

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ANVAR AZIMOV,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

11 June 2009

**In response to the farewell address by Ambassador Terhi Hakala**

Madam Chairperson,

A serious discussion on the results of the work of the OSCE Mission to Georgia that is closing down and whose mandate, as you know, expired on 31 December 2008 has been long overdue. The time has come, using as an example this field presence and its actions or inaction at a critical point in modern European history, to draw a number of conclusions of a generalizing nature. These conclusions are extremely necessary for they could, in our view, genuinely help our Organization to gain "a second breath" and, by honestly and objectively analysing the mistakes made, to earn its rightful place in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

The Georgian leadership's military adventure in South Ossetia last August further exacerbated the structural crisis experienced by the OSCE over the last decade, beginning in 1999, when, with a massive use of force, the armed forces of a group of participating States belonging to NATO, in violation of the norms of international law and without the approval of the United Nations Security Council, grossly violated the sovereignty of an OSCE participating State, namely Yugoslavia.

Georgia's treacherous attack on South Ossetia was a most flagrant violation of international norms and humanitarian principles and delivered a heavy blow to the OSCE's prestige. The Georgian aggression was launched in spite of Russia's warnings and in the face of repeated assertions by the authorities in Tbilisi that they had no intention of starting a war with Tskhinval. We all heard these assurances, here in Vienna at meetings of the Permanent Council and also during a visit to the region in July 2008 by the permanent representatives of some participating States. In fact it turned out that under the cloak of this sanctimonious demagoguery Georgia was secretly making careful preparations for an invasion of South Ossetia.

We shall soon mark the first anniversary of those terrible and bloody events of last August. On 8 August 2008, Georgian troops began the massive shelling of the sleeping city of Tskhinval, using among other things large-calibre artillery guns, tanks and multiple rocket launchers, resulting in heavy casualties among the republic's civilian population and the

Russian peacekeepers. However, so far the OSCE has been unable not only to provide a fair assessment of Tbilisi's actions but also to recognize the indisputable fact of Georgia's treacherous attack on Tskhinval.

The authority of the Organization has been seriously undermined in the eyes of the South Ossetian people and leadership. One should not forget the unseemly behaviour during the military activities of the staff of the office in Tskhinval who refused to allow women and children from nearby houses to take refuge in their bomb shelter, thereby leaving them to perish under the fire of Georgian "Grad" multiple rocket launchers (relevant cases were cited by representatives of South Ossetian non-governmental organizations at last year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw).

This is why it is now so difficult to find a mutually acceptable formula for the continuation of the OSCE's work in South Ossetia, whether in the form of a field presence or of monitors. It is important to restore South Ossetia's trust in our Organization, and we are sure that assistance in achieving this can in many respects be derived from direct contacts with Tskhinval, getting together to work out the modalities for the future presence, something that Russia has been and still is actively calling for.

And the position of the South Ossetian side is understandable. After all, the behaviour of the OSCE and its field mission on the eve of the Georgian aggression, during that aggression, and after it makes it perfectly clear that the Organization was not up to the conflict resolution tasks entrusted to it. It is clearly stated in the Charter for European Security that the OSCE is "a key instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation". To put it bluntly, last August the OSCE failed to prove its worth in any of those four areas.

We have to face the truth. Like it or not, with Saakashvili's military adventure and the OSCE's response to it, including that of the field mission, came the moment of truth, and frankly, the OSCE was not up to the job. It was unable either to prevent the aggression or stop the aggressor or help to resolve the crisis. Russia did that for it as part of efforts to enforce peace, in full accordance with the norms of international law and obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, working also in co-operation with France, which held the European Union presidency at the time.

It is symptomatic that the less the OSCE and its field mission in Georgia have demonstrated a willingness to do some soul-searching and take a serious look at the tragic events of last August, the more we have heard, from the platform of the Permanent Council and elsewhere, unfounded accusations against Russia and fresh outbursts of anti-Russian rhetoric from certain participating States. What is more, the most strident criticism of Russia has come from the very countries that, in violation of international agreements, including those reached earlier within the OSCE (the Principles Governing Conventional Arms Transfers of 1993, the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security of 1994 and the Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons of 2000), have supplied and are continuing to supply the Georgian authorities with military equipment and munitions or have simply closed their eyes to Georgia's dangerous preparations.

In any case, this kind of connivance merely encouraged Tbilisi to unleash bloodshed, in other words to play out the worst possible scenario of bringing South Ossetia back under its control through the use of force.

A few separate words should be said about the work of the OSCE military monitoring officers, especially since this topic was the subject of unprecedented and shocking reports in the media. *Der Spiegel*, *The New York Times*, *The Sunday Times* and the *BBC* published a series of sensational exposé articles on the Georgian leadership's crimes. These articles were based on the testimony of eyewitnesses to these tragic events – personnel of the OSCE Mission to Georgia at that time, namely, Mr. Ryan Grist, the then deputy head of the presence, and Mr. Stephen Young, senior officer of the OSCE military monitors.

Thanks to these journalistic investigations, it became known that on the eve of the Georgian attack on South Ossetia OSCE observers were reporting military preparations by Tbilisi, but for some reason their reports failed to reach all the participating States of the Organization. The Russian Federation has stated on numerous occasions and at many different levels that this kind of situation is unacceptable. We have also insisted on a thorough investigation, which however, as it turns out, has yet to take place.

Unfortunately, it has to be recognized that in its reports since the war the OSCE Mission to Georgia has been making inappropriate use of unverified information that to a considerable degree reflects Tbilisi's one-sided and subjective approach. The monitors selected as their main source of information not their personal observations but some kind of "information" received through contacts with representatives of the Georgian law enforcement agencies, village authorities and local residents. As a result, the patrol reports are full of countless references along the lines of "the Georgian police reported", "the Georgian police stated", "according to the Georgian police", "the police believe", "according to local residents", and so forth.

Things have got to the point where in their reports the military monitoring officers have begun to reproduce Georgian media coverage, notably *Rustavi 2* and *Imedi*, on a "possible Russian invasion of Georgia this spring". What is this if not the broadcasting of blatant Georgian propaganda?

The constant monitoring of the Russian military contingent's posts from the South Ossetian side of the border and never-ending complaints about the notorious "refusal of access" to South Ossetian territory to assess the security situation there have become the favourite subjects of these reports.

It is worth remembering that Permanent Council Decisions No. 861 of 19 August 2008 and No. 883 of 12 February 2009 set only numerical parameters, namely 20 monitors, and also the zone of their responsibility, namely the areas adjacent to South Ossetia. In other words, to date the military monitoring officers are in the region without their monitoring modalities having been agreed upon and approved by the Permanent Council. It is therefore not clear with what justification the monitors can "demand" access to the territory of South Ossetia and "complain about" some sort of refusal to grant them such access.

We absolutely cannot understand who authorized the monitors to observe the positioning of Russian and South Ossetian posts along the Georgian-South Ossetian border, the personnel and armaments deployed at those checkpoints, and the movements of Russian troops and equipment on the South Ossetian side of the border. We constantly find this kind of information in the monitors' reports. It needs to be borne in mind that this kind of

“monitoring” activity is not part of the observers’ functional duties, since, we repeat, no modalities for the work of the military monitoring officers have in fact been agreed.

We believe that, given the changed circumstances, the role of the OSCE in Georgia must also change. Unfortunately, a number of countries, including Georgia, are artificially linking the retention of an OSCE field presence in the region with the existence of a single monitoring operation on both sides of the Georgian-South Ossetian border.

We have supported the continuation of the work of the OSCE military monitoring officers in the areas adjacent to South Ossetia, and continue to do so. Their presence in that area is essential to help to better monitor and prevent the emergence of new aggressive plans by Tbilisi directed at its neighbours.

And there is no doubt that designs of this kind are being hatched by the current Georgian leadership. No sooner had the Russian troops left the positions that they had occupied in the security zones on the borders with South Ossetia and Abkhazia than Tbilisi began to concentrate there its military units, including special-purpose units belonging to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, move up heavy weaponry, build fortifications and set up new field camps and observation posts.

There is no end to Tbilisi’s threats and belligerent rhetoric. Just yesterday, speaking at a meeting of the government, Mikheil Saakashvili directly stated: “We shall liberate our territories – there is no historical alternative, and we shall not leave this task to future generations. We are dealing with it every hour”.

As for the future of the OSCE presence in Georgia and South Ossetia, including the monitoring operations in the region, the Russian position on this issue is well known and was once again set out in detail at the last meeting of the Permanent Council by Mr. Grigory Karasin, State Secretary and Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

Permit me to single out the most important point. The OSCE document must meet two fundamental requirements – it should reflect the new politico-legal realities in the region, which have changed as a result of the Georgian military aggression against South Ossetia, and it must also take into account the views of the South Ossetian side. We are convinced that without this it will be impossible to resume dialogue between Georgia and South Ossetia and to return the OSCE to South Ossetian territory. A failure to recognize these obvious truths will only further undermine the authority of our Organization.

Lastly, as regards the technical closure of the Mission, we hope that all the lessons learned will be set out in the After Action Report, which in our view the Secretary General should present to the Permanent Council. In addition, we should like to receive the report on the inspection by the Office of Internal Oversight and the report of the external auditors.

We wish Ambassador Hakala every success in her future career.

We would ask that the text of this statement be attached to the journal of today’s meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council.

Thank you for your attention.