

Address
To the Permanent Council of the
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
by Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia
H.E. Mr. Sergi Kapanadze

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Thank You Mr. Chairman,
Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to be back in this hall, addressing the distinguished audience of the Permanent Council.

Our values and principles have emerged here, in these walls, some 40 years ago. They continue to be relevant today, albeit not always respected.

I strongly believe that we all should aspire to make the OSCE the true platform for increased cooperation and security among the participating states. It's our responsibility to strengthen the organization which is a unique value-based, which is built on agreed principles and commitments.

During the last four years while addressing this distinguished audience at various levels, Georgia's representatives have often expressed profound regret that the role of the OSCE in addressing security challenges has diminished.

Today, unfortunately, I but have to repeat that OSCE indeed remains in limbo, with its mechanisms hamstrung by offender's veto and political will sapped by the difference in values among the participant States.

Instead of real political issues and adequate responses to security challenges, lowest common denominators in every issue dominate the agenda.

We move from one Ministerial cycle to another knowing that the main security challenges the OSCE area faces will remain unaddressed. Successive Chairmanships censor their aspirations, ever mindful of what is feasible under the flawed and rather outdated decision-making rules. And, predictably, the domain of the possible narrows every year.

Indeed the security of one affects the security of another within the OSCE. This is most relevant to Georgia, which finds itself in a turbulent region, where challenges relevant in the 20th century are still persistent, where occupation, Berlin walls, proxy regimes, terrorism, ethnic cleansing and even war have all been seen resurgent within the last five years.

We cannot claim that the OSCE has no mechanisms, or that these mechanisms are intrinsically flawed. Quite the contrary: they proved both their resilience and their relevance in the recent past in Georgia as well as elsewhere.

Let me remind you of the positive role our Organization played in the aftermath of the Balkan wars. Four years after the Dayton agreement, security arrangements were in place, the OSCE had deployed staff and resources in almost every town of war-ravaged countries. The principle of property restitution was outlined and its process set in motion. Rigorous monitoring was in place to eradicate hate speech from the public sphere. We are now phasing out OSCE presence from the Balkans precisely because our efforts were successful in many areas.

Now take a look at four years after the war in Georgia. The guns have barely fallen silent, and the truce is not solidified because one of the sides is refusing to make a non-use-of-force pledge. Two Georgian regions are under military occupation by another OSCE participant. OSCE presence was terminated despite Georgia's outcry, and our Organization is failing to even follow-up on its 2008 human rights recommendations.

Dear Colleagues,

My country today lives and tries to develop in an extremely uncertain security environment. As we speak, Russia holds military drills "Kavkaz 2012" fielding several thousand soldiers, artillery and aviation just few kilometres away from our borders. CSTO exercises take place to the South of our borders, whereas the military installations on our occupied territories are taking part in another set of drills. Let me remind you that the similar "Kavkaz 2008" exercises were held just few weeks before the August 2008 invasion. General Khrulyov, the former commander of the 58th army, recently sensationally acknowledged that two re-enforced armoured battalions stayed behind after 2008 military drills were over, that these battalions were camouflaged in the mountains and decided the outcome of the August 2008 war. We are concerned that current exercises in 2012 could be used for similar aggressive purposes.

President Putin just few weeks ago made astonishing acknowledgment. He said that the plan to attack Georgia was approved in late 2006 and that the Russian side was actively training South Ossetian militia throughout the years, when Russian diplomats here and elsewhere were claiming to be the neutral party and mediator. For those remaining few who still do not believe or cannot understand how the war started in 2008, this confession should be enlightening.

I am not claiming that the Russian aggression is imminent and that Moscow is poised to use force against Georgia tomorrow. But neither of us can stay assured that an aggressive action from Moscow is ruled out. Lack of predictability is our biggest concern. And the non-use of force pledge can be an important diffuser of tensions.

We cannot trust sporadic assurances of goodwill. As I said, official Moscow still refuses to reciprocate non use of force. Georgia's tangible unilateral constructive gestures such as lifting visa requirements for Russian citizens, our cooperative stance on Russia's WTO membership, our offers to hold talks and engage in the dialogue without preconditions still remain unanswered. Russian market is still closed for Georgian products.

In return, Russia continues to organize terror campaign from the occupied regions, and continues to build up military. Rhetoric is hostile and we hear groundless allegations of Georgia harbouring terrorists.

Human rights continue to be abused in the occupied regions. HCNM and ODIHR are unable to follow-up on their 2008 report on human rights violations. Just three days ago we witnessed how the Gali children in Abkhazian region were not allowed by the Russian soldiers to go to the Georgian schools where they went for all their lives, just because they were crossing the Administrative boundary line. Where, but not the OSCE should these concerns be raised and addressed?

OSCE has to work more on the problems of the internally displaced persons. There are hundreds of thousands of IDPs in the OSCE area and this organization has failed to address their concerns. Last year we prepared the draft Ministerial decision, but there has been no follow-up presented so far to this.

Without the meaningful international presence on the ground and with no objective assessment of threats, Georgia's security will continue to remain fragile. Restoration of the OSCE Mission in Georgia, as well as further strengthening of the role of the OSCE institutions, such as ODIHR and HCNM is essential for fundamentally dispelling our concerns.

We at OSCE tend to look at the problems regionally. Georgia's security dilemma is linked with the security architecture in the South Caucasus and a wider region. Quite recently, the Georgian government had to counter with a dangerous spill over of instability from Russia's restive North Caucasus. Two law-enforcers and a military doctor were killed in a standoff which eliminated 11 Northern Caucasus insurgents near the village of Lapankuri in Eastern Georgia.

It is obvious that the combination of bureaucratic and military pressure Russia exerts in the Northern Caucasus has proven futile, if not counterproductive. As a security community we cannot close our eyes on that. The civil war that rages in the Northern Caucasus has to be under the spotlight of this organization.

My government is also concerned that military posturing and preparedness, rather than collaborative diplomatic effort, seems to take precedence when official Moscow projects its actions to respond to potential instability in the wider region – be it in Iran, Syria or between our neighbouring states. We are indeed worried with some high level threatening statements coming from Moscow that if situation becomes volatile in the wider region, South Caucasus could destabilize. We are aware of the Russian plans to use the pretext of reinforcing its military base in Armenia in order to further destabilize the security situation in Georgia. And if such scenario materializes, OSCE has to be vigilant. The only way to counter such actions is through increased transparency on the ground, through more eyes and ears.

Dear colleagues,

I realize it would be short sighted to only point at shortfalls, without suggesting at least some solutions. So let me say this – we cannot make the OSCE more relevant and visible by tweaking the OSCE mechanisms and institutions. We cannot make it more effective while the participating States equivocate and dither in their commitment to the principles and values this organization was set up to represent. The *Helsinki + 40* document, which we saw recently is an honest effort of the

Chairmanship in a difficult predicament: it talks of the process, since there is no commitment to results among the participating States. Only your courage and determination can give this and incoming Chairmanships the impulse they need: short of it, we have witnessed how each incoming Chair has felt compelled to downplay expectations. Realism is welcome, but immobilism cannot be a virtue if we are to meet challenges together.

I would like to share with you, my respected Colleagues, our expectations:

We must overcome a debilitating influence that a misuse of consensus rule has had on our courage to point to problems. We did not remain silent when political leaders in lands closer to the tender core of Europe called for wanton destruction of the property of people because of their ethnicity. Yet when Mr. Tibilov of South Ossetia did exactly that a couple of weeks ago, only the High Commissioner for National Minorities raised his voice, and our gratitude goes to him. His independent institution served its mandate, but the silence from participating States has been deafening. In this context, we need to counter at all costs the attempts to undermine the mandate of independent institutions like HCNM, ODIHR, or the RFoM.

The Permanent Council must show its will to restore the OSCE presence in Georgia, ignoring the politicking which aims to question my country's territorial integrity. This presence, even a status neutral one, will be an additional – and in some areas only – guarantee of stability and a tool for mending the social texture across the war-torn communities of Georgia.

The OSCE can and must enhance its role in the Geneva Discussions. As the process drags on, the role of the Co-Chairs in steering the debate becomes ever crucial. The annual rotation of OSCE Co-chairs has a negative impact on the Organisation's efficiency. Perhaps the incoming Chairmanship Troika might agree to appoint a single Co-Chair for the period of three years, to ensure continuity. In the same vein we would welcome seeing OSCE as a full-fledged co-chair of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms.

The OSCE must become more active in confidence building between the war-torn communities. OSCE has a capacity to undertake humanitarian projects aimed at restoring ties between the divided communities. OSCE ran an extremely successful Economic Rehabilitation Program before 2008 which was instrumental in bringing together Ossetian and Georgian villages. We need a similar program today as well.

OSCE institutions have to remain independent and exercise their mandates of transparency and human rights protection, as well as conflict resolution and prevention throughout the whole territory of Georgia. HCNM and ODIHR are crucial in monitoring the human rights situation in my country and its occupied regions.

We must discuss the modalities in which we all can use the OSCE mechanisms to counter emerging regional threats, especially in the context of Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs) and the measures to ensure military transparency.

Georgia does not come to OSCE only with requests and criticisms. I stand here today to say that we in Georgia are doing our part for being a responsible player in international security and to conform to OSCE values in our actions. Four years after the war, the Georgian economy and politics have recovered from the crisis, and we are looking towards our country's future with optimism.

Yes, from time to time we have fall-backs. Recent scandal related to the torture and sexual abuse in Georgia's penitentiary system is a case in question. It was a shocking discovery for us that the human rights were still abused in our prisons, despite all the efforts we have invested in eradicating corruption and violence. However we have learnt our lesson. The reaction to the crisis was swift, those responsible are already bearing the consequences. I am confident that the violations of this kind will never return, as we start the full-fledged transformation of our penitentiary system.

Politically, we will be witnessing the transformation of our political system towards a parliamentary republic. Georgia will have the parliamentary elections on October 1, 2012. As the OSCE and Council of Europe observers note the electoral process is competitive. For the first time we have at least three political parties campaigning fully in all parts of Georgia. We have extended invitation to more than 2000 observers, including ODIHR and the OSCE PA. We will do our best to have the most transparent and competitive elections ever held in Georgia's history.

I have to say very firmly that any foreign meddling in the outcome of the elections is unacceptable. Georgia's people will decide themselves who will be the rulers of the country. Those who entertain illusions of forceful interference after the Election Day need to be warned and deterred. Yes, some might argue that our political scene is in flux, it is challenged by big money, irresponsible politicians, factionalism, xenophobia and other vices. However, the political process in Georgia is very competitive and the Government is motivated to do everything in its power to conduct free and fair elections. We have called on all stakeholders to acknowledge the results of the elections once they are declared by the Central Election Commission and assessed by the ODIHR as in line with international standards. It is unfortunate that not all political parties have yet done so.

Georgia has proven that it can achieve spectacular successes even in the face of adversity. If we address the existential challenges that I spoke of in the beginning of my speech, Georgia has a potential to become one of the engines in promoting security.

Dear Friends, this was not a statement of bitterness, but a call to sobriety. Georgia has shown that even under duress, it has the power to provide security and to defend our shared values. At the same time, we need to remain mindful that we live in a time and geographic place where diplomatic formulas stand the harshest test of reality.

And from this vantage point, let me conclude by saying that the OSCE is more than a worthy idea, it can be an effective tool if we stand firm in our convictions. Let us talk frankly to find out why this is no longer the case. Let us work to address the root causes of conflicts and problems, rather than expect them to dissipate of their own accord. Because when the next crisis strikes, we will be letting someone down, and the worthy idea will perish – because we lacked the courage our values demanded.

Thank you very much.