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Interview on Imedi TV With Revaz Sakevarishvili

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Tbilisi Marriott Hotel
Tbilisi, Georgia
May 10, 2005

(12:20 p.m. Local)

MR. SAKEVARISHVILI: Madame Secretary, welcome to Georgia. I'd like to thank you on behalf of our company. During the time schedule, you have found a few minutes to answer our questions. The first question; how successful was your visit to Russia and Georgia? And what can we expect from this visit?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, let me start with the visit to Georgia. This has been a wonderful visit. The President last night had a great introduction to Georgian culture, and to Georgian hospitality. Georgia is a country that the United States considers a good friend. And it's a good friend not just because of what Georgia has done to support us in the war on terrorism in Iraq or Afghanistan, or because of our deep cultural ties, but because we share values. And it has become very clear that the world has been inspired by the Rose Revolution. So this trip has been terrific. I think the President is having a good time and we look forward to many, many years of excellent relations between the United States and Georgia.

MR. SAKEVARISHVILI: Georgia hopes to get support from the United States in order to restore its territorial integrity. Georgian government officials often say that Russia is the main negative factor that prevents Georgia from achieving this. What do you think Washington can do to help Georgia in this mentioned above?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we've had good discussions with the Russians over the years but also when we were in Moscow, about the importance of Georgian territorial integrity and the move for a unified Georgia. I do believe that there are really two aspects to this. One is that the international community could be helpful. In South Ossetia for instance, at times the OSCE has been involved. In Abkhazia, the United Nations has a role to play. And so the United States, in conjunction with the international community will try and help Georgia to resolve these difficult conflicts. But it's also the case that the stronger Georgia becomes economically, the more vibrant this democracy becomes, I think that you will

see that people want to be a part of Georgia. Yes, people may want some autonomy in their local affairs -- they may want some local control over some issues. But a unified Georgia that is democratic is going to be a magnet for all kinds of people. This can be a great multi-ethnic democracy and that I think is really Georgia's future.

MR. SAKEVARISHVILI: A couple years ago an American-funded Train and Equip program was started. Initially the White House stated that American trained troops were not entitled to take part in the settlement of internal conflicts. Is there any possibility that Washington's position may change?

SECRETARY RICE: Well we believe strongly that there should not be the use of military force in these internal conflicts. We have made that clear with the Georgian government. In fact, these are issues that need to be resolved politically and diplomatically. I do believe that as the democracy develops here there will be reason for people who now live in Abkhazia or live in South Ossetia to really want to be a part of this great Georgian democracy. All forces for Train and Equip were to ensure that Georgia could fight terrorism. We started in the Pankisi George and I think we've had some great success there. But it is really the case that we do not believe in the use of military force in these internal conflicts and therefore American forces, forces that were trained by the United States, could not be used in those conflicts.

MR. SAKEVARISHVILI: In his annual report President Bush mentioned Iran as the danger of freedom and democracy around the world. What's the plan that Washington has to deal with this problem? Is there any chance that an anti-Iran operation could resemble anti-Iraq one, and what part could Georgia play?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we have no intention of using military force in Iran. The fact is that conflicts are different. And Iraq had for twelve years, twelve long years, defied the international community. It was time to deal with this brutal dictator in Iraq. Iran is a country where we have many, many concerns about Iran's role in funding terrorism in the Palestinian territories, in Lebanon, in other parts of the world and we all as a world need to deal with Iran. Funding and support for terrorism, which is open that they support terrorism. We also have to deal with Iran's ambitions for nuclear technology to complete to a nuclear weapons program. And there, we are working with the Europeans to try and support their negotiations to get Iran to live up to its international obligations. Now as to democracy I firmly believe that Iran will not be immune to the changes that are going on in the world. If you look around the world, people are demanding their democratic right. And the Iranian people are a sophisticated people, they are wordly people. They want to be a part of the international community. And they are being denied their rights by an unelected few in Iran who want to impose their particular view of the relationship between religion and politics on the Iranian population. Iran is a proud and great nation. And Iran will find its place in democratic values because as you know it's not too far from here. But the freedom, and the spirit of freedom that is spreading throughout the world, Iran is not going to be easy.

MR. SAKEVARISHVILI: Do you think that the attitude of Washington towards Georgia would change, according to democracy in Georgia?

SECRETARY RICE: Well we believe that Georgia is on a democratic path. And everything that I have seen since I've been here, and I think that everything that the President has seen since he's been here is that Georgia is on a democratic path. It is not easy to build democracy and we understand that it's not just having luncheons, the President will say that to the Georgian leaders. He's said it in his speech, that it's not just having luncheons, it's building democratic institutions. We were able to meet with the Speaker of the Parliament. It means having a strong legislative branch. It means having a strong independent judiciary. It means rooting out corruption in government. It means allowing the economy to be free of too much government interference. These are the foundations of democracy,

and along with freedom of speech, freedom of worship and protection of minority rights, that's how you build a democracy. And so I'm confident that that is the road that Georgia is on. It's why I believe that our friendship is only going to get deeper over time.

MR. SAKEVARISHVILI: During your visit to Riga, President Bush met with the Presidents of the Baltic States. But in Tbilisi he did not agree to meet with leaders of two other Caucasian countries. What's the reason for this? The level of democracy or anything else?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, the visit to the Baltic States was a particular kind, the President went to Latvia, he had been to Lithuania, and as you know, of course the Baltic States are members of NATO, they are allies and so he wanted to bring them all together, but we have relations with Azerbaijan, we have relations with Armenia and we value those relations. We do believe that it is important that democracy spreads in the Caucasus. Georgia is a wonderful example for people in this entire region of what can happen when people start to take their rightful place in the communities around them.

MR. SAKEVARISHVILI: Thank you for your time. I hope it's not your last visit.

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, I think it will not be my last visit to Georgia. It's a wonderful place and I've always loved coming to Georgia. And I very much support coming again.

MR. SAKEVARISHVILI: Thank you.

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