



United States Mission to the OSCE

Geneva International Discussions on the Conflict in Georgia

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Kate M. Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 6, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Together with Georgia, Russia, and representatives of the de facto authorities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the United States participated March 28-29 in the thirty-ninth round of the Geneva International Discussions on the conflict in Georgia, which was co-chaired by the EU, UN, and OSCE.

The United States welcomed the continued functioning of the Gali and Ergneti Incident Prevention Response Mechanisms (IPRM), which have defused tensions on the ground in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The United States encouraged all parties to continue constructive negotiations aimed at achieving a mutually agreeable non-use of force statement during the June 2017 GID round. The United States strongly encouraged participants to work together within the Gali IPRM to conclude the investigation into the May 2016 fatal shooting of a Georgian civilian along the Abkhaz Administrative Boundary Line (ABL).

The United States noted with concern recent developments in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, such as the recent closure of two controlled crossing points along the Abkhaz ABL. These closures restrict freedom of movement and negatively impact the livelihoods of local residents. The United States calls for these crossing points to be reopened, allowing children to attend school and residents to move freely to engage in commerce, visit relatives, and obtain necessary medical services.

The United States noted that the March 12 de facto parliamentary elections, as well as Russia's ongoing negotiations with South Ossetia to integrate military forces, and South Ossetia's April 9 de facto presidential elections and referendum amending the territories' name, not only violate Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity but also undermine the Geneva International Discussions. We called on Russian authorities and Abkhaz and South Ossetian participants to reconsider these decisions.

Although participants held useful discussion for most of the round, the United States regrets that the two working groups were not able to complete discussion of their agendas, including

a discussion on internally displaced persons (IDPs). The United States urges participants to look for practical steps forward to resolve humanitarian issues -- including the core issues regarding IDPs, refugees, and returns -- during future negotiations.

The United States fully supports Georgia's territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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