



EMBASSY OF GEORGIA TO THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA
PERMANENT MISSION OF GEORGIA TO THE OSCE AND OTHER
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENNA

S T A T E M E N T

*Delivered by Ambassador Paata Gaprindashvili
at the 763rd Permanent Council Meeting
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Madam Chairperson,
Mr. Deputy Foreign Minister,
Dear colleagues,

I would like to join other delegations present in welcoming Mr. Karasin to the Permanent Council today.

Mr. Minister,

Last year, in August 2008, the country you represent invaded its neighbour. Russia's two-pronged assault, an invasion of Georgia through the Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia by land, sea and air, resulted in the occupation of two provinces of Georgia. This military operation employed Russian conventional, airborne and special forces based in the North Caucasus Military District, as well as the airborne troops from Pskov and Ivanovo, a naval force from the Black Sea Fleet, and irregular forces – the South Ossetian and Abkhaz militias and Cossacks. Tens of thousands of Russian combat troops, several thousand tanks and hundreds of planes flooded into Georgia as a part of this large-scale military aggression against the sovereign State and a neighbour.

Russian forces and their proxy militia conducted ethnic cleansing and committed crimes against humanity on the territory of a neighbouring State. The HCNM, the ODIHR, the UN, the Council of Europe and other recognized international institutions described and documented in detail the horrors of the war and clear-cut cases of ethnic cleansing, which resulted in the displacement of more than 100,000 persons.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to remind you that this tragedy of the twenty-first century in Georgia was preceded by almost two decades of a deliberate policy of the Russian Federation, directed against Georgia's statehood and its people, starting with two wars in the early 1990s – again in the Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia. These wars were also accompanied by massive ethnic cleansing, which was later recognized by the OSCE summits in Budapest, Lisbon and Istanbul. More than 300, 000 persons were displaced as a result of a brutal policy of ethnic cleansing in the early 1990s.

In August 2008, international efforts made it possible to stop Russia from executing its aggression on a larger scale, i.e., occupying Georgia's capital, deposing Georgia's democratically elected government and devastating Georgia's economy. It was only through the concerted efforts of the EU and the United States that the French Presidency of the EU managed to broker the ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008.

Today, Russia is attempting to legitimize the aforementioned atrocities. Today, Russia openly defies and clearly remains in flagrant violation of the ceasefire agreement of 12 August. We have today distributed the comprehensive document on Russia's violations of this agreement, which is available outside the meeting room, so I will not go into every detail of this issue. However, I must comment on Mr. Karasin's interpretation of point 5 of the ceasefire agreement. This "unprecedented" interpretation is simply wrong and represents yet another disgraceful attempt of Russia to undermine international efforts and evade its international obligations. It is noteworthy that the delegations present here expressed their indignation at the explanation provided by Minister Karasin.

Dear colleagues,
Madam Chairperson,

What alarms us further is that, in parallel to the military build-up, Russia is continuing its diplomatic activities aimed at undermining the efforts of the international community to peacefully solve the conflict between Georgia and Russia. Let me remind you that, in the same manner, before the August war, Russia "successfully" opposed and undermined all the efforts of the international community aimed at peaceful conflict resolution. I am not going to enumerate everything from this long and unfortunate list, but I will highlight only some of the points from the OSCE domain.

Mr. Minister,

In defiance of the OSCE community, Russia opposed the continuation of the OSCE Mission to Georgia on two occasions during the past seven months. On 22 December and on 13 May, Russian vetoes caused the OSCE presence in Georgia to be discontinued. Both proposals, Mr. Minister, were the results of long discussions and negotiations and were supported by the overwhelming majority of this Organization's participating States. Today, Mr. Minister, your statement destroyed even the last hope of maintaining OSCE activities in Georgia.

Madam Chairperson,

We have become used to Russian confrontations within this Organization. In 2004, against the will of the overwhelming majority of the OSCE participating States, Russia vetoed the continuation of the extremely successful border monitoring operation in Georgia. In subsequent years, Russia blocked an increase in the number of the OSCE monitors in the Tskhinvali region, and it also opposed and bluntly rejected a proposal supported again by the overwhelming majority of the OSCE participating States to permit an OSCE checkpoint in Didi Gupta and to establish joint Russian-OSCE-Georgian monitoring of the Roki tunnel. In 2008, again against the will of the international community, Russia vetoed the deployment of the additional OSCE monitors in South Ossetia. The subsequent implementing measures of 8 September, signed by Russia's President, stated that the OSCE monitors should continue to carry out their responsibilities in conformity with their personnel and deployment scheme, as it had been on 7 August, and again the Russian Federation continued to stand isolated in this forum in opposing the adoption and implementation of the decisions which would have had a positive impact on peace and security in the OSCE area.

By rejecting the presence of the OSCE monitors, Russia once again demonstrated its negative approach towards the principles of transparency and accountability. All these actions have one single aim – to make sure that the Russian military presence in the Tskhinvali region is unchecked, unbalanced and non-transparent, so that no international organization observes the legalization of the occupation through well-employed instruments of illegal issuance of passports, ethnic cleansing and military build-up.

Mr. Minister,

Your government has turned the Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia into huge military bases. But you can be sure that the time will come when the last Russian soldier will leave the occupied Georgian territories, just as you had to leave Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan. And by then there will be an international presence on the ground to monitor the way this withdrawal is taking place.

Dear colleagues,

In December 2005, the Ljubljana Ministerial Council adopted the “Statement on Georgia”, which stated that the Ministers welcomed the Peace Plan proposed by Georgia as a basis for the peaceful settlement of the conflict and supported the OSCE's further involvement in the conflict resolution process. How Russia “supported” further OSCE involvement in the conflict resolution process, I have already reminded you. Mr. Minister, let me now remind you and this distinguished audience that Minister Lavrov was personally involved in the negotiations concerning the aforementioned statement, and he personally supported it. But it turned out that Russia could only live up to its international political and legal commitment for about a month. On 9 January 2006, the Russian delegation here in Vienna, under the instructions of the same minister, circulated a statement which said: “Georgia proposed working on a kind of ‘project of joint action’ for the implementation of the

allegedly already existing and agreed plan for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Unfortunately there is no such plan as yet.”

This change in approach is a clear demonstration of the way in which Russia tried to destabilize the situation in the Tskhinvali region. This diplomatic disavowal was then followed by other destructive actions by the Russian Federation, which ended in repeated rejection of the peace proposals; secondment of Russian military and security personnel into the *de facto* governments; a creeping annexation of both conflict regions against the background of a deliberate weakening of the existing negotiation formats; armed provocations against Georgian villages, peacekeepers and police; and escalation of the Russian military rhetoric against Georgia. And all the aforesaid ended in the large-scale invasion and occupation of Georgian territories.

Mr. Minister,

I have to say that, today, Russia’s “contribution” to the conflict resolution process is in no way different from the one that I have outlined. Let me underline Russia’s neglectful approach towards the Geneva discussions, and Russia’s attempts to use them as a tool to blackmail the international community in different forums. Mr. Minister, your outrageous walkout on the first day of the fifth round of the Geneva discussions is yet another proof of the obstructionist role that Russia is playing and has been playing in the conflict resolution process. During the last six rounds, Russia twice walked out of the talks and once appeared unsure whether and when to continue the discussions. This is truly a “remarkable” record for a “responsible” international actor.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While the whole international community was calling on Russia to respect and implement its international commitments, the Head of the Russian Delegation to the fifth round of the Geneva talks unambiguously declared that Moscow did not respect point 5 of the ceasefire agreement of 12 August. This is how the diplomats of the Soviet Union acted throughout the last century. It is very unfortunate to see that such an approach to implementing its international commitments has also been inherited by Russia.

Madam Chairperson,
Dear colleagues,

Today, we heard groundless accusations levelled at Georgia and the international community. We have been lectured about the notion of responsibility in international politics by the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister. I am not going to comment further on these points. What I would like to draw your attention to is what was not said today.

We did not hear anything about how Russia is going to implement the provisions of the six-point agreement of 12 August and the subsequent implementing measures of 8 September; We did not hear anything about how to establish proper international monitoring on both sides of the administrative boundary, and which

would be the best way to ensure transparency and accountability, confidence-building and non-resumption of hostilities. We did not hear anything about how Russia can start co-operating with the OSCE and the EU on security and stability arrangements in South Ossetia and in Abkhazia and reciprocate the steps they have taken. We did not hear any comment in the statement about the reports of the HCNM and the ODIHR, about their recommendations. What we have witnessed today is that Russia is shamefully continuing to pursue its traditional attitude of turning a blind eye and looking the other way.

Madam Chairperson,

Although Mr. Karasin does not like it when questions are asked, which is obvious from our experience during the Geneva discussions, I would still like to take advantage of this forum to pose some questions, since the Permanent Council is a tool that indeed encourages such a means of communication. I would kindly ask the Deputy Minister to comment on the following:

- I would appreciate it if Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister could elaborate more eloquently on the status of implementation of the six-point agreement of 12 August and the subsequent implementing measures of 8 September.
- I would also like to know whether there is a need for OSCE monitoring in the heavily militarized Tskhinvali region?
- What is the position of Russia regarding the HCNM/ODIHR reports? How should we proceed with a follow-up to the reports and implement the recommendations contained in them?

If the Deputy Foreign Minister still chooses to remain silent at this stage, I would appreciate it if answers could be received later on in writing by the Russian delegation in Vienna.

Thank you.