in GA included television shows such as *The Walking Dead*, *Ozark*, and *Stranger Things* and major films such as *Bad Boys for Life*.



The Georgia Film Office in GA has done a fantastic job of growing GA’s film industry for several decades. According to the GA Department of Economic Development’s website, “For over 40 years, the Georgia Film Office has been engaged in bringing film and television production to Georgia. The office maintains a locations database of thousands of properties, and provides scouting assistance as well as certifying projects for the tax incentive. With its temperate climate, great variety of locations, the world’s busiest airport, large crew base and pro-business focus, Georgia is now a leading destination in the world for filming.” This growth has had an enormous impact on GA’s economy in the billions of dollars each year by creating local jobs and increasing spending in GA, and there is even a large amount of film tourism happening as a result of the big-name productions filmed in GA.

Many of the productions that are filmed in GA also film portions of their movies and shows in Europe, and that is where there is potential for GA to strengthen ties with GE. If the GE government is willing to offer significant film tax credits like those offered in GA, as well as cash rebates for a portion of the money spent in GE on filming (note that such cash rebates appear to already be an option to a certain extent), then GA-based production companies would likely be willing to consider GE as their go-to country for European (or at least Eastern European) filming. A key to making this happen would of course be the creation of regular direct flights between Atlanta and Tbilisi as mentioned above to make GE more accessible.

GE is an idyllic European location for filming. Tbilisi is situated in a river valley, with hills sloping up on both sides of the city, which allows for some fantastic views of the city. The old town in Tbilisi has narrow, cobbled streets where churches of a variety of religions mix with traditional Georgian houses with old courtyards and colorful wooden balconies. The city as a whole has a distinctly European feel, meaning it could pass for a wide variety of European cities in a film. There are also distinctive sulfur baths dating back to the Middle Ages, where one can still get sulfur baths today, and there are even several Soviet buildings that would be perfect for period pieces.

Outside of Tbilisi, there are beautiful sites and expanses that are easily accessible from the city given the fairly small size of the country (GE is about half the size of GA), such as the churches in Mtskheta, a spectacular cave monastery in Vardzia, the snow-capped Greater Caucasus mountains, a cave city in Uplistsikhe and a modern city on the Black Sea coast in Batumi.

Practically speaking, it would not be difficult to pull off the actual filming once in GE. There are already GE-based film production companies with talented employees, and the non-skilled local labor would be easy to find and afford given the relatively high unemployment and poverty levels compared to Western Europe. Finally, there are organizations in

place in GE to facilitate filmmaking, such as Enterprise Georgia and Film in Georgia. As an added benefit, it would be fantastic for Hollywood films that were filmed partly in GE to have their GE (or perhaps even European) premiers in the empty tubes mentioned above that will hopefully be open soon as a splendid concert hall.

8. RESTAURANTS

The cuisine in GE is absolutely delectable, and on top of that, GE has one of the best feasting traditions. For special occasions, GE natives gather together with their family, friends and guests for a traditional and extravagant feast called a “*supra*.” The best and most unique part of every *supra* is that it must have a toastmaster (“*tamada*” in Georgian) who is responsible for giving the toasts and entertaining the guests. The drink is typically either homemade wine fermented in clay jars buried in the ground according to the ancient wine-making technique in GE or *chacha*, which is basically traditional GE moonshine that is quite strong.

The toastmaster follows a specific order of subjects for the toasts (note that the order varies by region and perhaps even by household), and the initial toasts generally cover the topics of time, God, GE, family, deceased loved ones, the reason for the *supra*, and the guests before the toastmaster begins to choose topics to cover. The *supra* and toastmaster are mainstays of the social culture in GE, and there is even a statue of a toastmaster holding a horn of wine in his hand in Tbilisi that people rub for good luck.

In terms of the spread at a GE *supra*, there are mountains of food that continue to come out over the course of several hours. On the table, there is most certainly *tonis puri*, which is boat-shaped GE flatbread that is traditionally baked in a deep circular clay oven that may look like a hole dug into the ground. A very popular salad in GE is a cucumber tomato onion salad with walnut dressing that is delightful. Expect to see *khinkali* (meat-filled dumplings), *khachapuri* (cheese-stuffed bread) and

platters full of skewers of barbecued meat (typically pork), as well as mushrooms, potatoes, etc. Finally, the dessert at the end of the meal could be cakes and/or perhaps the traditional GE candy called *churchkhela*, which is a string of walnut halves that have been dipped in grape juice thickened with flour and then sun-dried. Throughout and after the meal, there is lots of drinking led by the toastmaster.

Outside of GE, it is not difficult to dine in GE restaurants in cities such as London and New York, but there does not appear to be a GE restaurant anywhere in Atlanta or the State of GA. In order to embrace the relationship between GA and GE and encourage tourism between the two as mentioned above, GA and GE should collaborate to fund the opening of an authentic GE restaurant in Atlanta. Even if the restaurant requires certain tax breaks from GA and/or subsidies from the GA Department of Economic Development (which the Mayor of Atlanta can likely help arrange) and its GE counterpart, a GE restaurant in Atlanta would open the eyes and tastes of so many GA residents to a new food and culture and serve to welcome our visitors from GE.

Likewise, there should be an authentic GA restaurant that opens in Tbilisi. The people of GE are certainly already familiar with GA’s finest “wine,” Coca-Cola, and they have even been exposed to several U.S. fast-food chains (particularly in Tbilisi), but most have likely never tasted real Southern soul food. The governments of GA and GE could make this happen in Tbilisi, and it may even be possible to get private sponsorships from companies like Coca-Cola (note that Coca-Cola is an example of a company that would benefit tremendously from the opening of the Anaklia port mentioned above through increased exports to Asia via GE) or other GA-based food/beverage brands such as Chick-Fil-A that would like to promote their name to an entire country of potential visitors to the U.S. The GA restaurant in Tbilisi should be a typical “meat and three” type of place with a GA native as the chef. Anthony Bourdain taught the world that perhaps one of the easiest ways to bring people together is through food, and a

restaurant exchange between GA and GE would do just that.

9. GOVERNOR'S VISIT

As perhaps the simplest and most symbolic step, the Governor of GA should make the trip to GE to begin forging a close bond that will assist U.S. foreign relations with GE significantly and kickstart all of the other items mentioned in this memorandum.

Unfortunately, this “simple” step is a bit more complicated because GE has both a President and a Prime Minister. This semi-presidential system is not uncommon across the globe and particularly in former communist countries, with France being the most well-known example of a country with a President and a Prime Minister. GE adopted a semi-presidential system in 2004, and the Prime Minister holds the more powerful position as the true head of government, particularly with respect to domestic policy. The President’s role is largely ceremonial and is focused more on foreign relations. Therefore, the GE President is a logical first point of contact for the Governor of GA to arrange the visit, but after making the long trip all the way from GA to GE, the Governor of GA should plan to meet with both the President (currently Salome Zourabichvili) and Prime Minister (currently Giorgi Gakharia).

The goal of this trip would be to learn more about what GA can do to help GE, while also presenting certain ideas (including the ones set forth herein) about how GE can help GA. For background, the modern history of US diplomatic relations with GE began in 1992 following GE’s 1991 independence from the Soviet Union. As Henry Kissinger, former U.S. Secretary of State, wrote in *Diplomacy*, “When communism collapsed, the Wilsonian idea that the road to peace lay in collective security, coupled with the worldwide spread of democratic institutions, was adopted by administrations of both major American political parties.” The U.S. certainly recognized GE as a country that was open to the spread of democracy, and it is extremely important for the U.S. to fully

embrace GE as one of its key toeholds in the former Soviet Union in order to enhance our collective security.

While the U.S. may have to concede some items/issues in countries like Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan going forward in order to acknowledge Russia’s strength in the region and give Russia at least the perception that the U.S. is being deferential to a degree (note that the Trump Administration is expected to appoint the first U.S. Ambassador to Belarus in over a decade after a recent February 1, 2020 visit to Belarus by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo), a lot of the legwork can be done in GE. That is where GA can play an important role.



In order to reap the benefits of the initial meeting between the Governor of GA and the leaders of GE, the Governor of GA should build on that momentum by participating, directly and/or through other senior-level GA policymakers, in the annual meetings of the U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission. The 2009 U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership that created the Strategic Partnership Commission provides the framework that codifies much of the relations between the U.S. and GE. The Strategic Partnership Commission comprises four bilateral working groups focused on the following areas identified in the Charter: (i) democracy; (ii) defense and security; (iii) economic, trade, and energy issues;

and (iv) people-to-people and cultural exchanges. In order to actively and regularly engage with GE, GA should find its way onto the Commission’s working groups to participate in the yearly planning meetings alongside key U.S. and GE representatives.

10. MOTHER OF GEORGIA STATUE

If all else fails with respect to the items above, GA at least needs a Mother of Georgia statue in GA that will be a symbol of our relationship with GE, much like the Statue of Liberty is a reminder of America’s relationship with France. In Tbilisi, there is a massive monument called Kartlis Deda (which basically translates into Mother of Georgia) situated at the top of Sololaki Hill overlooking the city. The 20-meter-tall statue was installed in 1958 to celebrate GE’s 1,500th anniversary, and the Mother of Georgia holds a sword across her waist with one hand to fight those who come as enemies and a bowl of wine in the other

hand raised to the level of her head to welcome those who come as friends.

A monument representing the “Mother” of the country is not uncommon in former Soviet Union countries, with Albania, Ukraine, Russia, Armenia and GE each having their own distinct statue. Now it is time for GA to have its own as a concrete reminder of its soon-to-be-strengthened ties to GE. Athens, GA would be the ideal location for the statue, given the proposed University of Georgia partnership and the fact that real estate in Athens will be much easier to obtain than in Atlanta. Specifically, GA’s Mother of Georgia statue should be installed on one of the hills on UGA’s campus to be viewed by students and townspeople alike, as well as visitors from GA, GE and all around the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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