



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by HoM in Georgia, Terhi Hakala

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 13, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States commends Ambassador Hakala for her impressive job in Tbilisi under challenging circumstances at the helm of one of our largest and strategically most important Missions. Georgia is making important democratic and economic progress amidst significant internal and external challenges and the OSCE Mission is part of the equation for success. We warmly welcome you, Ambassador Hakala, to the Permanent Council and thank you for your thorough report.

Ambassador Hakala,

As we look ahead to the Parliamentary elections in May, we note particularly the Mission's efforts in trying to facilitate dialogue between the Government and the opposition. You are also helping focus the government on reforms recommended by ODIHR in its recent final report on the Presidential election. We encourage continued dialogue among all parties and the government to continue implementation of necessary reforms. To help Georgia reach the goal of holding elections that meet all international norms and standards, the United States is providing election administration training, helping improve tabulation and reporting processes, and helping to improve voter lists.

The national security of Georgia is the other major concern that the Mission deals with every day. The United States strongly supports the territorial integrity of Georgia and the settlement of its territorial disputes within Georgia's internationally recognized borders.

We share the concern of many of our partners about Russia's recent decision to unilaterally withdraw from the CIS sanctions on Abkhazia. This decision unfortunately comes at a time of renewed dialogue between Georgia and Russia, and hopefully, will not put at jeopardy much needed progress on a number of complex bilateral issues.

Despite claims to the contrary, only a limited number of Georgian refugees have returned to Abkhazia, and those that have encounter significant difficulties. The Abkhaz regime continues to block the return of the vast majority of ethnic Georgians expelled, and there has been virtually no progress on this issue since the CIS sanctions package was announced in January 1996. The United States does not agree that the Abkhaz authorities have met their obligations or merit any weakening of international pressure as was discussed by the UN Friends of the Secretary General for Georgia.

We are especially alarmed at the prospect that Russia's withdrawal from the CIS sanctions regime could open the way to arms transfers to the separatists, which would only further raise tensions and risk further weapons proliferation throughout the region.

In South Ossetia, we believe that the conflict is ripe for new attempts at resolution, and not only because of new or renewed leadership in the Russian Federation and Georgia.

Unfortunately, there is a new anti-OSCE campaign launched by the Tshkinvali authorities and it is as mysterious as it is wholly unacceptable. We condemn the recent violence directed toward Mission Monitoring Officers and Joint Peacekeeping Forces as they responded to an explosion in Dmenisi. We commend you, Ambassador Hakala, for your forceful intervention with the Tshkinvali leadership and we urge the Mission not to be discouraged.

To increase the safety and security of international personnel and the local population, we strongly support sending immediately the eight additional Mission Monitoring Officers to Georgia. We must allow Ambassador Hakala to decide for herself, without interference or micromanagement from us here in Vienna, where it is best to station these new monitors in South Ossetia.

The OSCE's Economic Rehabilitation Program in South Ossetia is proving to be a valuable component of the conflict settlement process and its projects improve the lives of citizens while encouraging political dialogue. We note with approval that the OSCE has presented the Program as a model for use in the conflict situation in Transnistria, and would encourage consideration of applying this model to Abkhazia.

We never forget that Georgia is much more than South Ossetia and Abkhazia. We are pleased to note the progress that the Mission has made with projects aimed at integrating ethnic minorities into civil society, specifically by helping them acquire necessary language skills in regions such as Kvemo Kartli.

Prison and judiciary reforms are ongoing, perhaps not as fast as we would like but we do welcome progress. For example, the new prison at Gldani helps combat overcrowding while easing the concern of the international community over pre-trial detention facilities. The government's increased focus on improving judicial professionalism and the newly adopted code of conduct for judges are signs of an increasingly democratic trend in Georgia.

We thank you Ambassador Hakala, for your comprehensive report, and we wish you continuing success.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.