



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Russian Actions in Georgia

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
April 30, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

The OSCE is properly engaged in its highest peacekeeping and confidence building role when it highlights serious tensions between two participating States and then seeks ways to break that pattern and assist the sides in finding the road to peace.

With Georgia and Russia, there has been a long line of troubling events. These include a range of economic, administrative and political steps, as well as the political-military issues that are our focus today, including:

-- Russia closed the Verkhniy Lars crossing, the only one between Russia and Georgia that does not pass through separatist-controlled territory.

-- There was the night attack on a Georgian village by helicopters in the Kodori Valley last year, where UNOMIG concluded that evidence indicated the helicopters "used multiple approaches from the north."

-- Two Russian officers were killed last September, while inexplicably serving in an Abkhaz unit.

-- There was the August Missile incident, where Russia produced no evidence from any primary military radar to disprove or refute Georgia's version of events, which was based on solid radar and eyewitness accounts.

-- Russia unilaterally suspended CIS sanctions against Abkhazia this year.

-- A Georgian unmanned aerial vehicle was shot down on April 20th by a fighter jet of what appears to be Russian provenance.

-- Russia is still operating unsanctioned border crossings into separatist areas.

-- Russia's April 29th announcement of a large increase in its peacekeeping deployment in Abkhazia also heightens tensions, even if the move does not violate the troop limits allowed by the 1994 agreement. Now is not the time for such a move. Concerns have also been raised about reported Georgian troop concentrations in the region. This situation should be addressed through dialogue and transparency, not deployment of military forces. We call on all sides to refrain from actions that heighten tensions and could lead to armed conflict and to work instead to reduce tensions through peaceful negotiations.

-- Russia's policy has fueled Georgian fears of "creeping annexation" of the separatist regions, as we discussed in the PC only last week. Recent Presidential instructions authorized establishment of official ties between Russia and the separatist governments, despite clear OSCE and UN declarations in support of Georgia's sovereignty over the whole of Georgian territory. Russia should repeal these measures, and also halt the widespread issuing of passports to the citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and stop the linking of regional infrastructure directly with Russia.

All these acts and more call into question Russia's role as a facilitator and peacekeeper in the region.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States believes there is an important role for the OSCE in helping these two participating states resolve their differences and move toward a more productive future. The time is now. We can start by clearly investigating the facts behind the latest military incident.

We pledge to use our contacts both with the Government of Georgia and the Government of Russia, to urge restraint and to seek all avenues for reconciliation. We strongly urge all parties to engage in a serious dialogue on the recent peace proposals put forth by the Georgian government, and to avoid any steps toward military action.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.