

Open letter to the leaders of the opposition

I am writing this letter to you, the leaders of the Georgian opposition, on behalf of the business community that has given a lot to this country by strengthening its economy, creating tens of thousands of jobs and improving the standard of living for so many citizens.

I am writing to you, at a time you are preparing to hold demonstrations on April 9, and at a time businesses are very worried and apprehensive, hoping that your protests will remain a peaceful expression of opinion.

I am writing to you in time of unprecedented world financial crisis that has affected Georgia to a large extent, at a time it is becoming very difficult for needy businesses to borrow money from the banks, at a time investors are witnessing the meltdown of their assets, and at a time emerging markets have lost their competitive edge to the West, especially at a time many Georgian businesses are struggling to survive.

Since November 2007, the Georgian business climate has suffered a lot. It all started with protests which were followed by a period of stagnation while preparing for the Presidential and Legislative elections. Then came the August war and, on its heels, an International financial crisis of geopolitical magnitude.

This chain of events has kept foreign investors and capital away from Georgia, and for months now, we've suffered from major job losses. What are badly needed for our economic survival at this crucial time are foreign partnerships and their financial investments.

As a democracy, it is the privilege of each and every citizen to express their opinion. However, with this privilege comes the ultimate responsibility of preserving the country's integrity and fostering the rights and properties of all of its citizens. While the government as well as the International community welcomes peaceful, civilized demonstrations, the business community views the upcoming April 9 demonstrations as most untimely, very dangerous to our economy and therefore detrimental to our country.

The April 9 protests will receive extensive International media coverage, with footage of the "unrest in Georgia" reaching millions of households all over the globe. You "the stars of the day" will view this as a great victory, just as you did back in November 2007. Diplomatic missions will interpret it as a sign of a new emerging democracy. But for the International investors, this will become another unstable country to avoid at all cost. The only losers of this "expression of democracy" will be Georgia and every single Georgian citizen, including each and every member of the opposition.

What is real tragic is that many of those protesters will end up losing their jobs as well, thus becoming another collateral victim of the negative impact your protests would have had on investors world wide.

Democracy is a healthy exercise for a country, just as physical exercise is for individuals. However, common sense dictates that one should refrain from engaging in any physical exercise

when ill, so as to avoid further health complications. So is Georgia today, ill from the November protests, ill from having waited for the outcome of the presidential and then legislative elections, ill from the drawbacks of the August war, ill from the impact of the international financial crisis; no individual in their right mind, one who truly cares for this country, would put Georgia at risk by exposing it to yet another round of street protests, with no set agenda or program whatsoever. Such effort will unfortunately become anarchy doomed for failure.

Leaders of the Opposition, I am calling on your patriotism, the same patriotism that you bravely showed this summer during the Russian invasion of Georgia. However, if back then it was easy to identify the enemy, this time the enemy is not visible although it is very present. That enemy is hiding while waiting for you to complete a mission they couldn't achieve themselves, which is the total destruction of our economy. Do not fall in their trap, because in the end you can be sure that history will not judge you kindly.

There is nothing that street protests can solve and that a constructive dialog cannot. We therefore urge you to sit down immediately with the authorities and discuss openly and transparently, in a civilized way of all your grievances and apprehensions. It is only through a constructive dialog that your demands will be achieved and the interest of the country will be secured.

Sincerely yours,

Fady Asly
Chairman
The Georgian National Committee of the International Chamber of Commerce
The World Business Organization