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**The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Georgia
Address to the Permanent Council of the OSCE
Vienna, 12 February 2004**

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,

Thank you for the kind invitation to address the Permanent Council of the OSCE and outline UNOMIG's activities and priorities relating to the settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia. Before going into the substance of the matter, I would take pleasure in extending my best wishes to you, Mr. Chairman, and to the Bulgarian OSCE Chairmanship for every success in discharging your important duties.

I myself regard this already traditional invitation as a testimony of the keen and continuous interest of your Organization in the processes in the Caucasus and Georgia, which is substantiated by the news-breaking developments in this country. The background of the conflict and the thrust of UNOMIG's efforts in the peace process are well known to the Permanent Council by virtue of the OSCE leading role in the settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, the active cooperation between our Organizations in implementing their respective mandates. UNOMIG was a cooperative partner during the visit of the Dutch CiO visit to Georgia last year and facilitated the March 2003 visit of the OSCE Ambassadors to Sukhumi. Moreover, you have at your disposal best sources of information in the person of my two predecessors Amb. Bota and Amb. Boden. This greatly facilitates my task today.

Since my last intervention at the Permanent Council in February 2003 a number of promising developments took place in the peace process against the background of the political impasse and lack of dialogue between the sides in 2002.

1. A year ago, in February 2003 the UN-chaired Geneva brainstorming session of senior representatives of the Group of Friends identified three sets of issues – economic cooperation, return of refugees and internally displaced persons, and political and security matters as key to advancing the peace process and recommended the establishment of three task forces on the above issues. This meeting helped create a fresh positive momentum in the peace process. The subsequent UN-chaired Geneva meeting of the Group of Friends in July 2003 reviewed progress and made further recommendations. For the first time representatives of the sides participated in a part of the meeting. The third Geneva meeting is scheduled for 17-18 February 2004.

2. On 6-7 March 2003 in Sochi the President of Georgia and the President of Russia agreed to create working groups in order to address the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to the Gali district in the first instance, the reopening of the railway traffic between Sochi and Tbilisi, and energy projects, which include the modernization of the Inguri hydropower station. It was understood that the opening of the railway will be done in parallel with the return of refugees and IDPs.

3. Result oriented activities on the above mentioned three sets of issues, including in the framework of the above bilateral Georgian-Russian working groups constitute the key vehicles for building common ground between the two sides:

- Respectively, the Mission launched the dialogue on security guarantees between the sides with the participation of the Group of Friends on the basis of their 2001 Yalta appeal to the international community to become guarantors for non-resumption of hostilities and for the return of refugees and IDPs to the Gali district in the first instance and to help elaborate mechanism to implement these guarantees. Two meetings have been held, the last one on 10 February 2004, which helped clarify the initial views and expectations by the sides so that the issue can be subsequently addressed by the international community.
- The implementation of the recommendations of UNOMIG's 2002 Security Assessment Mission, led to a major new development as is the initial deployment of a UNOMIG civilian police component, in conformity with Security Council Resolution 1494 (2003) and also to the conduct of a UNDP-led feasibility rehabilitation Mission in the Gali district and two other districts.
- Economic issues and return of refugees and IDPs are being tackled in the bilateral Sochi working groups. The Mission participated in activities of these working groups, in particular in that dealing with the return of IDPs/refugees and contributed expertise, in order to assist in the implementation of the tasks put forward by the Group of Friends. UNOMIG also continued its programme of quick impact projects in the zone of conflict.
- The Mission focused on enhancing practical cooperation between the sides, entailing also cooperative efforts on the part of our two Organizations. I will specifically address this important matter later in my presentation.

While in value in themselves, the above activities are ultimately aimed at initiating meaningful negotiations between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on a comprehensive political settlement on the basis of the paper on distribution of competencies between Tbilisi and Sukhumi prepared and fully supported by the Group of Friends and the Security Council.

However, as in the case with some other so called frozen conflicts, progress remained painfully slow. The Abkhaz side continuously refuses to enter into negotiations on the future political status of Abkhazia within Georgia. It also expressed reservation to participate in the Geneva recommended task forces, but stated its interest in the dialogue on security guarantees and its readiness to return to the UN-chaired Coordinating Council.

The Mission also faced increasingly complex political situation on both sides of the ceasefire line in last September around the 10 anniversary of the cessation of major hostilities in 1992-93, which the Abkhaz side celebrated as its "Independence day" and, especially, by the end of 2003 in light of the well-known events in Tbilisi and the pre-positioning of the political forces in Sukhumi in advance of the *de facto* presidential elections in October 2004 and the preceding local elections this March.

Maintaining stability became a key priority. Representation at the highest level, including by the Secretary-General and the visit of the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations to UNOMIG and the region reinforced the UN support for the peace process, whilst the UN impressed upon both sides to comply with the Moscow 1994 ceasefire agreement and prevent

serious damage to this process. Preservation of relative stability has been possible due to the sense of responsibility on both sides and the political maturity manifested by the new Georgian leadership, shaping the course of the events. In October 2003 and January 2004, UNOMIG also convened *ad hoc* high-level meetings of the sides on security matters with the participation of the CIS PKF to defuse occurring tension and help improve security mechanisms in the zone of conflict. It continued to monitor the compliance with the Moscow Agreement, which is also a dangerous task *per se* as exemplified by the shooting down of a UNOMIG helicopter in 2001 and six cases of kidnapping UNOMIG personnel, the last being in July 2003 in the Kodori Valley.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the Mission sustained its effort to maintain the peace process by giving priority to practical cooperation, keeping regular contact with the Group of Friends, including Russia in its capacity of facilitator in the conflict settlement. This practical cooperation and the emerging situation on the ground have also led to an enhanced cooperation between our Organizations. I would like to mention, in particular:

Police training. During the UNOMIG-led joint Georgian-Abkhaz visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo in October 2003 to study UN best practices in post-conflict situations, in particular related to policing and refugee return, the sides expressed particular interest in having their police officers trained in the Kosovo Police Service School, led by the OSCE. I would like to thank the OSCE Secretary General for the immediate positive reaction. Within the framework of its “equipment and training program”, UNOMIG civilian police component in Zugdidi district is selecting 15 Georgian police officers for such training. This program remains open to the Abkhaz side, which has temporarily delayed its participation. We consider this program instrumental for ensuring a safer environment on the basis of the introduction of international standards in policing and, thus, also facilitating the return process.

Human rights. We have established efficient cooperation under the United Nations Human Rights Office in Sukhumi, which is carrying out projects in Abkhazia, Georgia, some of which are financed by the OSCE. The human rights situation remains precarious and the opening of a Gali branch of the Human Rights Office remains a salient matter of implementation of the outstanding recommendations of the 2001 Joint Assessment Mission, which was conducted with the participation of the OSCE, as well as the recommendations of the late 2002 Security Assessment Mission to the Gali district. Another outstanding recommendation relates to the burning issue of language of instruction in the Gali district. Along with its efforts for overcoming this issue the Mission has facilitated an experts’ visit from the office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in January 2004 and is ready to further cooperate with the OSCE and other relevant organizations. These challenges necessitate further coordinated effort of both organizations.

The Mission will continue to facilitate OSCE visits to Abkhazia, Georgia.

I also deem it appropriate to provide greater detail on UNOMIG efforts, aimed at contributing to security through the economic rehabilitation of the Gali district and the adjoining conflict-affected areas of the Ochamchira and Tkvarcheli districts. The above mentioned UNDP-led mission carried out in December 2003, at the invitation of the Mission and in line with the recommendations of the 2003 Security Assessment Mission, aimed at assessing the feasibility of a sustainable recovery process for the local population and potential returnees and to identify further actions to improve overall security conditions and ensure sustainable return. I expect that

the upcoming report of the Mission will give food for thought for broadening the international cooperative efforts

In sum, UNOMIG stands ready to contribute to the meaningful cooperation between our Organizations. In this vein, I would like to express my appreciation to the 2003 Dutch OSCE Chairmanship for the excellent cooperation during its tenure of office and express my sincere hope that this will continue under the current Bulgarian OSCE Chairmanship.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.