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Interview of the President by Rustavi 2, Georgia TV

The Map Room

10:07 A.M. EDT

Q Mr. President, let me thank you very much for this opportunity to interview you. And on behalf of Georgian people, let me welcome you to Georgia.

Why have you decided to visit Georgia? None of the American Presidents have visited this country before.

THE PRESIDENT: You know, I got to know your President, and I can remember him urging me to come to Georgia. He's got such enthusiasm about life and about the future of Georgia. And I have been most impressed by the aftermath of the Rose Revolution, that I said I want to go, I want to see -- I want to feel the sense of a new democracy. I want to be there to thank the Georgian people for setting such a good example for other countries that have followed. And so I'm really looking forward to the trip.

Q Mr. President, Georgia faces a lot of problems; among them, two unresolved conflicts, quite difficult -- the economic situation, Russia military presence in the country. How do you see resolving all those problems?

THE PRESIDENT: Peacefully. And I think they will be resolved peacefully. But you're right, it's difficult to go from a country of -- a communist country to a free country. It's not easy. I think the President understands that and his government understands that.

On the economic front, there's a lot of work to be done, but by routing out corruption and insisting upon rule of law and transparency, that will help attract investment and capital.

Secondly, in terms of the regional disputes or the bases, I can help some. But the best way to do this -- deal with this issue is to do it peacefully between Russia and Georgia. And I think we've got a very good chance of seeing these issues resolved in a peaceful way. It just takes time sometimes to deal with old disputes.

Q The latest developments of Eastern Europe and the region, I mean, the Georgia's Rose Revolution and Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and elections in Moldova and revolution in Kyrgyzstan caused Russia's negative reaction. And relations between Moscow and these countries are getting worse. So how is U.S. going to support these transitional democracies in the future?

THE PRESIDENT: No, that's a great question, and the first thing is, is that when I see President Putin, I will remind him again that democracies on his border will make it easier for Russia to grow in a peaceful way. Democracies are peaceful. Democracies don't like war. And democracies are the best form of government to deal with animosities and concerns.

And so I will remind him that this is not a plot by anybody or any nation. This is just the inevitable course of humankind because all humans want to be free. And as Georgia's economy begins to grow and pick up, Russia will have a trading partner, Russia will realize that a prosperous democracy in her south is good for the people of Russia.

Q U.S. Department's annual report on terrorism raised some questions about the stability in Pankisi Gorge. But Georgian government, with support of U.S., was successful in clearing this gorge of military elements. So how will relations -- I mean, military cooperation between Georgia and the United States in the future?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I appreciate that. No, it's going to be very close, obviously at the request of the Georgian government. And I -- the Georgian government asked for help in routing out the terrorists who had lodged themselves in the Pankisi Gore -- training help. We were more than happy to provide it. But remember, what was interesting about some of those operations is there was close cooperation with the Russians, and I thought that was very helpful and very instructive about what can happen, because it's in Russia's interest, it's in the United States' interest, and more importantly, it's in Georgia's interest to make sure the Pankisi Gorge is clear of terrorist traffic or terrorist safe haven. No country wants terrorists who are willing to cause harm living within their border. And so I found this to be a very instructive and interesting cooperative arrangement.

Q Georgia is seeking NATO membership.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q How big is chance?

THE PRESIDENT: It's good. But remember, this is a performance-based criterion. In other words, there's a way to get into NATO. And I will tell President Saakashvili that there's -- to look at the countries that have recently been admitted and see what decisions they made and how they -- what they did. And I would hope it's good. But just remember, it's a process. It just doesn't happen overnight. And that's not only what I have told your President, but I've told the President of Ukraine and other countries that are interested in joining NATO.

Q Thanks for your precious time, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Glad you're here. Looking forward to going to Georgia. It's going to be an exciting trip.

Q I wish you a successful and safest trip.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, sir.

Q Thank you so much.

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