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EMBASSY OF GEORGIA TO THE REPUBLICS OF AUSTRIA AND HUNGARY
PERMANENT MISSION OF GEORGIA TO THE OSCE AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENNA

Statement
of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia
H.E. Gela Bezhuashvili
at the OSCE Permanent Council Meeting
Vienna, 14 June 2007

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address the OSCE Permanent Council today. My aim is to provide you with a few useful insights into current developments in Georgia, especially with respect to conflict resolution.

First and foremost let me reiterate our key priority – to ensure the irreversibility of democratic processes in Georgia, to build a strong democratic state, which will be a reliable international partner.

Amongst other international organizations, which Georgia is closely cooperating with, the OSCE has a special role in providing international assistance to the reforms being carried out in the country in the fields of promotion of democracy, human rights, rule of law, good governance and freedom of expression as well as the fight against intolerance and discrimination. These topics are at the heart of the work of the OSCE.

In this context, Georgia highly appreciates ODIHR's valuable work and reaffirms its strong support for it. We should like to emphasise our particular appreciation for ODIHR's activities in the field of elections. Continuous ODIHR-Georgia cooperation and recent municipal elections in Georgia have shown that close cooperation with ODIHR can result in considerable improvement of the electoral process. Today active cooperation between ODIHR and appropriate authorities of Georgia, Central Elections' Commission first of all, is in process on our way to the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in 2008. Next step in our democratic transformation is to strengthen not only electoral but – institutional democracy.

In general terms, we see the OSCE as an important international structure promoting peace and stability in European continent and worldwide, and we are determined to enhance this role by strengthening capability of this organization through result oriented reform process. We support cross-dimensional perspectives to put solid linkages between three OSCE dimensions. This is particularly important in the area of conflict prevention and resolution, and post-conflict rehabilitation.

This lets me to come right to the point – Major impediments to aforementioned positive developments of the countries of the OSCE area are still unresolved territorial conflicts.

As I stated at the Ministerial Council in Brussels, the only path we see to peace in Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia is the same path that we see for all people of Georgia: We must deliver on the promise of individual liberty, economic opportunity, quality of life, and human security.

This approach, I believe, reflects the spirit in which the OSCE was founded.

However, there is still a great deal that should trouble all of us in this room: Instead of the Tskhinvali region being fully demilitarized, the process has gone into reverse. Instead of an improved security and human rights situation, crime and smuggling are

growing. Our citizens – Ossetians and Georgians – remain subject to rampant violations of their rights, from the arbitrary cutting off of the water supply to the tragic deaths caused by mines in uncontrolled territories.

At the same time, alongside these troubles, today we are witnessing a promising, newfound resolve among the local population. They appear determined to seek a peaceful settlement in the region.

The establishment of a movement that calls itself the “People of South Ossetia for Peace” symbolizes the new reality on the ground in the region. This movement reflects the will of the majority of the population, both Ossetian and Georgian.

The movement in question is willing to engage constructively in the negotiation process to find a viable and durable solution.

What is remarkable is that the leaders of this new movement were, only a short while ago, firmly in the separatist camp. In fact, the leader of the “People of South Ossetia for Peace” served as both “defense minister” and “prime minister” of the Tskhinvali regime.

Yet, ultimately, they understood that separatism was not the best way to improve the life conditions of people living in the region. They have committed themselves to finding a way for the Ossetian and Georgian communities to live peacefully together.

As a result, support for this new movement has been constantly growing among both Ossetians and Georgians in the region.

The “People of South Ossetia for Peace,” therefore, are being now effectively and legitimately engaged in conflict-settlement and confidence building activities.

Mr. Chairman,

Collectively with our international partners, Georgia has long been committed to finding a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia.

So it is natural that we should view the new movement in Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia as a unique chance to improve the situation on the ground. It is an opportunity that none of us can afford to waste. As such, we are doing our utmost to respond positively to new realities in the region. Including by establishing Provisional Administrative-Territorial Entity and delegating to the leader of the movement "People of South Ossetia for Peace", Mr. Dimitri Sanakojev the competence to exercise the functions of the Head of the Provisional Administration.

Next to elaboration of the draft Memorandum on Tskhinvali region, distributed in March 2007, the above steps represent organic coherent elements of the continuous progression derived from our joint Peace Plan.

We continue pursuing the main goal: support creating opportunities for true, result-oriented and inclusive dialogue for the representatives of the region's community who believe in peace and who see the future of the region within the Georgian State, while advocating with conviction for the interests of the local population.

One of the primary purposes of this dialogue is to define how the region can best be governed, and which responsibilities should remain with the local community and which should accrue to the Government of Georgia.

As importantly, the new Provisional Administration has begun to serve as an engine of social and economic rehabilitation. The prospects are already emerging for a dignified life for local residents, as several infrastructure projects have been initiated in recent weeks. As their numbers grow, so will their impact.

In this context we call upon all our partners, in particular the Russian Federation, to positively and adequately respond to these dynamics as a major opportunity on the way towards sustainable conflict resolution. We invite our Russian neighbours to become part of the solution, solution that provides opportunities to all stakeholders.

We offered this proposal at the highest level. At the meeting couple days ago my President and President Putin talked about the same issues I'm speaking about now.

The Georgian approach is inclusive, not exclusive. And I would like to stress again that the Georgian side is ready to remain involved in negotiations aimed at peacefully settling the conflict, with I repeat - all stakeholders.

In other words, we would like to appeal to the OSCE, the EU and our international partners to deliver a firm, convincing message to the Tskhinvali regime that the only way forward is to engage in a constructive, results-oriented dialogue.

The Tskhinvali regime's current language of ultimatums, its military provocations, and its deplorable neglect of humanitarian concerns should not be allowed to continue.

As a matter of special concern, the Tskhinvali regime continues to impede the work of the OSCE monitors.

In order to help reduce tensions, allay fears, the Georgian side is actively seeking ways to engage the Tskhinvali regime into dialogue and to bring them back to the negotiation table. The Georgian State Minister for Conflict Resolution has made repeated requests to hold meetings of the JCC plenary and preparatory working groups in order to address a series of outstanding, problematic issues.

Needless to say that we question the efficiency of the JCC, but for the sake of engaging those who are not yet on the side of peace, we continue dialogue within any of existing formats.

As such, we feel it is imperative for the JPKF to immediately begin fulfilling the primary task of its mandate—the full demilitarization of the region.

At present, we are witnessing a massive inflow of illegal weaponry and ammunition into the conflict region from the north, through the uncontrolled segment of the Georgian-Russian state border at the Roki tunnel. It is fully and immediately viable for the Russian Federation and Georgia, together with the international community, to take an obvious decision and establish joint control over its border. As a first step, establishing a joint JPKF-OSCE checkpoint at Didi Gupta also would address the problem of the illegal militarization of the region.

Another proposal long since advocated by almost all OSCE Member States, and would support the activities of the OSCE Mission to Georgia by boosting its monitoring capacity, is the proposal to increase the number of OSCE Mission Monitoring Officers.

We need to go forward on solving these issues, some of which are quite uncomplicated and do not require complex negotiations on political level.

With all these developments in mind—and being well aware of the risks and threats connected with the potential for the region's destabilization—Georgia is determined to proceed cautiously and with due consideration of the existing realities. We will not be drawn into any provocation. We all need to work on minimisation of risks, especially: us and our neighbour – Russia.

Our assessment is that only the Tskhinvali separatist regime's provocations are unlikely to lead to a major military confrontation – as long as wise and determined actions are taken to forestall this, and provided no instigation from outside is present. We believe that each peaceful day in the region works for the benefit of our policy of peaceful settlement towards final resolution within the territorial integrity of Georgia. Today is the Anniversary of the Brussels Donors' Conference. It is necessary to mention that last summer in Brussels at the Donors' Conference, Georgia, together with its international partners—primarily the OSCE, the EU, and other international partners—took responsibility for the social and economic rehabilitation of the whole region.

Georgia has already transferred its first instalment to the joint OSCE fund, and is resolute to continue financially supporting the fund together with all donors.

Now, the regime in Tskhinvali has the unique chance to show flexibility and—through cooperation, constructive dialogue, confidence building, and ensuring free interaction amongst South Ossetian communities—to secure even greater benefits for the communities on the territories it controls.

Let me put it directly: Today, we have a truly unique opportunity to create a “win-win” situation for all stakeholders. We simply cannot afford to let it slip away.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to use this opportunity and focus your attention on the process of implementation of Istanbul Joint Statement provisions, undertaken by the Russian Federation and Georgia during OSCE Summit on November 17, 1999.

In this respect, I would like to note with satisfaction the progress achieved in the implementation of the Istanbul Joint Statement provisions on the withdrawal of the Russian Military Bases from the territory of Georgia and underline that the process of withdrawal of the Akhalkalaki and Batumi Russian military bases has started and is

being carried out in accordance with the agreed schedule. This is a good example of responsible cooperation between neighbours.

Despite the mentioned achievement, the issue of the closure of the Gudauta Military Base still remains open. We are ready to continue to work closely with Russia and the OSCE community to close this issue on the basis of transparency. Our position on this matter has been clearly identified at the ongoing CFE conference.

Mr. Chairman,

One another crucial issue I would like to address here is strengthening the capacity of Georgian Border Police (GBP) and security of Georgian Borders.

With assistance from the EU, the Georgian side is working now on elaboration of an Integrated Border Management Strategy (IBM). Within the framework of this program, the OSCE Mission in cooperation with Georgian Border Police proposed a draft of OSCE/GBP Transitional Support Program, which envisages the training assistance to the border police officers to acquire modern skills and best practices in the field of border management.

We appeal to all Delegations to support this program, which undoubtedly would bring much of added value into the border security of the region.

Finally, I would like to thank the Spanish Chairmanship for its efforts in preparing the Madrid Ministerial Council Meeting and the related Road Map. Look forward to host H.E. Miguel Angel Moratinos to visit Georgia soon.

We are determined to achieve tangible results at the Ministerial and we express our readiness to contribute to all preparatory activities.

At the same time, we would like to stress that the preparatory work should aim to advance our common cause of developing a proactive strategy for conflict settlement.

This issue must remain high on the Ministerial agenda and must not be buried in routine.

We note with satisfaction the cooperation among the delegations prior to the Brussels Ministerial, particularly on the draft statement regarding Georgia, which produced several improvements. This year we hope that all interested delegations will participate in this work and that we will be able to achieve a final consensus.

I thank you.