



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

STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF GEORGIA

Delivered by Ambassador Victor Dolidze to the 35th Joint Meeting of the Forum for Security Co-operation and the Permanent Council, Vienna, June 11, 2008

Madam Chairperson,
Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished colleagues,

Allow me to focus your attention on an issue of high security concern for our OSCE community: the fact of open aggression against a sovereign State on the eastern flanks of Europe, which is a continent of peace and stability.

Earlier today, the Russian Federation attempted to divert our attention from this alarming event by vigorously trying to focus our thoughts on unsubstantiated facts and extraneous concerns that even after painful elaboration fail to display a contextual nexus with the Vienna Document.

I remain hopeful that despite this our community will remain keenly alert to this issue.

What is more, I remain hopeful that the Russian Federation will constructively engage in this review and will display a sober attitude to our legitimate concerns.

Those of you who follow Georgia-related issues are aware of the fact that Georgia recently became subject to a series of acts by the Russian Federation that amount to tacit annexation of its territories.

Open Russian military build-up and brazenly separatist statements forced us to utilize unarmed national intelligence capabilities in order to collect data. Since military confrontation is not an option for us, we chose the most peaceful and civilized means of obtaining information about what was happening in reality on the other side of the administrative border with Abkhazia, which is still a closed territory for us.

And let me remind everyone that what we are talking about is a one-metre long unarmed flying device, equipped with a camera.

As we all know by now, a UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) operated by the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs was shot down by a Russian aircraft — an act of unprovoked aggression against the sovereign territory of Georgia.

Now, allow me to give a brief account of the chain of events that unfolded on 20 April, as exposed not only by Georgian data but by the report of independent experts and the report of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG).

At 09:45 a fighter jet was detected by the radar stations (“36D6”) of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia in north-western Abkhazia, Georgia, at 27.8 km from the Russian Federation border heading southeast.

At 09:55 an air-to-air missile launched by the mentioned aircraft shot down the UAV of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia at a distance of 8 km from the settlement of Anaklia, on the territory of Gali district of the Abkhazia, Georgia.

At 10:05 the fighter jet crossed the State border of Georgia in the direction of the Krasnodar region of the Russian Federation.

You can see the video taken by the UAV just moments before it was shot down and the radar data on the screen right now. These are precisely the materials that we distributed to everyone, including the Russian Federation. Several copies of the presentation you are viewing now, including the video footage taken by the UAV and the radar data, will be made available to interested delegations by the Georgian delegation.

We qualify this action on the part of the Russian Federation as an act of aggression. This is a despicable act that shakes the foundations of international law; if unchecked, it bodes ill for the future stability of the existing international order.

Georgia realized that as a responsible State it had to engage in the investigation process and involve as many international actors as possible to make sure that no-one would question the findings of the investigation. Transparency became the cornerstone of our actions.

Allow me to bring before you the actions we undertook to ensure the transparency of the investigation.

A day after the incident, on 21 April, the video footage taken by the UAV and the radar data were released to the media.

On 23 April the Georgian Foreign Ministry distributed the same materials to all EU and NATO Member States.

On the same day we circulated all the materials at the Security Council of the United Nations to all its members. A special Security Council session was convened precisely for this purpose, at which the now Head of the Parliament of Georgia Mr. David Bakradze conveyed Georgia’s concerns and expectations to the international community.

We invited independent experts from European nations and proposed to the Russian Federation that we should exchange radar data on 23 April.

Independent experts consisting of representatives of the United States of America, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania arrived in Georgia and worked from 30 April to 2 May.

UNOMIG started its investigation on 7 May and completed it on 26 May 2008. The Georgian side co-operated openly with UNOMIG, allowing it full access to the whole territory of Georgia and to all sites of interest related to their impartial investigation.

Exactly in the same manner, we provided the independent expert group with full access to the materials and sites of interest.

We also involved the OSCE in this process. Allow me to remind you that the first information about the 20 April incident was presented at the Permanent Council on 24 April. On 30 April the Finnish Chairmanship launched the Bucharest Mechanism and at the behest of the Estonian Chairmanship the Forum for Security Co-operation became actively involved in the issue. Since then, we have continued to provide the FSC and the PC with regular updates on the investigations.

Regrettably, throughout this process we have witnessed an inconsistent and unconstructive approach on the part of the Russian Federation. In various statements, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation claimed that materials were not authentic, arguing that the territory featured in the UAV footage did not correspond to the real territory, and that it was not a MiG-29 or a Su-27 that shot down the UAV but, firstly, the Abkhazian anti-aerial system, and then an Abkhazian L-39.

Despite the fact that we have addressed this concern previously, once again allow me to show that the place is exactly as it is seen on the radar video and even Google Earth. You can see the materials on the screen right now.

In addition, contrary to the statements on behalf of the Russian Federation that they never received any materials from the Georgian side, we would reiterate that the Russian Federation was provided with all relevant materials on 23 April during the UN Security Council session.

Among its many unsubstantiated claims, we took particular note of the statement made by the Russian Federation on the importance of UNOMIG playing a leading role in investigating the 20 April incident.

For the sake of full transparency we refrained from publishing the report of the independent experts until UNOMIG issued its own report.

As you all know by now, the report confirmed our claims — the twin-fin fighter jet owned by the Russian Federation entered the territory of Georgia, shot down a Georgian flying aircraft, and left the territory of Georgia.

The report explicitly stated that “based on the authentication of the radar record, the FFT could confirm that the interceptor — a MiG-29 ‘Fulcrum’ or a Su-27 ‘Flanker’ — headed south towards the UAV and the Ceasefire Line and after the interception and the shooting down of the UAV, turned back to north heading toward MAYKOP/KRASNODAR into the Russian airspace. Absent compelling evidence to the contrary, this leads to the conclusion that the aircraft belonged to the Russian air force.”

The report also emphasized that the materials provided by the Georgian side were authentic. The same was stated by the group of international experts. The whole international community thus confirmed what we already knew, namely, that the Russian Federation was behind the shooting down of the UAV.

As there were no questions left unanswered, we decided to engage with the Russian Federation in meaningful dialogue to reduce risks and prevent such incidents from happening in the future.

This is the reason why we activated the Vienna Mechanism on 28 May.

Our intention is to engage in a constructive dialogue through which we may receive an assurance that no similar activities will take place in the future.

By resorting to all possible diplomatic tools and instruments, one of which is the Vienna Mechanism, Georgia is acting as a responsible sovereign State capable of countering overt acts of aggression with civilized means.

Likewise, we will seek to bring any such acts before the eyes and judgement of the international community.

Any responsible member of the international community must try to avoid committing such incidents in the future.

We continue to be struck by the veil of ignorance and complete negligence displayed by the Russian Federation towards our legitimate concerns.

We are also daunted by many other actions committed by the Russian Federation that are not the explicit subject of today's meeting but are deeply relevant to international peace and stability.

We mean a cascade of legal and military steps taken by Russian Federation on the territory of Georgia that clearly violate Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. From an international perspective, they represent clear acts of aggression against a sovereign State.

In the past two months, Russia has gravely escalated the crisis in Abkhazia and South Ossetia through its virtual legal recognition of the separatist regimes, its illegal military build-up in Abkhazia, and its acts of aggression in the air.

We believe that Russia is wrong in viewing Georgia as it does. We are not a threat to Russia: on the contrary, our partnership could lead to great mutual advantage.

You would all without exception agree that stability in Georgia means stability in the Caucasus. We therefore fail to understand why our efforts at being economically vibrant, politically democratic, and territorially secure should be a problem for anyone, especially for the Russian Federation.

Regardless of what Russia perceives or misperceives, Georgia will continue its chosen path of development. On this we will not be diverted. We will continue to pursue democratic and economic progress and will tirelessly try to settle disputes by peaceful means.

We will seek to engage in a dialogue with the Abkhaz and the South Ossetians so that we can arrive at a resolution of these disputes.

We hope and trust that a comprehensive peace plan offering an unprecedented degree of autonomy both in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia will finally become a cornerstone of our relations.

In this regard, we are encouraged by the statements made by Prime Minister Putin recently, in which he stressed that the peace initiatives proposed by President Saakashvili are "the right plan".

We must grasp the opportunity of the moment and pursue the Peace Plan. To this end:

— This process must begin soon;

- Russia must reverse the actions it has been pursuing in Abkhazia, Georgia, in the last two months;
- Russia must decide now whether it is impartial or party to the dispute;
- Russia should allow for increased international involvement in the conflict regions for the process to become inclusive and meaningful.

This is where we stand today. To be honest, we can hardly see any other way out of this political impasse.

In conclusion, allow me to once again use this Forum to reaffirm my Government's stated commitment to a comprehensive, peaceful, and negotiated solution to the separatist conflicts on Georgia's territory. We will continue a direct dialogue with the Abkhaz, in which our aim is reach a final settlement of the conflict within the internationally recognized borders of Georgia by offering internationally guaranteed measures, including the widest possible autonomy.

Meanwhile, we remain hopeful that the OSCE and the mechanisms created to safeguard peace and stability will remain relevant in the face of emerging challenges. We also hope that the OSCE will do its best to develop the rapid-reaction mechanisms designed to deal with such cases as the 20 April incident.

We would like to thank those participating States who allowed this meeting to take place and who provided us with an inclusive forum for discussing and condemning the violence, as discussed at length above.

We remain hopeful that a new approach towards Georgia will emerge: one that respects our territorial integrity and sovereignty, one that is consistent with the actions of a responsible member of an international community of States, and one that is aimed at peace and not at war. All these things seem possible only through the concerted efforts of the whole international community.

Thank you.

For PDF attachments or links to sources of further information, please visit:

<http://docin.osce.org/docin/lisapi.dll?func=ll&objId=8281620&objAction=browse&sort=name&viewType=1>