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EMBASSY OF GEORGIA TO THE REPUBLICS OF AUSTRIA AND HUNGARY
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 Victor Dolidze at the 709th Permanent Council
Vienna, 17 April, 2008*

Mr. Chairman,

Dear Colleagues,

Today, I would like to draw your attention to extremely alarming situation around Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Georgia and particularly recent steps that the Russian Federation has undertaken towards annexation of Georgian regions.

On April 16, 2008 the President of the Russian Federation instructed the Government to launch formal cooperation with the de-facto authorities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in economic, social, scientific-technical, informational, cultural and educational spheres, and to involve Russian regions in this process.

With this decree the list of the documents issued to the physical persons by the de-facto authorities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and recognized by the Russian Federation is being established; personality of legal entities, registered in accordance with the legislation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, is being recognized; the federal organs of the executive authority are entrusted to implement the cooperation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia within the framework of providing legal assistance in civil, family and criminal matters. At the same time territorial organs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, will be able to perform certain consular functions for the protection of interests of persons, permanently residing in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

We are witnessing a culmination of “creeping annexation” from the side of the Russian Federation, which is done in a blatant and daring manner. This process can not continue any further and we are at the brink of, and I am fully serious, when I say this, unexpected and dangerous unfolding of events.

As you may already remember this action was preceded by a series of provocations from the Russian Federation, but in no way comparable with this one in baldness and potential danger it might cause.

On 6 March 2008, the Russian Federation unilaterally withdrew from the sanctions regime aimed at preventing the increase of armament and military forces in Abkhazia. We have already informed the PC on this matter, but I want to reiterate once again that this action creates a serious danger of having a territory in the OSCE area, where no regime of arms control exists. And we know where the uncontrolled armament of a region can lead

to.

On March 13, the Russian State Duma issued a statement, which directly supports the separatism, hence infringes the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia. On April 3, 2008 the President of Russia, through an official letter, promised the separatist regimes “not declarative, but essential assistance”. In this letter President Putin promises *de facto* authorities essential assistance under the pretext of defending rights of the Russian citizens currently residing in the conflict zones of Georgia.

We would also like to inform you that, last week, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation appealed to the Ministry of Justice of Georgia and expressed intention to begin an official co-operation with (quote)“the government of Abkhazia”(unquote) regarding the transfer of the citizens of Russia convicted on the territory of Abkhazia. This action is also considered by Georgian side as an open attempt to infringe the sovereignty of Georgia.

These are only few examples of the steps taken by the Russian side in the last period. On every occasion and from all levels of the Russian establishment we hear intimidation and threats against Georgia and its sovereignty. Let me remind you the statement made by Gen. Yuri Baluevsky, the chief of staff of the Russian armed forces, who openly declared that Russia would protect its interests through military and “other measures” in case of Georgia’s and Ukraine’s integration into NATO. As you all remember decision that Georgia and Ukraine will eventually join North Atlantic Alliance was taken 2 weeks ago, by 26 countries, all represented here today. We would very much like to know what does protection of Russia’s interests through “military and other measures” imply...

The timing of the above mentioned actions by the Russian Federation is the subject of our special concern as it followed shortly after the peace proposals by the President of Georgia aimed at timely conflict resolution and guaranteeing protection of political, economic, social and cultural rights of Abkhazia. This gives us a serious ground to perceive the actions by the Russian side to be aimed at deliberate disruption of any Georgian steps towards peaceful conflict resolution.

There can be no better evidence of Georgia’s commitment to peace, then the proposals to facilitate the resolution of conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, made by the President of Georgia on March 28, 2008.

These generous proposals envisage imminent and steady economic progress for Abkhazians, through the creation of the joint free economic zone in Gali and Ochamchire districts, linking them with the free economic zone of Poti; these proposals envisage guaranteed Abkhaz representation in Georgia’s central executive and legislative authorities, creation of a constitutionally guaranteed position of vice-president of Georgia for Abkhazians, and most importantly granting Abkhazians a right to veto all decisions which concern Abkhazia’s status and rights. We are ready to have international guarantors involved in this process, including the Russian Federation.

This is our understanding of wide federalism and “unlimited autonomy”, which, in our mind will create all the necessary preconditions for developing Abkhazia’s culture, language and national identity.

Regarding Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, you are all aware of the new proposal which was presented here at the Permanent Council. This proposal, which aims at engaging in the dialogue over the political status of Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia in the 2+2+2 framework, is a logical adjustment of already existing formats of negotiation to the new

realities. At the same time, I want to stress again that we are ready to use all the negotiating fora which exist today, as long as they are yielding positive results for the population on the ground. Georgian side has already expressed readiness to meet with the Tskhinvali *de facto* authorities and it is unfortunate that no serious reciprocal steps were observed in this regard.

Just a few days ago, on April 12, 2008 President of Georgia put forward additional set of proposals, which emphasize the importance of carrying out a package of confidence building measures which was agreed with the EU. Also, respective ministries were instructed to draft concrete proposals building on the initiatives of the President and to engage in direct negotiations with Abkhazia.

With regard to Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia, it was stressed by the President, and I want to communicate this message to you, that we are still focused on the implementation of the Peace Plan developed by the Georgian side and approved by the OSCE Ministerial in Ljubljana.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Economic Development of Georgia was tasked to develop a plan of action and to allocate funds for guaranteed purchase of agricultural goods from Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Georgia. We have already made a decision to provide ten students from Tskhinvali with scholarships to study abroad under the aegis of the Program of the President of Georgia. Summer vacation programme for schoolchildren will also be enhanced in this year.

On the President's instruction, inter-agency working groups on legal, economic and political issues were set up involving the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Economic Development and Justice and the Offices of State Minister for Reintegration and the National Security Council. The aim of these groups is to process thoroughly the new peace initiatives, develop a plan for their implementation, which will be presented to you in the nearest future, enter into a direct dialogue with the Abkhaz side and Tskhinvali *de facto* authorities and involve the international community in this process.

It was underlined by the President and I want to stress it here that the success of our peace initiatives is conditional on a more active involvement of the international community, in particular the Russian Federation, in the ongoing processes.

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished colleagues,

There can be no doubt that the recent decree of the President of Russian Federation and a cascade of events which preceded this decree are in complete violation of all existing norms of international law and are directed at the legitimization of *de facto* annexation of the territory of the sovereign state. These facts cannot be considered otherwise than as the part of the comprehensive aggression policy of the Russian Federation. This is the policy that promotes full economic, legal and political integration of Georgian regions into the Russian space.

We are pleading to the international community, not to turn blind eye to the obvious and blatant annexation of our territories. We know that such development of events will be to no one's benefit. We plead to international community to act promptly against this action of the Russian Federation. Adequate response, in our view, would be public denouncement of the *de facto* annexation of the territory of the sovereign state and support of the peace initiatives of the President of Georgia.

Mr. Chairman,

Despite all aforementioned destructive actions from the Russian side we are confident that our new peace proposals open up a completely new vista for peaceful resolution of the conflicts, create a unique mechanism for the protection of rights of national minorities in Georgia and provide additional opportunities for the engagement of the international community in the conflict resolution process.

Just two days ago UN Security Council, including the Russian Federation, adopted its sequential resolution (N 1808) on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia once again reaffirming inviolability of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. We believe it is obvious that on the part of a permanent member of the UNSC the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia should be respected not only in word, but first and foremost in deed.

Mr. Chairman,

We firmly believe that, instead of absorbing the Georgian territories, it would be better for the Russian side to engage more actively in the process of safe and dignified return of IDPs/refugees – victims of ethnic cleansing, as provided by a number of UNSC resolutions. In this context, we would like remind that in the latest resolution the sides in conflict are called upon to commit themselves to fulfill within a reliable timeframe the conditions necessary for the safe, dignified and swift return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman we urge OSCE and its participant states, United Nations, UN Secretary General's Group of Friends, and other states concerned to give their support to the Georgian side's peace proposals, engage in the implementation process of the above-mentioned initiatives and hence, give a fresh positive impetus to peaceful resolution of the conflicts on the territory of Georgia.

Mr. Chairman,

Last, but not the least, I would like to inform you that in the nearest days we will use all the possible formats within OSCE to get back to this issue with full seriousness.