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Address by HE Temuri Yakobashvili  
Vice Prime-Minister and the State Minister for Reintegration of Georgia  
at the 799<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Special Permanent Council  
March 19, 2010

State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to express gratitude to this distinguished audience and thank you all for the opportunity to present the strategic vision of the Government of Georgia towards the occupied territories of my country – Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, as well as to explore together with you what are the areas, where the OSCE can play a role to bring together the communities affected by the war and the occupation.

Only one year after the invasion of my country, occupation of its two territories and the recognition of the independence of two Georgian regions by Russia, Government of Georgia took an initiative to develop a policy aimed at bringing together the population of Georgia that has been affected by the occupation and war. This initiative is an answer to the key question, raised by all citizens of Georgia, including those residing on the occupied territories, as well as the question raised by many of you, our partners, allies and friends

“What next? How is the Government of Georgia going to handle the situation that emerged in the aftermath of the August 2008 war?”

It was obvious that Government of Georgia had to elaborate precise and substantive policy in order to find correct and precise answer to this existential question.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today I have the honor to present my country’s vision of the future regarding the engagement of the war-affected populations. This vision is outlined in the Georgia’s State “Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation”. This document was discussed and agreed during the consultations within the interagency group of the GoG, including the State Ministry for Reintegration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Security Council.

It has to be noted that in the process of elaborating the Strategy, GoG organized several rounds of consultations and drafting sessions with local and international experts, NGOs, INGOs and UN family organizations, as well as the consultative sessions with political parties, including parliamentary and non-parliamentary opposition and communities living in occupied territories. Obviously the Strategy would not have been possible without the active involvement of the partner states of Georgia, who have contributed significantly to the brain-storming process. Examples and cases from other places in Europe and elsewhere have been thoroughly studied and inspected by our Government, to make sure that our approach dwells on the best practices of confidence-building and conflict resolution.

The draft Strategy has been debated in the Parliament of Georgia. It has been submitted for final comments to the Cabinet and was adopted by the Government on January 27, 2010.

Therefore the final document largely represents the visions and suggestions of all stakeholders involved in the drafting process. The document is an illustration of the wide consensus among the civil society, political spectrum and GoG, as well as our friends. As you know the Philosophy and the approaches outlined in the Strategy has been widely welcomed on international arena. Statements by the European Union and the United States, as well as other nations concerned with the fate of those who reside on the occupied territories demonstrate well that the Strategy enjoys wide support.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sometimes the Strategy is perceived as the governments reintegration or the deoccupation strategy. This is an incorrect definition. The title of the strategy precisely reflects its vision and strategic intent – it is the roadmap for engagement and co-operation with the communities, residing currently on the occupied territories. The strategy aims at creating environment and ground, which eventually will support to voluntary reunification of communities and peaceful de-occupation of these territories. This is a long term goal, which, as I just said, is not a subject matter of the Strategy, but rather a eventual by-product of the confidence and trust that could be built between the war torn communities.

The Confidence building, mentioned in the strategy as one of the critical tools to success, is to be carried out between those, who once have shared this land - residing and expelled communities – between former neighbors, co-workers, classmates, associates etc.

The implementation of the Strategy can only be possible if the two fundamental pillars are present: non-recognition policy and active engagement. The international community has condemned Russia's recognition of the so-called independence of the occupied regions. This is a adequate reaction from the international community, which should be the guardian of international law. Active non-recognition policy should continue to be pursued everywhere. Russia has to be constantly reminded of its obligations under international law. International community has to continue showing its strong stance on the occupied territories and particularly continuous violations of human rights there.

At the same time, while our territories continue to be occupied, we should not forget about the people, who reside there. This is why we accentuate the policy of engagement as the only viable way forward for those citizens of Georgia, who happen to live on the other side of the occupation line. Government of Georgia has chosen a path of de-isolation and engagement as opposed to the path of ostracism and exclusion.

Furthermore, the Strategy clearly demonstrates Georgia's strong commitment to solve the conflict with Russia only through peaceful means and diplomatic efforts. This is the only viable way forward and we recognize this. Hopefully Russia will also acknowledge

that military solution to the conflict is not an option and will abandon military rhetoric and provocative actions towards Georgia.

Three issues are not included in the Strategy: Security, Status and the IDPs. Government of Georgia assumes that the security arrangements, as a follow-up of 6 Point Cease-Fire Agreement between Russia and Georgia, brokered by EU have to be discussed and solved under the international auspices in Geneva and other political fora. As for the status of the occupied regions, we believe this issue has to be settled in parallel with the complete de-occupation of the Georgian territory and safe and dignified return of the IDPs and refugees through internationally moderated discussions with the Russian Federation in full conformity with the principle of territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. The return of the IDPs in safety and dignity is also a subject matter for the Geneva Discussions.

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All these issues are of a medium to long term nature. As for the relations between those communities who have been separated by the war, this is the issue of an imminent and humanitarian nature, therefore we can not wait until all the differences are sorted out. We need to act now and act quick. This act has to be depoliticized and humanitarian in nature and this is where our Strategy steps in. This is why we like to say that the Strategy is humanocentric.

To achieve these humanitarian and confidence-building aims the Government of Georgia aims to undertake proactive policies, inter alia aimed at:

- Promoting economic interaction between communities across the dividing lines, improving socio-economic conditions of the populations on the both sides of the dividing lines, and including Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia in Georgia's international economic relations.

- Rehabilitating and developing infrastructure that will enable the movement of goods and people across the dividing lines.

- Enhancing existing mechanisms and developing new means for promoting basic human rights in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, including the freedom to exercise religious rights and the right to receive education in one's native language.

- Improving the quality of, and access to, health care for war-affected populations, as well as promoting their ability to receive education. Promoting freedom of movement—as well as people-to-people interaction and contacts across the dividing lines—through identifying areas of common interest and supporting joint inter-community projects and activities in all spheres of mutual interest.

- Supporting the preservation of cultural heritage and identity, and advancing their promotion and exposure both domestically and internationally. Promoting the free flow of information across the dividing lines, with the purpose of strengthening understanding and cooperation. Exploring legal avenues to ensure that activities in pursuit of the above-mentioned goals can be accomplished without compromising the basic principles of this Strategy—notably the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia and the objective of non-recognition and eventual de-occupation.

Georgia will work closely with its partner states and organizations to develop adequate expertise, instruments, and resources for the implementation of these objectives. I have toured various international organizations, including Council of Europe, European Union, NATO, and currently I come here to the OSCE precisely for this purpose, to seek your expertise, resources and instruments in implementing of this noble goal.

OSCE has unique instruments and capabilities aimed at promoting confidence building activities on the ground. We have seen and experienced this while the OSCE Mission to Georgia was working on the ground, promoting interaction between the war torn societies and households. Unfortunately the Economic Rehabilitation Project was discontinued due to well known events here in Vienna. However the need for confidence building remains on the ground. I am sure that the OSCE will find ways and tools how to become more active in the implementation of the Strategy through its good offices.

I am also well aware that some of the instruments that the OSCE possesses are dormant and outdated, but since today we are in the process of debating how to improve the existing capabilities of the OSCE within the Corfu Process, I am sure that the outcome of

these debates can also contribute to the implementation of the Strategy. We have circulated some ideas on how to increase the efficiency of the confidence building dimension of the OSCE and I hope that some of our ideas will be taken on board, without putting them as the hostage in hands of a few.

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Friends,

Now let me say a few words on the next steps.

In parallel to promoting Strategy, Government of Georgia has started developing an Action Plan, which is aimed to be as pragmatic, neutral, objective and efficient, as time and circumstances permit. We want to achieve results and improve people's lives through the small steps. And this is why we need an Action Plan. We have pledged that the Action Plan will be developed with the involvement of all stakeholders and we are motivated to keep our word.

As for the time-scale: currently the Action Plan is being developed by the expert groups. Both, local and international experts are involved in the process. In a manner similar to the development of the Strategy, Action Plan will be developed through the inclusive, participatory and constructive process, in order to ensure that the support for the document is unequivocal throughout the whole society of Georgia, including in the occupied territories.

Our immediate goal is to organize a Conference in the nearest months, which will be aimed at implementing of the Action Plan and the priorities I have just presented to you. HE Mr. Bernard Kouchner, Minister of Foreign Affairs of France has expressed his interest to host this event and we are extremely grateful for this support. This Conference will aim at adopting action plan and pledging financial and institutional support for its implementation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Implementation conference is a concrete forum, where the OSCE can contribute greatly. As I mentioned above OSCE currently possesses a toolbox of mechanisms aimed at implementing, supporting, or financing the non-military confidence building measures. I am also well aware that this toolbox is being updated and defined currently. I have taken a note of the presentation of Ambassador Salber (Director of Conflict Prevention Center), who on March 10 stated that the “complementary development and use of non-military CSBMs could also further contribute to conflict prevention and crisis management processes”. For this purpose I propose you all to hold a seminar, or a thematic workshop or a special session, where the experts from your countries, OSCE Secretariat and Georgia could sit down and discuss in greater details what can be done in order to successfully apply the OSCE CSBM toolbox to the Strategy and the subsequent Action Plan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the end allow me to inform you that all the areas covered by the Strategy such as – health, education, trade, confidence building, transport and communications, human rights, free flow of information etc will be transformed into the particular projects reflected in Action Plan. The Action Plan will be comprised of two major blocks: unilateral actions and bilateral activities with authorities in control.

Concerning unilateral actions Government of Georgia will work out frameworks and mechanisms that will enable population, residing on the occupied territories to have access to the benefits, available for the rest of the population of Georgia – be it access to health care, education, social benefits or international travel. The actions include amendments of procedures and/or legislation when necessary. In this regard we appreciate international expertise and support.

In order to promote bilateral activities with the authorities and structures in control Government of Georgia is trying to develop a status neutral liaison mechanism, which will serve as an umbrella framework for interaction among each other and other relevant stakeholders, who act on the ground. UNDP is sought to become platform for this

mechanism and in particular cases it will serve as an implementation agency as well. It should be well understood that this mechanism will be aimed at facilitating the implementation of the humanitarian projects and activities aimed at the increase of the confidence between the war torn societies. This mechanism can and will not deal with such issues as security, stability, IDPs and refugees or the status. For these purposes we have other instruments. In short, this mechanism is being developed not to substitute, but to supplement already existing mechanisms.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In short I would like to encourage you to engage in active discussion with the Government of Georgia on how your states bilaterally, and the OSCE institutionally can contribute to the drafting and implementation of the Action Plan. Your input will be more than appreciated.

Thank you very much.