



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Three Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions on the Conflict in Georgia

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 3, 2016

The United States warmly welcomes the three Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions on the Conflict in Georgia to the Permanent Council: welcome EU Special Representative Salber, UN Special Representative Turunen, and OSCE Special Representative Baechler. Thank you for your comprehensive and frank reports.

The United States remains committed to finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Georgia. The Geneva International Discussions (GID) are the key mechanism for advancing resolution of the 2008 conflict and reversing the effects of war by enhancing security and stability and promoting respect for human rights through practical, confidence-building measures in the conflict-affected areas. We believe that the EU, the UN, and the OSCE possess the expertise needed to help tackle the challenges inherent in the process and look forward to continued fruitful cooperation among these organizations.

Russia's holding of elections to the Russian Duma in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia without the consent of the government of Georgia on September 18 constituted a violation of Georgia's sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders. Likewise, Russia's security and military presence in the Abkhaz and South Ossetian regions of Georgia, as well as its "borderization" of the Administrative Boundary Lines with these Georgian regions, also contravenes Georgia's territorial integrity. These provocative, confrontational actions build barriers rather than bridges. They adversely affect the livelihoods of residents in the conflict-affected areas, damage trust and confidence among people in the area, and undermine Russia's claims that it is a constructive regional actor.

We call on the Russian Federation, as party to the conflict, to uphold its commitments from the 2008 six-point ceasefire agreement, including pulling back all forces to pre-conflict positions and allowing humanitarian access throughout both separatist regions. We also call on Russia to join Georgia in making a unilateral pledge on the non-use of force.

We thank the three Co-Chairs for their tireless efforts to make progress and move the negotiations forward in challenging circumstances. We specifically note the resumption of regular meetings of the Gali Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism in May this year, agreed to in the GID, as a good example of this progress. We also commend the Co-Chairs on their progress this year on missing persons as well as in helping to facilitate prisoner exchanges. We urge the GID participants to hold accountable the Abkhaz perpetrator who fatally shot a Georgian civilian in Khurcha on Tbilisi Administered Territory on May 19. We

also strongly support steps that allow for the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of internally displaced persons. We look forward to former Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Thomas Hammarbergs' report on the human rights situation in Abkhazia and support steps that ensure that the rights of those living in Abkhazia, including being taught in their native language, are respected.

The United States reiterates its full support to the three Geneva Co-Chairs and the GID forum. We call on all members of the OSCE to support the reestablishment of a meaningful OSCE presence in Georgia with unhindered access throughout the country's internationally recognized **territory up to its internationally recognized borders**.

The regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are integral parts of Georgia. The United States fully supports Georgia's territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders, and recognizes its aspirations to integrate into Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.