



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus Peter Semneby

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Jeffrey VanDreal
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 28, 2009

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is a pleasure to welcome you to today's meeting, Ambassador Semneby. We appreciate your valuable work in the South Caucasus and thank you for your informative report today.

The United States supports your continued efforts to assist the countries of the South Caucasus in furthering democratization, rule of law, and respect for human rights. We hope the European Union's Eastern Partnership Initiative will contribute to stability and prosperity in the South Caucasus, and believe the region's continued integration into European institutions will yield long-term benefits.

The United States also supports your continued efforts to encourage peaceful conflict resolution in the South Caucasus. We are hopeful that Armenia and Azerbaijan can achieve a breakthrough on the Basic Principles by the end of this year. This process, and the Turkey-Armenia normalization process, are separate efforts that are moving forward in parallel but at different speeds. Each one can reinforce the other and contribute to a general climate of reconciliation.

Ambassador Semneby, we also appreciate your efforts to help end the current stalemate in Georgia by urging the government and the opposition to begin negotiations immediately and without preconditions on a new program of reforms. We joined the European Union earlier this week in calling on all Georgians to respect the rule of law, abide by Georgia's Constitution, avoid violence, and honor the right of peaceful protest. We pledged our full support for all efforts aimed at strengthening Georgia's democratic freedom and prosperity, and reiterated our unyielding support for Georgia's independence and territorial integrity.

We hoped the May 18-19 Geneva discussions on security and stability arrangements in the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia would yield concrete results. Regrettably, Russia followed the South Ossetian separatists in walking out of the Geneva discussions on May 18, and the Abkhaz boycotted the talks at the start. While discussions resumed the next day, we hoped for more progress on resolving the urgent problem of achieving free and unhindered humanitarian access to the South Ossetian region, to which Russia committed under the August 12 cease-fire agreement and UNSCR 1866. We also hoped the South Ossetian and Abkhaz participants would commit to implementing the incident prevention and response mechanisms agreed in February.

We hope the Russian delegation and the South Ossetian and Abkhaz participants will demonstrate a more constructive attitude when they meet in Geneva on July 1 for the next round of discussions. In the meantime, we hope progress can be made on pressing

humanitarian questions, including unhindered humanitarian access, and the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of internally displaced persons. We also urge the good-faith implementation of the incident prevention and response mechanisms, and call on all parties to allow for joint visits, together with international monitors, to the sites of incidents.

As you know, Ambassador Semneby, access to the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia remains critical. We believe international monitors – working under the auspices of the OSCE, the European Union, and the UN – can help deter violence, ensure the safety and protection of civilians, and promote human rights. We fully support these monitoring efforts and the work of these organizations. We regret that Russia made it impossible to achieve consensus on the Chairmanship's status-neutral proposal for a continued OSCE presence in Georgia, which was supported by the overwhelming majority of OSCE participating States.

We repeat our call for Russia to honor the commitments it made in the August 12 and September 8 agreements, including the withdrawal of its troops to the locations and numbers that existed before last August's war and the provision of free and unhindered humanitarian access to the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions. Russia has a responsibility to ensure respect for human rights is upheld and international humanitarian law is observed in those areas of Georgia it controls.

Ambassador Semneby, we all know how difficult these issues can be – but if we cannot effectively address and resolve them, it is unlikely we will make any genuine headway on a Europe that is more secure and at peace. Progress on these issues would help restore trust and confidence and facilitate any discussion of European security.

Ambassador Semneby, thank you again for speaking to us today. We wish you all the best in your work.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.