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Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

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Russia has recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, mindful of its responsibility for ensuring the survival of their fraternal peoples in the face of aggressive, chauvinistic policy pursued by Tbilisi.

That policy is based on the slogan "Georgia for Georgians" advanced in 1989 by Zviad Gamsakhurdia who tried to implement it in 1992 by abolishing the autonomies in the Georgian territory and ordering Georgian troops to take Sukhum and Tskhinval with a view to enforcing unlawful practices. It was as early as then, that South Ossetia was subjected to genocide. Ossetians fell victim to slaughter and mass expulsion.

Due to self-sacrificing actions by the peoples rising in revolt against the aggressor and efforts undertaken by Russia, it became possible to stop the bloodshed, to negotiate a cease-fire and to establish mechanisms to maintain peace and to address all aspects of the settlement.

Peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia and Abkhazia were created, respectively, in 1992 and 1994, along with the institutional infrastructure to facilitate, with Russia's mediation, confidence building, social and economic rehabilitation and the solution of issues related to political status. Those steps were supported by the UN and the OSCE which got involved in the work of the relevant mechanisms and sent their observers to the zones of conflict.

In spite of certain difficulties, peacekeeping and negotiating mechanisms did work helping to bridge positions and to achieve concrete agreements.

However, prospects for settlement which was already in sight were ruined when, at the end of 2003, the political power in Georgia was taken, by way of revolution, by Mikhail Saakashvili who immediately started to threaten to use force to solve the South Ossetia and Abkhazia problems.

In May 2004, special forces and troops of the Internal Ministry of Georgia were deployed in the zone of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, and in August that year

Georgian troops shelled Tskhinval and tried to take it. With active mediation of Russia, the then Prime Minister of Georgia Zurab Zhvania and the leader of South Ossetia Eduard Kokoity signed a cease-fire protocol and, in November 2004, a document on ways to normalize relations in a step-by-step manner.

After the mysterious death, in February 2005, of Zurab Zhvania, who was a sensible politician, Mikhail Saakashvili categorically rejected all the previously achieved agreements.

That was also the case with regard to the Abkhazian settlement on the basis of the Cease-Fire and Disengagement Agreement signed in Moscow on May 14, 1994. In accordance with the Agreement, collective peacekeeping forces were deployed in the zone of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. In addition, the UN Observer Mission in Georgia and the Group of Friends of the UN Secretary General on Georgia were established.

Having brought, in 2006, the Georgian military contingent into the Upper Kodori in violation of all the UN agreements and decisions, Mikhail Saakashvili disrupted the emerging progress in the settlement process within these mechanisms, including the implementation of the agreements of March 2003 between Vladimir Putin and Eduard Shevardnadze on joint efforts to bring back refugees and establish the railway communication between Sochi and Tbilisi.

Mikhail Saakashvili continued to overtly ignore Georgia's commitments and arrangements within the UN and OSCE and established puppet administrative institutions for Abkhazia and South Ossetia so as to drive the final nail into the coffin of the negotiating process.

All years of Mikhail Saakashvili's rule were marked by his absolute inability to negotiate, continuous provocations and staged incidents in the conflict areas, attacks against Russian peacekeepers, disparaging attitude towards democratically elected leaders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Since the outbreak of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in early 1990s, as a result of Tbilisi actions, Russia has been doing its utmost to contribute to their settlement on the basis of recognition of the territorial integrity of Georgia. Russia has taken this position despite the fact that the proclamation by Georgia of its independence violated the right of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to self-determination. In accordance with the Law of the USSR "On the procedure for addressing the issues related to the secession of a Union's Republic", autonomous entities that formed part of Union's Republics were entitled to resolve themselves the issues of their stay within the Union and their state legal status in case of the secession of the Republic. Georgia prevented Abkhazia and South Ossetia from exercising that right.

Nevertheless, Russia consistently followed its policy, performed its peacekeeping and mediating functions in good faith, sought to contribute to attaining peace agreements, showed restraint and patience in case of provocations. Our positions remained intact even after the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo.

By the aggressive attack against South Ossetia on the night of 8 August 2008, which resulted in numerous human losses, including among the peacekeepers and other Russian citizens, and by the preparation of a similar action against Abkhazia, Mikhail Saakashvili has himself put paid to the territorial integrity of Georgia. Using repeatedly brutal military force against the peoples, whom, according to his words, he would like to see within his State, Mikhail Saakashvili left them no other choice but to ensure their security and the right to exist through self-determination as independent States.

It is hardly possible that Mikhail Saakashvili did not realize the consequences with which an attempt to resolve the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts by force was fraught. As early as in February 2006, he said in an interview: "I will never give an order to start a military operation. I do not want people to die since blood in the Caucasus means blood not even for decades but for centuries". Thus, he knew what he was doing.

One should not forget about the role of those who have been conniving all those years with the military regime of Mikhail Saakashvili, who have been supplying offensive weapons to him in violation of OSCE and EU rules, who have been discouraging him from assuming obligations not to use force, who have been fostering a feeling of impunity in him, inter alia, as regards his authoritarian actions aimed at stamping out dissent in Georgia. We know that at some stage the external patrons of Mikhail Saakashvili tried to prevent him from reckless military adventures; however it is obvious that he completely went out of control. We are concerned about the fact that some failed to draw objective conclusions from the aggression. The vague hopes for the implementation of the joint initiative of the Presidents of Russia and France of August 12, 2008, soon vanished into thin air when Tbilisi actually rejected this initiative and the advocates of Mikhail Saakashvili did his bidding. What is more, the USA and some European states promise Mikhail Saakashvili protection of NATO, call for rearming the Tbilisi regime and even start to deliver new shipments of weapons. This is an overt invitation to new reckless ventures.

Taking into account the appeals of South Ossetian and Abkhaz peoples, of the Parliaments and Presidents of both Republics, the opinion of the Russian people and both Chambers of the Federal Assembly the President of the Russian Federation decided to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and to conclude treaties of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance with them.

Making this decision, Russia was guided by the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act and other fundamental international instruments, including the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations among States. It should be noted that in accordance with the Declaration, every State has the duty to refrain from any forcible action which deprives peoples of their right to self-determination and freedom and independence, to adhere in their activities to the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to possess a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory. There is no doubt that Mikhail Saakashvili's regime is far from meeting those high standards set by the international community.

Russia has sincere good and friendly feelings towards the Georgian people, and is confident that Georgia will eventually find worthy leaders who would be able to show proper concern over their country and develop mutually respectful, equal, and good-neighbourly relations with all the peoples of the Caucasus. Russia will stand ready to contribute to this in every way.

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