



German Presidency of the Council of the European Union

670th Meeting of the Permanent Council

14 June 2007

Statement of the European Union in response to H.E. Gela
Bezhuashvili, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

The European Union warmly welcomes Minister Bezhuashvili back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his presentation.

The EU has enhanced its relationship with Georgia in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The high frequency of high level contacts between the EU and Georgia reflects the importance the European Union attaches to its relations with Georgia. EU Special Representative Semneby and his team, in close coordination with the EU Heads of Mission in Tbilisi, are in constant contact with the Georgian authorities in order to facilitate an intensive dialogue between Georgia and the EU based on mutual understanding and trust.

The EU supports the ongoing democratic reform process in Georgia and encourages the authorities to continue their efforts in this regard. We note that significant progress has been made in a number of fields, including police reform. We welcome Georgia's ongoing efforts towards meeting its OSCE commitments regarding the rule of law, including in particular the judiciary and the penitentiary system, and national minorities, and encourage further efforts in this respect. We note that the OSCE Mission to Georgia is playing a key role in this process by supporting the Government in implementing its ambitious reform agenda in a sustainable manner.

The EU commends Georgia for the impressive economic progress made in recent years, as confirmed by the IMF Review Mission earlier this month.

We reiterate our support for the Economic Rehabilitation Programme in South Ossetia, to which the EU and its member states are major contributors. We hope that the Steering Committee meeting due to take place in Tskhinvali next week will be successful, and that subsequent meetings will take place on a regular basis. The adequate and timely implementation of the programme is of the utmost importance for the region, as recent problems regarding water management have shown. We therefore call upon parties to help create and maintain the right conditions for the implementation and monitoring of the projects. We also repeat our call on all donors to honour their commitments concerning the funds they pledged at last year's donors' conference in Brussels, for implementation through the OSCE. We have welcomed Georgia's decision to underline its commitment to the programme by allocating a first tranche of 50,000 EUR, to be followed by further contributions. We recall that the OSCE Economic Rehabilitation Programme in South Ossetia is meant to benefit all the population of South Ossetia in order to build confidence and promote co-operation.

The EU reiterates its firm commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders, and supports all efforts towards a peaceful settlement of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts. We welcome the Georgian commitment to non-use of force. The peaceful resolution of these conflicts is of vital importance for the future of the whole region. We reiterate our call upon the parties to comply fully with previous agreements regarding these conflicts, including those regarding demilitarization, and to undertake confidence building measures in and around the conflict regions. The EU stands ready to play its part as well, including through the use of EU instruments to promote confidence building measures.

The EU welcomes the Georgian government's invitation to the South Ossetian society as a whole – i.e. representatives of all political forces and local groups – to participate actively in discussions on progress towards peaceful conflict resolution. We hope that the South Ossetian population and all political and societal forces will engage constructively, and in a spirit of dialogue and compromise, in efforts towards conflict resolution. An all-inclusive consultative process, open to members of civil

society, is regarded by the EU as a basic principle of conflict resolution. This all-inclusive consultative process, however, can only succeed if it is given sufficient time to unfold, and if it is accompanied by concrete confidence building measures. In this respect, we are looking forward to learn more about the progress made regarding this very important process of dialogue in which representatives of all political and societal forces were invited to take part.

The EU is disappointed that no agreement has been reached on a JCC meeting in the near future. We encourage the parties to use all negotiation formats, including the Joint Control Commission and Authorized Delegations, to explore ways of increasing the effectiveness of the conflict resolution process.

Given the tense situation on the ground, the EU urges all parties to exercise caution and to refrain from provocative actions. The discoveries of heavy anti-aircraft weaponry inside the zone of conflict as well as recent road closures, more frequent increases in the exchanges of fire and the renewed building of fortifications by both sides, demonstrate again the urgent need for implementation of the agreed demilitarisation and confidence building measures. We reiterate once more our call for more OSCE military observers, which would help to reduce tensions, allay fears, aid transparency and build confidence. Additionally, and in light of recent incidents regarding joint OSCE/JPKF monitoring patrols, the EU believes that the possibility of the establishment of new joint checkpoints in the region would help to improve confidence, security and stability on the ground.

As stated before, the EU welcomes the important agreement signed by the Russian Federation and Georgia on 31 March 2006 on the withdrawal of Russian bases and other military facilities, in accordance with the Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and Georgia made on 17 November 1999 annexed to the Final Act of the Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. We acknowledge in particular the concrete progress achieved last year on the withdrawal of Russian military equipment from the bases at Akhalkalaki and Batumi. Likewise we call for progress to resolve remaining issues relating to the Gudauta base. We recall that the 30 May 2005 statement of the Georgian and Russian Foreign Ministers identified the importance of a mission to Gudauta by

international observers, and for progress to be made to resolve the purpose and modalities of such a multinational mission.

The EU remains committed to the search, in an inclusive manner, for pragmatic solutions to the conflict and to improvements in the general situation in South Ossetia, including through concrete measures and the work of the EU Special Representative for the Southern Caucasus. The EU wishes to work closely with all parties to promote prosperity and stability in the Southern Caucasus and to deepen our relationship with Georgia within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, EFTA country Iceland, a member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

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