



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008  
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008  
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

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## **Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

**Permanent Council No. 706  
13 March 2008**

### **EU statement in response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Mission to Georgia, Ambassador Terhi Hakala**

The European Union warmly welcomes the Head of the OSCE Mission to Georgia, Ambassador Terhi Hakala, to the Permanent Council. Her comprehensive report gives a good overview of the many challenges the Mission has been dealing with since she assumed her duties.

The EU highly values the Mission's wide range of activities, especially those supporting the authorities in the ongoing process of democratic reform in Georgia. In this regard, we commend the Mission for its pro-active role and flexibility facing recent developments. We fully agree with Ambassador Hakala's assessment that priority should be given to electoral assistance and strengthening of the democratic process, including by promoting the indispensable dialogue between political forces and with civil society. Given the importance of successful Parliamentary elections in May, we particularly welcome the Mission's assistance to Georgia in implementing the recommendations highlighted in the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report of 4 March 2008. Other priorities we share - in line with Georgia's commitments in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan - are human rights (including those of persons belonging to national minorities), freedom and pluralism of the media, and in particular the independence of the judiciary.

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Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008  
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008  
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

The EU reiterates its firm commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders. We commend the Mission for its activities to promote peaceful conflict settlement, which is of vital importance for the future of the whole region. We welcome the increase of bilateral talks between Georgia and the Russian Federation, which resulted, amongst others, in the release of two detained peacekeepers. However, we regret that, in spite of the Mission's efforts, no meeting of the Joint Control Commission has taken place since October last year. We call on parties to resume the talks, and use all negotiating formats - including the JCC and Authorised Delegations, or any other agreed format - in a constructive manner to explore ways of increasing the effectiveness of the conflict resolution process. We support the Mission's efforts to facilitate such talks.

The tense situation in South Ossetia highlights the necessity for consultations. Recent incidents in the zone of conflict, including the one mentioned in the mission's Spot Report on 29 February, demonstrate again the urgent need for implementation of the agreed demilitarisation measures and cooperation between law enforcement agencies, as well as confidence building measures in general.

The EU welcomes the inclusion in the 2008 budget of eight additional OSCE Mission Monitoring Officers, which it strongly advocated. We would like to use this occasion to reiterate our call on all participating States to show the necessary flexibility and reach an agreement on the modalities of their deployment shortly. Additionally, we believe that the establishment of new joint checkpoints in the region would improve confidence, security and stability on the ground. This would also help maintain the necessary conditions for the implementation of the economic rehabilitation projects.

The EU, being the largest contributor to the economic rehabilitation programme in South Ossetia, reiterates once more the importance it attaches to the timely and successful implementation of this programme which is meant to benefit all the population of South

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Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008  
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

Ossetia – not only as a way to improve economic and social conditions, but also as an effective confidence building measure in the broader framework of conflict resolution. We welcome the progress made in a variety of projects, despite sometimes difficult circumstances. We highly value regular meetings of the Steering Committee, and encourage all involved to engage in constructive discussions contributing to the practical implementation of the projects. We are looking forward to the Steering Committee meeting in Vienna in April.

With regard to Abkhazia, the EU welcomes the Mission's continued support to the UN-led peace process, including its contribution to the protection of human rights in the region. The EU notes with concern the recent unilateral withdrawal by the Russian Federation from the 1996 CIS Decision on the imposition of sanctions on Abkhazia. Noting the Georgian security concerns related to this withdrawal, we encourage the sides to follow up on their commitment made at the latest Group of Friends meeting in Geneva on 18/19 February, to pave the way for an early resumption of the security dialogue, and to seriously engage in establishing modalities for implementing already agreed confidence-building measures.

The EU remains ready to lend support to dialogue and to contribute further to confidence-building measures agreed between the parties. We highly value the intensified cooperation in this field between the Mission and the EU, including EUSR Peter Semneby. Upon his recommendation, currently an EU Police Liaison Officer is based within the Mission.

The EU is looking forward to the Mission's proposal regarding an extra-budgetary Border Management Support Programme, to be set up within the framework of the OSCE Border Security Management Concept as established at the 2005 Ministerial Council.

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Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008  
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008  
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

The EU takes note of Ambassador Hakala's concerns regarding local staff salaries. We will consider this long-standing issue in the relevant fora.

In conclusion, the EU reiterates its firm support for Ambassador Hakala and the wide range of activities of the OSCE Mission in Georgia. We thank Ambassador Hakala and her staff for their dedicated work, and wish them success in the period ahead.

The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area Iceland align themselves with this statement.

\* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

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