

**Nika Gvaramia - Journalist**

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**Moderator:** I'll talk just a little bit. I've been friends with Zviad for a number of years, from the Fletcher connection and Zviad was wonderfully kind enough to invite me to Tbilisi this past summer to lecture on my new book and to meet with LEADx, we all know Zviad's program LEADx which is a fantastic community of young and mid-level career professionals, activists, from all across the Caucasus and the former Soviet bloc.

While we were there the big news of that week was Nika's release. And it was absolutely just a celebration and we were so happy to be there for that.

I had spent five years in Moscow before, or what my wife calls five winters. I'd been to Georgia often. But what was really stunning to me being there on the ground was the sense of great popularity for Western values among the Georgian people, something I didn't sense was reflected by your government, and I want to talk about that a little bit. It was also so wonderful, you all know the phrase "Ugly American", right? Tourists who misbehave. Well it was so great being an American and letting the ugly Americans [inaudible] all the Russians who were in Tbilisi.

So with that, Nika, welcome. We are honored. The floor is yours, please share a few thoughts.

**Mr. Gvaramia:** Thank you very much for having me here. Thank you very much for the invitation and the interest that you have towards Georgia.

First of all my country, my homeland. Which I don't think that it's an irregular situation and there is no similarities and serious problems in my country. Thank you for supporting me personally. And thank you for here people who actually tremendously affected the decision of the Georgian President pardoning me.

The most important thing I would like to share with you that a lot of Georgians probably they know even better than me, some kind of, better than I knew some things about Georgia, but still

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I had my own experience and I would share with you this experience in a few words.

Put it in a nutshell, Georgia is Russia style authoritarians. What happens in Georgia is not a matter of bad governance. It's an issue for Russian style authoritarians. There's a huge difference between those two because bad governments can be reelected or elected or changed by the way of elections or kind of different approach through the years. But still the Russian style of authoritarianism in general means kind of the blocking of elections or the possible distribution of power.

What happens in Georgia is a mirror, kind of distribution of labor and not just power between the branches who are all of the same in subsuming that it's a branch of Ivanishvili who is the main guy in Georgia now. What happens in Georgia, it's the Russian style oligarchy and we should know that there is huge difference between oligarchy and strongman's power which is present in Europe even, and some say that it was present a few years ago in the United States as well, the strongman's power.

So what is difference between strongman's power and oligarchy? That is that strongman is at the end of the day is a politician, so they need money for being in politics. That's not good of course, but it still looks like usurpation of power via money, but still it is politics.

What is about oligarchy? Oligarchy needs politics to know that you get more money. So what is difference? Oligarchy is not only [inaudible] of politicians or international politics or barely they are. So that is main difference and makes oligarchy much more dangerous than strongman's power. In Hungary, for example.

So Ivanishvili, that's a later development after 2021 probably, makes him more clear. I would say it was after Ukrainian war that was political coming out, I would say. And geopolitical may be coming out as a kind of ally of Russia more than the rest. That's anti-Ukrainian politics of Georgia and something awkward never happening in Georgia, never. So that's [inaudible] of democracy. It is something unusual -- it's not unusual for democracy, I mean [inaudible] of democracy I mean for Georgia. But still Georgia is now behind Armenia in this sense which is the first time in our history. And what is even more important. Georgia is behind, according to these kind of

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geopolitics, behind Armenia in support of Ukraine. It is unbelievable because we know that since difference, due to different circumstances, Armenia unfortunately is satellite of Russia but still gradually coming out of this influence zone which is perfect news for me and for Georgia and in support of fully independent Armenia, but still it's in comparison with Georgia, Armenia looks much better. Way better in democracy and in kind of anti-Russian politics included.

So I was 13 months a prisoner, a political prisoner. So is it unbearable? No. It's not unbearable. What is unbearable, it is possibility of having political prisoners in my country. And this possibility is not just possibility. It's a quite much often realized possibility. I mean kind of we have another guy on the ground who is political prisoner that is Mikheil Saakashvili, a huge scale politician who is now, you know, imprisoned. And he has to be released, but there is no chance, there is no chance to release him until this regime change will happen in Georgia. And I hope that it will have place in 2024 elections and Georgia will be not just more consolidated democracy but full Western country and will be back on this full European track and path which is for Georgia the kind of only chance to survive.

That is momentum now Russia has, you know, shut down to death Georgia. I would say so because it's about independence. It's not about successful and democratic Georgia, it's about independent Georgia. That is momentum for Russia. They know it because our new generation is totally pro-Western. For them Russia is kind of not geopolitical. That's [inaudible] period. And there is no chance for Russia to survive in Georgian politics, in Georgian geopolitics if our new generations are in charge of the country. But they know it.

And my generations and the generations who was born in Soviet Union and who are actually the more vulnerable to Russian influence and maligned influence I would say. The certainness of Russia, it's just about us because some of us are ready to, you know, be defined with Russian influence. Unfortunately, almost all of those guys who are fine with it are in government now.

And you know, when you have on the ground flow, when you have some Russian oligarch on the ground it means a lot if you can understand what I mean. And I understand it's not very easy to

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understand for American what it means Russian oligarch, oligarch on the ground as the main guy, [inaudible] any forces including justice, including persecution, including police, including social life, including media, everything is included. All inclusive. This is all inclusive country for this guy.

And we have to change it. That's the only way. We have to remove him as the main hindrance of democracy to the way of democracy, and the making the way for Western Georgia. And I would say that, I would not say that you must and you should even, but it would be great if you help us. And you are doing a lot. Your sanctions, your very well targeted and calibrated sanctions and recently sanctioned the [inaudible]. Officially declared by the State Department as [FSD], active agents, not some kind of agent of influence or something like this. Active agent on the ground of Georgia. He's still in Georgia, he will be in Georgia until elections because he is handling this election, [inaudible], et cetera.

But you know what now US and European Union are doing is pretty much complex. It's very well targeted and calibrated, as I mentioned, and it's high time to be more straightforward, more determined in your language, which used to be very mild sometimes. But understanding of Russia is changing. It's getting better day by day. Ukraine is paying or that, unfortunately, but being [inaudible], I understand that Ukrainian can be [inaudible] assessing the situation. But from the point of view of world politics, Ukrainian war, I mean war in Ukraine changed and ruined the paradigm, the paradigm of world politics I think that's more human being oriented politics. Paradigm is not about stability, it's about humanity, it's about democracy, and that is what we need. I think that is United States built upon actually. That's your main power, your main currency is democracy at the end of the day. I think so. And America is number one and will be number one since democracy matters in the world.

**Moderator:** Thank you. I'm going to stop you there. I'll ask the first question and then we'll go around the table for the 45 minutes. We'll end promptly at one o'clock. I know everyone's busy.

So Nika, talk a little bit about the way Putin exerts maligned influence not just in Georgia but across the Caucasus. The New York Times had a story this morning by my friend Julian Barnes,

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the intelligence reporter, that the US is already seeing deep fakes, misinformation, et cetera, and that the American people need to get smarter to read that. Separate topic.

But what do you see in your home country, in the region, and how can the US help out?

**Mr. Gvaramia:** The most important power is the media. So the Russian propaganda in Georgia is clear, very flat I would say. We call it yellow. Some kind of that's unbelievable stories about, you know, parrot number one and parrot number two and six year old kids can you know, be transgenders, et cetera. That's all about America, and that is provided by the programming [inaudible] channels in Georgia. So that's Imedi TV, that's [inaudible], and public broadcaster even sometimes. That's a way of life in United States, in Europe. It's just about, you know, kind of that's very strange things, against Georgian traditions. You know. It's just not true, absolutely. Against conservative views of people and conservatives are severely oppressed or something like this which is not true. Because I think that America is a conservative country, and a lot of countries in Europe are more conservative country than Georgia is, more religious countries than Georgia is, et cetera.

But still it works by media channels. And our approach that education of things or some kind of media literacy working scenario, it is not. It is not because lectures, [brochures], conferences, you know, the research data analysis is not working scenario when you have the wild propaganda on your screens. Propaganda should be defeated by the same vehicles as propaganda is produced and by the same bearers.

Of course I don't mean that it's kind of lies or misinformation. No, of course not. Just I mean the platforms. That platform means, the name of this platform is infotainment. That is American creature. Infotainment was Europe first, number first, number one kind of [weaken] against communists. And your number one weapon was [inaudible]. That is infotainment number one. Infotainment in the history of kind of informational war against Soviet Union.

And now why you guys change it and downplayed it to brochures and conferences, I don't know. Because it's not working at all. Because Russians are spending a lot of money and doing their best stuff, and low quality stuff, and you have some kind of

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meta show such as Voice. We can do Voice and kind of everyone understands that America is the best one because they have best show, Voice. So you know, the pro-Western people are providing Voice. And pro-Russian people are providing something --

**Moderator:** I've heard Zviad sing. He has a pretty good voice. [Laughter].

**Mr. Gvaramia:** But how to speak about this? It's story telling is most important thing. Not just kind of giving some knowledges, numbers, budgets. And no one cares in Georgia how many millions were spent on Georgian justice. No one cares because there is no justice in Georgia.

But the second thing is, you know, the budgets, numbers, it's not impressive. Impressive is how people are living in US including conservative people. And Georgian conservatives is interested how American conservative is living. What is his problem or her problem? Because they are pretty much similar in their approach, in their point of views. And Georgian liberals are interested in American liberals' lives. How they are facing problems with conservatives. Et cetera, et cetera.

So there is, you know, human story. Human story. The main thing about TV and main thing about information and main thing about propaganda as well. Which is truth about propaganda -- key word is interesting. Propaganda is always interesting. How to counter propaganda? The key word is always the same. Interesting. But it should be not lie, but it should be interesting.

TV is a Coke. It's not kind of chateau, established in 18<sup>th</sup> century and giving your best champagne. It's not about TV. TV is Coke. It should be easily digestible, easily achievable.

**Voice:** And allowed for kids.

**Mr. Gvaramia:** And allowed for kids. And what is most important, the key word is interesting.

**Moderator:** Just a footnote on that before questions. No less a luminary than Bob Gates, the former Defense Secretary, CIA Director, had a major piece in the Washington Post a month or so ago calling for expanding the budgeting of USIA Voice of America, to put muscle back as when I was in Moscow, et cetera.

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**Voice:** I've been smiling all this time since Ivana came into the room. I think she did not have a chance to introduce herself. She is the person to follow for propaganda. And these are --

[Multiple voices].

**Voice:** Good afternoon. First of all, thank you so much for inviting me. And thank you so much for recommending me. My name is Ivana [Sadling] and I'm a fellow at [Information] for Defense of Democracies. I also teach at John Hopkins University cybersecurity, and I'm a special correspondent for the [Inaudible].

My main research is indeed on Russian propaganda and I was indeed smiling because everything you just mentioned, it really resonated with me. I didn't grow up here in the United States so oftentimes when I speak with people about how to counter Russian propaganda it's all about what you just mentioned, how they operate here. For example, raising the awareness and numbers and they are talking about increasing the budget. But that doesn't really help. I really firmly believe we need a complete restructure of our approach and go back to the Cold War era, to join the offensive. And [inaudible] that we do not need to spread lies. The truth is on our side.

I would like to say with [inaudible] Russian propaganda. Just think about Nagorno-Karabakh, which is [inaudible]. What a great opportunity to launch an offensive in which [inaudible] and to tell the world that Russia is losing its [inaudible]. That Russia is [inaudible]. And to stress something like that and [inaudible] in Africa, in Asia.

So that's my reasoning and thoughts in a nutshell. So I wanted to take this opportunity to respond to your presentation.

**Moderator:** Other questions?

**Mr. Gvaramia:** You bring a great case, I would say the best case. From my point of view this three-day war is not, from my perspective actually, they won this war in the very beginning because they won the propaganda war because that was the main thing.

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The very main thing about even Zelenskyy, because he know how to run the show. So it is a show. I understand that maybe somehow the correctness of information is damaged by 21<sup>st</sup> century, but that's [inaudible]. In 21<sup>st</sup> century not just facts but perceptions matter.

So Zelenskyy's main power, main power is the thing that he knows how to run the show. Show, of course, in a kind of -- and his statements are very good, well calibrated against Russian propaganda. And he defeated it in the very beginning. And propaganda should be defeated in the very beginning. If you are following propaganda, you are always losing because propaganda is always that step forward. One step forward. So you should not follow. You should defeat it in the very beginning and then propaganda follows you. You are the winner.

**Voice:** You should always put them on the defensive and [inaudible]. Let them spend time, energy and resources in defending themselves.

**Mr. Gvaramia:** Absolutely, because propaganda is not about defense. Propaganda is offensive. Propaganda is not defensive [inaudible]. They are losing.

**Voice:** You mentioned the traditional, spiritual and world values. How Russia is basically portraying the West as a decadent and as a satanic state. And it's fascinating, I'm not following closely Georgia, but I'm following very closely the Russian [inaudible] here and elsewhere, in Europe. I'm just curious [inaudible] Russia's military strategies [inaudible] traditional, spiritual and world values [inaudible]. How do counter that?

**Mr. Gvaramia:** I don't think that it works in Georgia. That's going to be some kind of [inaudible] for someone. I don't think that it works in Georgia. What works in Georgia is more propaganda. Because we have our own collective [inaudible] which is more 15 years ago had war, and 30 years ago had war, so you know, Georgians are pretty much vulnerable to this topic and especially having worked in Ukraine and thousands of killed, kids, et cetera. They're very sensitive to that. And what is working? That is working. What is our TV channels and the [inaudible] TV channels, you know, that's about work. And what is the main, what they are blaming the West? Actually that is how to engage Georgia in war. How the collapsing West and the



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global war party was to engage Georgia in war. I don't know. It's silly things. But that is working scenario in Georgia.

Because om Hungary it's a different thing. Hungary is, you know, that's having [inaudible], just trying on trauma. This 2<sup>nd</sup> World War trauma about breaking [inaudible] et cetera. Providing -- [inaudible] is in danger. Now this, some kind of [inaudible] in danger. They want to take over everything, our sovereignty, et cetera. It's working for [inaudible] areas.

For Georgians, it's not working. Even for Georgian dream it's not working because [inaudible] with Georgia is Russia. And Georgia, we never approach Russia in a negative way. So that's why this pillar of propaganda is not working in Georgia.

Second, this pillar in Europe, for example, in the same Hungary is the migrants. It doesn't work in Georgia because all of the Georgian migrants are Russians. So the Georgians have a [inaudible] approach to migrants because it's people of some kind of their nationality.

The third pillar is sovereignty. So they are taking our sovereignty. That's everything should be decided by the center. It's now, used to decide Moscow, now Washington and Brussels, et cetera. It's not working in Georgia because no one cares about these issues. Or everyone in Georgia want a safe or secure country, prosperous country, and we are fine with Brussels and Washington's decision and we know that it is not against our traditions or Georgian values, et cetera. Because our values are democracy. At the end of the day we are very focused on people. We are not from Moscow. We are Western people. We are [inaudible]. So we just like Russians as a kind of -- and we don't think that our future is Russia. What we do actually, we are afraid of Russia. We are scared of Russia because of war and because of our collective trauma and that is the working scenario in Georgia. And this issue is heavily used by Russian style propaganda in Georgia because that is the kind of specifics of Georgia. And this is very specific to Georgia.

In Hungary, for example, I never heard about -- actually that's a very heavy, you know, kind of propaganda about there will be war in our streets if we are not kind of good relations with Russia. No. It's the main thing that Europe is evil. So Europe is evil, it's not working in Georgia because we know that Europe is not evil. But Europe needs us as a part of the war,

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it is working because we are scared of war. We are scared of people dying in the streets of Tbilisi because it's recent. It's open trauma still. It's a bleeding [inaudible]. Unfortunately.

And exploiting this kind of fear, and it is a fear of death. That's probably the biggest fear of humankind, of human beings. So it's terrorizing, you know, the country. Your own people. And they are terrorizing Georgian people every single day, providing information that Georgia will be engaged in war if Georgian dream is not [inaudible]. Georgian people going to die, et cetera, et cetera. They are opening this trauma every day, simply it's terrorism against our own people.

Terrorism is a different thing. It's --

**Voice:** I've been in town for almost ten years now. For the first five years working for the Voice of America, Georgian Service and covering Georgia. And now it's mostly focused on [inaudible] affairs. I hate when people say like Russian neighborhood I say no, not Russian neighborhood, I'm covering Ukraine. And I've been here enough to see, to make all sorts of [inaudible] from very high level politicians to opposition leaders to civil society leaders. And then there is coverage with [inaudible] based on the record and background conversations with the people [they met].

I heard you saying that of people over these nine years, like help us. It was always like okay, help us with this. Do we need to get rid of Ivanishvili? How can you help us? At some point before the full scale invasion started in Ukraine, there was some sense of okay, enough is enough. You Georgians are spoiled. You have [inaudible]. If you want to [inaudible] the government, elect the government. But then war of course changed a lot of things. And I personally see more sympathy towards Georgia and more interest in this city.

I am relieved to hear you when you're saying I'm not saying you must help us. Or not even saying you shall help us. I'm sure this conversation will come out during your other meetings, especially with policy-makers and on the Hill. What is your sense? Like with coming elections for 2024. Can we count on support from the States or -- I know you were in Brussels as well.

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**Mr. Gvaramia:** I am absolutely sure that we can. The main thing we have to do by our own hands, you know, some kind of -- let's go a bit deeper. Candidate [inaudible] thing. So the people deserve, Georgian people deserve to be the candidate, the European Union candidate. Georgian people, let's say it's correct or incorrectly. Georgian people want to be part of Europe. Deserves Georgian people or not, this decision is measured by the government, by the elections. I think that's only [inaudible]. That's historical. In the historical view, we do not deserve. We are Europeans. In the sense of, you know, our kind of desires, yes. But desire and the fact that we [inaudible] doesn't mean that, it's not particularly saying that Georgian people deserve. I think that yes, we want and we deserve even, let's say, but sit still. We have to clarify these things at the end of the day by elections. And I am sure the Georgian people will elect a new government. There will be peaceful transfer of power.

And what we need actually from the side of the West, it's not kind of doing politics, [instead of us], and doing politics, you know, kind of engaged deep in Georgian politics. Everyone knows that there will be no such kind of engagement. That's the rule of international politics, international law.

So what do we need actually? It's a close following of our elections. It's long term missions and not somebody monitoring so-called [zombie] [inaudible] covering election issues. Unfortunately, --

**Moderator:** Zombie?

**Mr. Gvaramia:** Yeah. That's the new word for [inaudible] missions -- you know, some kind of so-called, yeah, walking dead. Some kind of organizations that gradually are coming zombies. You know those organizations, I don't want to name that, but --

The Russia power organizations, they are gradually dying and their missions are, you know, gradually dying. So we need the particular and direct observation of elections from the side of US and there is, you know, serious talks about this in all of the meetings and all of the visits of US kind of officials in Georgia and the US Ambassador's last remarks, former Ambassador making her last remarks was about elections which is very good actually. A good signal for Georgian democracy. And the same

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happens in the European Union. So that's what we need in reality. That's candidates that is very good, it's a badge of success. But we actually, at the end of the day we need real success. [Major] success is not success, you know, some kind of -- it's the sign of success which is could not be realized. It's the potential. But potential should be, you know, kind of performance could be lower than potential or higher than potential. We need performance higher than potential.

And we have this opportunity now because everyone is focused on Georgian democracy which is important. Not Georgian stability and this, you know, kind of -- some journalist from Balkans, I don't remember his name. I think he was either Bosnian or from [Inaudible], coined the word stabilocracy. That's how the West is, you know, sometimes looking at our, at the type of countries. This type of countries. Balkan countries or Georgia or Caucasus countries, et cetera. We don't need stabilocracy. We are not colonists. We need democracy. We are the proud countries. We want to be a part of the West, Western society. By stabilocracy there is no way to Western society. There is way to Western society where, just the only way is democracy. We want to be part of democratic society. Liberal democracy.

So stabilocracy may be, you know, stability is good, that's kind of prosperity is good. Everything is good. I'm fine with that. But still, democracy is the main ground for building those buildings and for constructing those buildings. Prosperity, security, stability, et cetera. But we need an even playing field. The main playground as you have here in this country, as you invented here I would say in this country. So we need the same. Maybe even better because we are a small country. We are kind of not so conservative kind of body. We're a very small country, we're smart people. We can do it.

**Moderator:** There are concerns here about how long we will be a stabilocracy. That's a different conversation.

**Mr. Gvaramia:** You have luxury of kind of variations because you are number one power in the world. That's up to you how to do it. I have my own vision of it but I will not comment on that, of course.

But still Georgia has no other option. Georgia should be democracy. So people are our main currency. Not some kind of oil, thanks to God. Not kind of some the pipelines, et cetera.

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Excuse me but after some kind of peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and it will take place in few years, I am absolutely sure. There will be no shortest way via Georgia because shortest way is via Azerbaijan and Armenia, including Turkey, including Iran especially.

What we need is to cement our value in this region which is [inaudible], first of all; and democracy. Not first of all. [Inaudible] is geopolitical and geographical [inaudible], and our people who are smart, love democracy. Passionate about democracy. So that is our main currency.

And we should build our new state, I would say third Republic of Georgia, on these main values and main currency of Georgian history, I would say.

**Moderator:** I would add Georgian wine to that. [Laughter].

**Mr. Gvaramia:** Yeah, et cetera. But still --

**Voice:** [Inaudible] one thing after another, like [inaudible] accused of financing the coup or stuff like that. Obviously we look at that as another diversion [inaudible]. There is a problem I see that my concern [inaudible] election, the 2024 election, considering how much [inaudible]. And we already know it's already happening. It's not something that's going to happen on the day of elections, but it's going to definitely influence the outcome of the elections. How can we be sure [inaudible]?

**Mr. Gvaramia:** We can't. That's why I'm speaking about long term mission which should start yesterday, I think. Because everything -- what happens now in Georgia, it's a part of political process. I mean not even political. It's a part of election process. It has already started.

So these kind of things, for example, which is propaganda stuff, but propaganda is provided by government security services. You know, this [USAID] stage coup. General [USAID] and coup, you know, some kind of excuse me, bullshit. What our TV did actually we simply have not covered this issue because it's just mere propaganda. It's [inaudible] propaganda. It's not news. It's not about something reasonable so it doesn't resonate any sense with Georgian public. So we simply avoid it as a piece of

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shit, excuse me. So we simply avoid it. Maybe some few words, et cetera, some news, security services has this kind of announcement and that was announcement of our Prime Minister, period. Somewhere there in a second block of news.

It's a redline. You can't skip some kind of important government saying something like this, but you don't have to mirror the propaganda because mirroring propaganda means spreading propaganda, you know? When you are giving some Europe commands and [inaudible] propaganda, you are spreading propaganda because you are mirroring the story of the main theme of propaganda, it's story telling. That is a very kind of important how to navigate through these ropes, but we are trying to do this. So we know how to do this. We don't have money, but still we are doing that.

The second thing is yes, we need, you know, America should step in, I think. Not should. That's a bad word. But still that would be great because we need long term monitoring mission and which is most important thing, we need real monitoring. Real monitoring. Something, interim results of monitoring. Some kind of analysis of the new developments in a legal sense, because there is developments in parliament about some kind of electronic kind of voting which is totally how to rig elections. It's not about electronic voting. It's a printout of elections. It's not electronic voting.

So I would say what is most important thing we started with, that's understanding of Russia. Russia is not about kind of, you know, I would say compromise or something like this. They perceive as weakness. That's why they need straightforward and tough language. That is about Russia. That is about Georgia because our government is a Russian style government and modus operandi is pretty much same. So toughness. That is the main clue. Because the assumption, Mr. [Inaudible], the result was mediate. The result was mediate. United States went about, you know, 2021 elections was on the verge of legitimacy, some kind of mild language. Result was the worsen situation, worsens and worsens every day. There is no democracy in Georgia. Mild language gives this kind of results. Tough language gives very tough results.

And if you are faced with Russian style regime, you have to work as you are working with Russia in Ukraine, for example. It's not enough how you work in Ukraine against Russia, but not here,

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I mean.

**Voice:** [Inaudible]. There are some things happening [inaudible]. I had a chance to briefly talk with [inaudible]. She confirmed that she's in country to have actually that mission in Georgia for the very first time. So the long term observation. So that is one thing that is happening.

To pick up on your question, how the way [inaudible] is quite different [inaudible] for 6.5 years. And yes it is a huge [inaudible]. It's not like [inaudible]. That's the major I think fundamental difference between how we conducted [inaudible] and the way [inaudible] bullet points, that's your [inaudible] [advantage]. Quite different than I personally see it from either the government side or the opposition side. So I want to commend you publicly.

**Voice:** Introductions are [inaudible] observing, [inaudible] we met with Congressman Keating an hour ago, and a fantastic conversation. Interesting. We are not here to complain. Because -- You talk about problems. Complaining is exactly asking your friends -- [Inaudible], and I'll support you where I can. That's it. And do not forget me. I think [inaudible] and Congressman Keating is working on the Black Sea strategy.

Now Jeff Mankos my friend from NDU and previously Jeff was at CSIS, he is Black Sea security expert. We had last year, the week of the invasion we had a bottle, two bottles -- one bottle is [inaudible]. But we were talking about the Black Sea all the time. And I was glad that they brought it up. Georgia cannot be just an island to talk about. If there is, Nika briefed him about his own thoughts and visions on how to link and how Georgia links naturally to the rest of the Western, which is --

**Mr. Gvaramia:** Think about this, because I think that it is the future of Georgia and that's the future of the whole region because there is new [gravitation] center which, I mean the geopolitical [gravitation] center which is gradually crystalizing out. And that is Kyiv which will be the next capital of Europe, I mean the third center of, the third capital of the Europe after Berlin and Paris. So --

**Voice:** The European Union [inaudible].

**Mr. Gvaramia:** Of course having in mind that the UK is not

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European Union. That is the historical [inaudible] of Georgia. That is about what I'm speaking democracy. We need democracy. Why? Because we have to be part of the European Union and this center will be one of the most important parts of European Union if not the most important. Because the Black Sea, which is our treasure, Georgia treasure. Mostly it's the Georgian treasure. Why? Because in this [inaudible], there is just one deep sea port and that is Novorossiysk. [Inaudible] the Russian [inaudible]. So we had [Samanaklia] and [Myochemchia] which is [inaudible]. So it's even better than [inaudible] for you to nkow. [Laughter]. It's deeper.

So why I'm underlining [Inaudible], because you know those [piers] or those ports, you have to reconsider our [inaudible] territory into Georgia because it's a huge economical project.

When I want to ask something of the Americans, I should do this because, but I am not in charge. So here is a different coast of Black Sea. Here is [inaudible], Constantza, and some kind of Odessa, kind of cascade or something like this. So here is just huge [Anaklia] or [Chemchia] port, pier or port, and you have all the way to Europe, that's all the parts of Europe. Bulgaria, Central Europe, and Constantza, and the rest of the Europe via Ukraine.

So that is how looks this new [gravitation] center. He is a new group of countries which is Baltics, which is Poland, which is Ukraine, and which is actually [Inaudible], used to be part of the [Inaudible] triangle which sometimes it was Lithuanian, or some [inaudible], et cetera. But still the [Libling] group which is [Unia]. So here is kind of Romania. It's a huge conglomerate, you know? Bulgaria is somewhere here, so [Libling] triangle or [inaudible] plus Black Sea, it's a huge [gravitation] center. Baltics to --

**Voice:** South Ossetia.

**Mr. Gvaramia:** South Ossetia is here. South Ossetia is about 10,000 people. So we don't need some kind of insurgency or war, et cetera. That's disaster for Georgia. We need reunion under the auspices of European Union.

What is next, this [gravitation] center is 150 million people. That's more than France plus Germany. Which means that this [gravitation] center could be the part of the axis, kind of



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Kyiv, UK, London, Washington. It's how to [avoid] Europe, if it sometimes can hinder real and quick decisions. And it's very often doing so, kind of. I think that in the sense of economy it is very American [inaudible]. And Europe already announced that [inaudible]. And it could be [inaudible] just after economic consortium of those ports. It could be followed by the security interests because if you have this kind of huge economic interest here, it should be safe, and some kind of security interest, it's very [natural]. So not vice versa.

**Voice:** I have a question. It's more like a provoke Nika [inaudible], but we are a couple of minutes away from [inaudible]. I think you are doing things, and you think the way you think. Why do you do that? What's your skin in the game? What's your story? Americans are a country of stories. I give you two minutes for that. Three.

**Mr. Gvaramia:** I want this in reality. [Inaudible].

I will be in this country any time in the future in this country and looking in this project. Georgian democracy, not removal of this Russian guy, et cetera, et cetera, that we should do by our hands, that's our business. This is really where we need help of United States and where United States could be even more interested in than Georgia is.

So there is for us a very important issue, but it's a very important issue for you. That's how controlling economically, let's say. Controlling Middle East, Middle Asia. There is somewhere in Mongolia, lost and forgotten by the United States. No one knows why. And there is kind of people behind Urals. The people, nomadic people, confederation of Turkish and Mongolian people who in the history of this planet defeated simultaneously Russia and China. Those people named [inaudible]. Those people are still living there, and they are lost and forgotten by the United States. So you need some new centers of kind of influence.

[Multiple voices].

**Mr. Gvaramia:** In Alaska maybe or something there.

**Moderator:** I was in Mongolia with the last Defense Secretary to visit. It was Donald Rumsfeld. That's how long ago it was. I always joked that just because Rumsfeld says something doesn't

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automatically make it wrong. But he did exactly what you said. He visited all the Stans, all the Caucasus countries. Whatever his failures were in the Iraq war planning and execution, he definitely understood this part of the world. He understood its importance. And talking about the Black Sea he used to say money is a coward. Let's make it safe. So he would be very much simpatico with your grand vision.

**Voice:** I was smiling the whole time you were mentioning Black Sea because ever since the Ukrainian war started and Georgia's decision to keep a member of the [inaudible] coalition for Ukraine. Before we were a Central and Eastern coalition center as well, we were really walking along with everybody for Ukraine and Black Sea. Black Sea is the key of Ukraine's safety.

**Mr. Gvaramia:** And Georgia's prosperity.

**Voice:** Exactly. But who controls Black Sea will control also Europe. So the Black Sea security is a huge component of our security, European and global peace. It can't be understated --

But I'm just so glad and so happy that you [inaudible] that you place here and now, and you're following through with this because this coincides with [inaudible] for these things, and [inaudible] for Georgians to [pick up] where Ukraine is in [inaudible] security for [inaudible]. So happy that is happening.

**Moderator:** We're underneath the five minute mark. I want to save a couple of minutes for your final comments. Anyone who hasn't asked a question or commented.

**Voice:** Very quickly, since we're talking about securing the Black Sea and some of the Black Sea experts [inaudible]. And you mentioned the project that I was speaking to him about in Tbilisi over a year ago. One of the takeaways from that project was that given all the other security challenges the United States faces, especially in Asia but even elsewhere in this particular region, a lot of the work of regional security is going to have to be undertaken by others. And talking to American officials, the place they always come back to for that role is Turkey.

So obviously what happens in Ukraine is going to be enormously important to the future of the Black Sea. But the other major

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player in the region is Turkey which is another country which has a very complex internal dynamics and foreign policy right now. So I was wondering if you could say something a little bit about the role you see Turkey playing and about Georgia's relationship with Turkey.

**Mr. Gvaramia:** Absolutely. I think that first of all this came, actually it's Turkey's role on the Black Sea is shrinking if we have the other players on the ground which is probably the Georgia, the best option. So now it's kind of asymmetry in this sense because Turkey -- what happens with Russia now, what is the Russian scenario about controlling Black Sea region, it coincides with Turkey's interests on Black Sea and the whole area. I understand they have advantages and they are using, exploding these advantages.

So Georgia and Turkey's relationships are, that's a very kind of [inaudible] relationship in the sense of economy. The political influence of Turkey on Georgia, I don't think so, that there is a serious influence of Turkey on Georgia in a political sense. Business sense, Turkey is quite much represented in Georgia, but the newcomer is China. There is very problematic things, that I'm not clear should be given to China, that was announced is disaster. And you should have in mind that China sometimes, and very often, is some second [level] of Russia in Georgia. You never know that it's really China or China plus Russia or just Russia, et cetera. And Chinese economy is about corruption, so we have heavily corrupted regime very like China. So they have their, all of the major contracts about strategic infrastructure to China and everything is rigged. You know, those highways, tunnels, et cetera, because that's the Chinese quality that's so very well known, and corruption which is the Russian kickback, actually. And so that is how our government is operating.

But China is a serious problem and very underestimated problem in Georgia because according to recent poll of the [inaudible]. It was provided by [Addison]. Sixty percent of Georgians are fine with Chinese influence, I mean Chinese engagement in the Georgian economy. But they are not [inaudible]. We are losing so much time, not losing but we are spending so much time on Russian, how to defeat Russian propaganda that we are, China is sometimes put aside. That's not how it should be because China is a serious threat of Georgia. Because you know that so-called Chinese credit influence, you know, the wild credits kind of. Absolutely some kind of hostages, or becoming hostages of this

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kind of trend of Chinese credits, and the China does not need any propaganda into Georgia because, they don't need propaganda in Georgia because their main propaganda tool is corruption and it works perfectly in Georgia. Where they need propaganda is United States via [inaudible] institutes or something like this and they are doing this here. But in Georgia it's easily doable without any kind of propaganda. That's a matter of money and it works in Georgia. In oligarchy, republic of private owned states. Georgia [inaudible].

So there is now, Georgian coast of Black Sea is surrounded with Turkey with its interests, but it's [inaudible] interests that you can somehow manage with that if you are doing the same. I mean you are aggressive and providing your economic interests and your security interests, et cetera. If you are not, the asymmetry with Turkey always will be present there. And the next player is China who is newcomer. And which most important is Russia and Russian interest is kind of vocally said by Ivanishvili, whose statement is very well known. Actually it was said in my talk show first time by the kind of [inaudible]. He was told by Ivanishvili that are you kidding, what is the interest of America on the Black Sea? There is no Americans on Black Sea and never will be. That is his position. But it's Russian position.

The state of, I mean despite of this you actually announced Black Sea is your main interest in this region. We are happy about that because it's the future of Georgia and it's forever. It's not about pipelines by Turkey and Azerbaijan, et cetera. It's not about kind of oil kind of or some kind of gold, et cetera. No, it's about Georgian people and it's about [inaudible] which is long lasting legacy.

**Moderator:** Thanks. We're at the hour mark. I want to be punctual. Thanks to all of you with such busy schedules joining us. Nika, an honor to have you here. Thank you for joining us. Zviad who was my co-pilot on this, thank you for all your support as well.

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