



CIO.GAL/15/09  
27 January 2009

ENGLISH only

**PC BRIEFING BY THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CHAIRPERSON-IN-OFFICE  
AMBASSADOR Ch.CHRISTOPOULOS**

It is a great pleasure for me to address, today, the Permanent Council and brief the participating States on the work done so far. First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the previous Chairmanship, Finland, and especially Ambassador Talvitie, because thanks to him I had the opportunity to get involved on the ground, before assuming the Chairmanship, namely in the Geneva Talks, the Co-Chairmen visit to Georgia as well as the "3+2" and "5+2" informal meetings for the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict.

Concerning my recent activities:

**1. Visit to Georgia**

On the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of January, I visited Tbilisi and Tskhinvali, respectively, in my capacity as Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office. The objectives of my visit were two-fold:

First, following the discussions in the second Working Group of the Geneva Talks, to address the urgent humanitarian issue of the disruption of the supply of natural gas through the Agara-Tskhinvali pipeline and,

Second, to present to the relevant parties the modules of our proposal for maintaining a meaningful and cross-dimensional OSCE presence in the region. During my trip, I was accompanied by an independent expert for gas pipelines Mr. Johannides of Austria, as well as by colleagues from the CPC and the Greek Task Force. My meetings and contacts on both sides of the Administrative Boundary Line were facilitated by the OSCE Mission to Georgia, including the MMOs.

On the gas issue, the Chairmanship circulated, on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January, the final report of the independent expert, Mr. Werner Johannides, outlining the actions undertaken for assessing the technical problem so as to contribute to the restoration of the operability of the pipeline. During my visit to Tbilisi, I met the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Vashadge and the Deputy Minister of Reintegration Mr. Rakviashvili, with whom I discussed the issue and asked them to facilitate the solution of this humanitarian problem. Both Ministers agreed on the humanitarian nature of the issue and assured me that the Georgian government would fully cooperate for its speedy solution.

In Tskhinvali, I had the opportunity to discuss the issue with the local authorities and to inform them on the constructive Georgian response. I also visited, together with Mr. Johannides, the Tskhinvali gas station which had been recently rehabilitated by Gazprom and seemed to be in good condition. However, since the pipeline was not under pressure no further inspection was possible.

I would like to point out that, thanks to the openness and cooperative spirit of all sides, the damages in the pipeline were speedily located and repaired and the pipeline has been able to carry gas since Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> January. However, we understand that some commercial issues still remain and we hope that these will also be settled in the very near future.

Furthermore, following the discussion at the Second Working Group of the Geneva Talks, I had the opportunity to raise to the local authorities, during my visit in Tskhinvali, another humanitarian problem, namely the issue of the supply of potable and irrigation water to the Georgian villages in the adjacent areas, and they asked me to convey to the Georgian government their readiness to discuss.

The Chairmanship intends to follow-up closely the issue and, in this regard, I would like to inform the participating States that, in the framework of the ERP, a report of an expert team, assessing the irrigation situation in the areas adjacent to South Ossetia, is currently under preparation and expected to be ready shortly. The Chairmanship stands ready to contribute to the restoration of the water supply system as soon as the weather conditions will allow assessment of the situation and reparation works on the ground.

Concerning the issue of the future OSCE presence on the ground, I had the opportunity to outline the Chairmanship's ideas and explain its basic concepts and guiding principles to the Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Veshadze and the Deputy Minister of Reintegration Mr. Rakviashvili. Both Ministers thanked the Greek Chairmanship for its speedy and active stance in attempting to resolve the issue of maintaining a meaningful OSCE presence in the region and assured me that they would carefully examine our proposal in a constructive spirit.

During my visit in Tskhinvali, I had the opportunity to discuss the issue with the local authorities, explaining that our intension is to establish a presence that would contribute to the security and stability of the region. They promised to examine our proposal and comment on it.

During my visit, I had the opportunity to meet the staff of the OSCE Mission to Georgia. I was very impressed by their dedication and loyalty to the Mission despite the uncertainties concerning their own future.

I also visited the OSCE Military Monitoring Officers base in Karaleti. I was very encouraged by the fact that the OSCE MMOs, with their extensive military background and experience, have managed to establish good working relations on the ground and

are welcomed by the local population irrespective of ethnic origin. I encouraged them to carry on their work with the same dedication and in accordance with their mandate. In this regard, I would like to express the Chairmanship's gratitude to all participating States that have seconded MMOs for their continuing support and commitment to the MMOs mission.

On behalf of the Chairperson in Office, I also thanked both the staff and the MMOs for their exemplary professionalism and dedication to their mission, briefed them on the current situation, answered their questions and expressed the hope that a solution for maintaining a meaningful OSCE presence in the region will be achieved.

In conclusion, my visit to Georgia strengthened my conviction that the OSCE presence there is crucial in the wider context of international efforts to ensure stability and security in the region. I witnessed, first hand, the efficiency with which the Mission has been operating, its expertise and its ability to defuse tensions by building confidence, providing lines of communication and implementing practical solutions to urgent problems. The tragic fatal shooting of a Georgian policeman, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, further testifies to the fragility of the security situation on the ground and the need to maintain our presence and, especially, that of the Military Monitors of the OSCE.

## 2. Visit to Moscow

I had the opportunity to accompany the Chairperson-in-Office Minister Bakoyannis in her visit to Moscow, yesterday.

Mrs. Bakoyannis presented to her counterpart Minister Lavrov the Chairmanship's framework of ideas for the continuation of OSCE presence in Georgia and explained that the current volatile situation on the ground requires more and not less OSCE presence on both sides of the administrative boundary line, including through its 28 military monitoring officers. Mrs. Bakoyannis explained that the Chairmanship's efforts aim at achieving a principled compromise, which, apparently, would not fully satisfy anyone but with which all participating States can agree. She expressed hope that all OSCE participating States will demonstrate a constructive approach, so as to reach consensus. The discussions were open, frank and fruitful and Minister Lavrov explained his country's position, in a constructive way, and promised to present his comments on the Chairmanship's proposal shortly.

In general, the Chairmanship's ideas have, so far, received a positive response by the parties involved. As we are still in the beginning of the road, understandably, there will be comments for additions and omissions. In multilateral diplomacy, we all know that there are no straight away YES or NOs. However, from the very preliminary comments that we have received so far, we detect genuine will for further consultations on the basis of our suggestions. Therefore, it is our intention to continue intensive consultations in order to present, in the near future, the relevant draft decisions. As we all know that "the devil is in the details", we expect that the process will be difficult and tough. However, the Chairmanship is committed to spare no effort to find a principled compromise and in this regard we appeal to all participating States

to show the good will, flexibility and constructive spirit that this challenging endeavor requires.

Finally, let me brief you on my schedule for the coming month:

During the first week of February, the three Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Talks will visit the region, in preparation of the next round of the Geneva Talks, on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> February. We consider the continuation of the Geneva Talks of paramount importance in order to achieve practical results in our efforts to stabilize the situation on the ground.

At the end of February, I am planning to visit Moldova, so as to have the opportunity to discuss with both parties and familiarize myself with the situation on the ground. As Minister Bakoyannis stated in her inaugural speech, last week, our aim is the establishment of favorable conditions that would allow the formal convening of a "5+2" meeting.

Thank you very much for your attention.