



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gomiashvili

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Paul Jones
to the Permanent Council,
February 3, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes Deputy Minister Gomiashvili to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his frank appraisal of the situation on the Georgian-Russian border.

Mr. Minister, we, as others, were enormously saddened to learn this morning that Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania passed away overnight. The United States extends its deep and sincere condolences to the Prime Minister's family, the people of Georgia and the government of Georgia on this tragic morning.

The United States also sincerely regrets the loss of life and the injuries resulting from the explosion in Gori on February 1. I would like to take this opportunity to offer our sympathies to the families of the victims.

Mr. Chairman, the United States would like to reiterate its strong disappointment over the failure of the Permanent Council to reach consensus on renewing the mandate of the Georgia Border Monitoring Operation, or BMO.

It is indeed a shame that this independent monitoring and reporting entity, which for four years so successfully decreased tensions on Georgia's sensitive border along the Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia sectors of the Russian Federation, was not renewed -- despite efforts to make it more efficient, the host country's request that it continue its operation, and the consensus of all participating states but one to extend its mandate.

The BMO provided objective reporting on border crossings. Its reports served as a counterweight to inflammatory media stories about events along the Georgia-Russia border.

In addition, the BMO likely served as a deterrent. Large-scale movements of people could not occur without detection by the BMO.

In 2004, the BMO reported approximately twice the number of border-crossing incidents as in 2003. It clearly contributed to the security of not just Georgia, but in our view, Russia as well. Given the high level of activity, it was clearly shortsighted and premature to close the operation.

Mr. Chairman, the border area in question remains an area of instability. The Georgian government is requesting that the OSCE provide assistance. We all would like to deter terrorism and avoid further tragedy in the region.

In response to the Deputy Foreign Minister's call for an OSCE assessment mission, I will reiterate what we stated in the Permanent Council on January 19: the United States strongly supports an assessment mission to investigate and report on the situation along the Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan sectors of the Georgia-Russia border, and on the security implications of the BMO closure.

If the Permanent Council is still unable to achieve consensus on renewing the BMO's mandate, the United States is willing to consider alternatives to the BMO, and we are also willing to consider OSCE training of Georgian border guards in a way that complements assistance already being provided bilaterally. We would urge all the participating states of the Permanent Council to give quick and positive consideration to this proposal.

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to take advantage of the Deputy Foreign Minister's presence to refer to President Saakashvili's peace initiative for South Ossetia, which he presented publicly on January 26. The President's plan represents a significant step forward in the peace process.

I would like to take this opportunity to urge that the OSCE stand ready as an organization to support this and all efforts toward a peaceful resolution of the South Ossetia conflict. The OSCE can play an important role in promoting, implementing and monitoring a resolution that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and at the same time offers all the rights, protections and guarantees for the South Ossetian population to ensure their security and prosperity as part of a unified Georgia.

President Saakashvili's plan offers significant autonomy for the region. We urge all parties involved to give careful consideration to this plan and to initiate negotiations.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to again thank the Deputy Foreign Minister for his presentation. We wish him well during his visit to Vienna.

Thank you very much.