

Dear Mr President

I would first of all congratulate you with your election the President of the Congress, wish you all the success and pledge the full support of the Georgian delegation in your future endeavours.

Dear Colleagues

Secretary General

I am pleased to be with you today, in this hemicycle, which more than a decade ago witnessed my country's accession to the Council of Europe, Georgia's long-term awaited return to common European family.

Apart of membership in the club, with this accession we assumed, like all other member states, concrete commitments to defend and respect European values this Organisation is promoting for the whole continent, for more than 60 years of its existence.

Today, I am proud to say that despite numerous challenges, notwithstanding the permanent attempts to destabilise the country from outside, conducted ethnic cleansing on the Georgian soil and ongoing occupation of 20 percent of the Georgian territory by the Russian military forces, the Georgian state has proved its adherence to European values. We have demonstrated that the determination of the Georgian people is irreversible and if the support of international democratic community towards the Georgian statehood remains firm, there is no force, however enormous it may be, which can halt this process.

On 30 of May, for the first time in the Georgian history, citizens of the Georgian capital directly elected the Mayor of the city. I am proud to say that it was my personal initiative.

I am persuaded that the free and fair elections are the ultimate and most correct way to determine the will of the population and the political party and the programme, most suitable to make real the citizen's choice.

I have also initiated, for the first time in Georgia, open and direct television debates among the main candidates in the Tbilisi Mayor's election. In fact, as an incumbent Mayor elected by the city Council, I have participated in these television debates on the same conditions as my opponents.

Obviously, all our efforts would have lacked success, without the strong determination of the central authorities and personally of President Saakashvili of Georgia - to support local and regional democracy and the promotion of strong self-governing institutions throughout the whole territory of Georgia.

I should also express my gratitude to all the international organisations, those who together with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe have supported us in holding the local elections with their valuable advice and/or by deploying observation teams.

All the international observers, representatives of the Council of Europe, OSCE and the European Union have underlined that the elections of 30 May, constituted a significant step towards the further democratisation of my country.

To me, it is of particular gratification that our European colleagues have observed the foundation of the culture of political dialogue in Georgia, which has substituted previously dominated confrontation and mistrust among the political actors.

Naturally, this progress should be attributed both to the governing political force and the opposition parties. It is extremely important to mention that, again for the first time in the contemporary history of Georgia, the defeated candidates have publicly congratulated the elected political force, including myself as an elected Mayor, and pledged their readiness for constructive co-operation for the benefit of the population.

However, we do realise that the elections are not the aim, but the way to further reinforce our achievements. Keeping this in mind, right after the elections, our political party decided to stick to the principle – engagement conditioned with the shared responsibility. Thus, we have proposed to the elected opposition parties some leading positions in the City Council, including the positions of Vice-Chairman and Chairmanship of two Committees.

I would also like to assure you that we are well aware that the progress and success do not mean that the process is over and we can now just relax and remain satisfied with our accomplishments.

As our European colleagues observing the elections have concluded, the elections were competitive, well organised and the election administration acted in a transparent and a professional manner. However, in order to ensure even better results for the general elections planned for 2012, it is important to further improve the existing electoral legislation.

All these, is well understood by the Georgian authorities and to this end, we have already launched a necessary process together with the opposition political forces and civil society actors.

Today, we are about to adopt the Congress Resolution and Recommendation on Municipal Elections in Georgia. I would like to confirm that the adopted recommendations will be carefully examined and taken into consideration by the Georgian authorities. We also count on the continuous support of the Council of Europe and particularly its Venice Commission in our endeavours.

In this context, I am also pleased to mention that on 15 October the Georgian Parliament has adopted a new Constitution of Georgia. In the final version, the recommendations of the Venice Commission, including on the introduction of self-government principles in the Constitution, have been taken on board.

Dear Colleagues

One of the European observers stated subsequent to municipal elections in Georgia and I am quoting: *“The strong democracy is built from local level upwards so we were particularly pleased to see the high level of engagement and interest of young people, women and minorities in these elections”*. End of quote.

I am persuaded, that the will and the determination of the Georgian society towards higher democratic standards, will be instrumental in further enhancing electoral environment and creating paradigm for real self-government, government of the people, by the people and for the people.

On 30 May, the Georgian population, including the citizens of Tbilisi, made their choice by assessing what has been done for the electorate and what is planned by the different contenders. At the end of the day, the choice of the voter is primarily based on the merits, lesser on other considerations.

The support expressed towards our political team was steaming from our ongoing and pro-active reform agenda for the country and for the capital city in particular. Our citizens have witnessed and felt that following the Rose Revolution, we have, by the way with the support of citizens themselves, re-built the whole infrastructure, significantly improved the system of servicing our citizens and solved most problems, including the one of corruption, that were hindering the city development.

Indeed, I am proud of what has been accomplished in Tbilisi but I am also fully alerted that there is a long way ahead of us. We are doing utmost to turn Tbilisi into a truly European city and to this end, concrete efforts are underway in the fields of economy, infrastructural development, management perfection and human capacity building.

Dear Colleagues

I believe that Tbilisi joining the 12-star club of cities for European Local Democracy Week is yet another step towards full realisation of the potentials that are provided by the possibility to co-operate with other cities and regions in Europe. I sincerely want to thank the Congress for this useful initiative and emphasise that most challenges we are facing nowadays are having common denominator, and enhanced international co-operation is the most efficient way to deal with them.

Few days ago, in Tbilisi, we were hosting international Conference on the Covenant of Mayors, dedicated to the reduction of pollution and emission of CO<sub>2</sub>. This event was attended by the Mayors and other officials from more than 40 cities and towns of Europe, including from the countries participating in the European Union's Eastern Partnership, but Asia as well. These are

real issues that are affecting our citizens everyday life and have concrete consequences for the future sustainable development. We need to enhance our joint efforts to efficiently cope with them and here, the international structures, such as our Congress are to lead these vital endeavours.

Coming to an end, I have to state that the Council of Europe, its statutory institutions, including the Congress, have important role to play in the fields of their competence at all levels, be it local, national, regional or Europe-wide. This organisation is unique as a soft power provider and we should keep this in mind while reforming the Council of Europe. There are other organisations and structures in Europe and world-wide that deal with military and deep security issues. The task of the Council of Europe is to support and help them in achieving their goals, by concentrating on issues, where we have experience, exclusive know-how and distinctive standing. Let us deal with democracy, human rights and the rule of law in order to fulfill the wish of the founding fathers of the Council of Europe and create Europe without dividing lines and achieve greater unity among the peoples of Europe.

I thank you for your attention.