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AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE MEETING OF
THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

4 June 2009

Madam Chairperson,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The main purpose of my statement here today is to draw attention to our justified concerns at the real situation that is at this moment emerging in relations between Georgia and South Ossetia and Georgia and Abkhazia, and to share those concerns with you. I shall also try to convince you that an OSCE presence in South Ossetia and Georgia is not only useful but also essential.

As you know, the overall situation in the region remains explosive, providing no stability to enable the peoples of Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia to lead constructive lives. Why is that?

Let me begin with a brief excursion into history. In the early hours of 8 August, the first day of the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, the President of Georgia took the irresponsible and criminal decision to attack the peaceful city of Tskhinval using the entire amassed firepower of his special forces, thereby undoing 17 years of difficult international negotiations, but negotiations relying on politics rather than force, as well as the fairly successful endeavours by the Joint Control Commission, the efforts of the OSCE Mission and the extremely difficult work performed by the Russian, Ossetian and Georgian peacekeepers. Thousands of peacefully sleeping people of the most different nationalities, including Georgians, awoke to find themselves under fire from Georgian missiles and artillery. Shells and bombs were flying all around Tskhinval, with no discrimination of targets. Hundreds of inhabitants of the Republic of South Ossetia, Russian peacekeepers and journalists, in other words ordinary people, suffered as a result of the bloody actions of the Georgian leadership. There is no justification for this action, nor will there be. It is regrettable, I might add, that so far the OSCE Permanent Council has failed to provide an objective assessment of Georgia's barbaric actions against South Ossetia last August.

And this occurred despite the fact that the entire international community, including Russia, the United States of America and representatives of the OSCE Mission, had been repeatedly issuing severe warnings to Georgia that any use of force was categorically prohibited. It had been pointed out over and over again that the use of force would put an end

to the territorial integrity of Georgia, since this would leave no other way out for the people of South Ossetia and Abkhazia who had already suffered so much. It is precisely for that reason that 8 August will forever go down in Georgian history as a tragic date. The slogan "Georgia for the Georgians" had reached its logical conclusion.

In analysing the tragic events of last August I would ask you all a single question: What could the residents of South Ossetia imagine as a hypothetical alternative for finding a way out of their dramatic situation? Would anyone have dared to suggest to them that they again place themselves under the authority of the Saakashvili regime, begging for civil rights from the position of a humiliated nation? I would ask you to think about that question.

It is clear that the Russian leadership simply had no alternative but to stop to the aggressor. The protection of human life is both a legal and a moral duty of responsible States.

On 26 August 2008, Mr. Dmitry Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, signed decrees on the recognition by the Russian Federation of the independence of South Ossetia and the independence of Abkhazia, and on 17 September treaties on friendship, co-operation and mutual assistance with the republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This was done to ensure lasting guarantees of security for the people of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and to make it possible for the peaceful citizens to live and work under normal conditions. A start was made for the development and strengthening of international relations between Russia and South Ossetia and Russia and Abkhazia.

Today, it is important to understand the dialectics of this process. We are witnessing a gradual but undoubtedly positive development and strengthening of bilateral co-operation between Russia and the republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. An important step in this direction was the signing on 30 April 2009 by the presidents of our countries of agreements on the joint protection of State borders. This represents a most serious contribution towards stabilizing the situation in the border regions and preventing provocations. What is involved is the organization of the normal operation of a border regime in keeping with generally recognized international practice. I would stress that however much some people would like to portray the situation in opposite terms, the implementation of international agreements between Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia with respect to military co-operation and border protection is entirely in keeping with the norms of international law, including the relevant agreements reached by the Presidents of the Russian Federation and France on 12 August and 8 September 2008.

From time to time we hear remarks to the effect that Russia has allegedly failed to meticulously implement paragraph 5 of the Medvedev-Sarkozy agreements. This is clearly taken to mean the complete withdrawal of Russian forces from Georgian territory. However, one must not forget that, as far as Abkhazia is concerned, prior to the August events, if that is to be literally understood as the line where the Russian peacekeeping units were stationed before 8 August, they were along the entire left bank of the Inguri river, including a battalion in the village of Urta within the Zugdidi district of Georgia. With regard to South Ossetia, the scrupulous observance of that line would have led to the positioning of our military posts along the entire southern border of South Ossetia, including several posts on Georgian territory (notably in the village of Karaleti). I venture to say that under today's circumstances this would not be to the liking either of our international partners or of Tbilisi.

In principle we have no need for this. Now that the South Ossetian and Abkhaz borders have been brought under control by Russian border guards and following the end of the destabilizing NATO exercises in Vaziani, Russian contingents are being moved to prepared bases deeper within the territory of the sovereign republics.

I might also note here that the Russian military bases in South Ossetia and Abkhazia were set up at the invitation and with the agreement of the authorities of the host countries, and also on the basis of the relevant international agreements. The setting up of these bases is absolutely legitimate and enjoys the active support of the population of the republics. I might add that in just the same way United States military bases were recently established in Romania and Bulgaria.

Given Russia's systematic efforts to stabilize the situation on the Georgian-South Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhaz borders, the position taken by a number of our partners in the OSCE is a source of both surprise and bewilderment. Let me cite a few specific examples.

For a long time discussions have been under way in Vienna on the question of extending the activities of the OSCE monitors on the territory of Georgia and South Ossetia. What could be more simple, it would seem, than to agree on the practical terms for their work on both sides of the border, with due account taken of the views of the host parties, i.e., not only Tbilisi but also Tskhinval. This in fact was the idea behind the Russian draft OSCE Permanent Council decision calling for the establishment of two monitoring groups. However, our partners stubbornly insist that we are attempting in this way, as they see it, to solve issues of status. In that connection, the Greek draft decision on the OSCE Office in Tbilisi is based on what is in fact the unreal premise of the territorial integrity of Georgia. It is clear that the work of a monitoring mission on South Ossetian territory will not be possible without the agreement of Tskhinval. This is well known. This is what is written in the Charter for European Security. Where is the logic here? Either we want together to give a "green light" to the continuation of the OSCE monitors' work or we will continue to remain hostage to a deadlocked politicized situation from which there is no way out on the basis of this kind of logic.

I should like to point out that the non-recognition of South Ossetia's independence and its non-membership of the OSCE are no obstacle to field activities. There are in the history of our Organization precedents for the status-neutral operation of missions (for example, in Kosovo). There are also examples of work being carried out in countries that were not at the time members of the OSCE (for example, in Macedonia where a mission was opened in 1992 although the country has been an OSCE participating States only since 1994).

The announcement by the Greek Chairmanship of the OSCE regarding the suspension of consultations in Vienna on the future of the OSCE in Georgia and South Ossetia seems to us to be offensively categorical. We fail to completely understand here the ultimatum-like approach taken: the draft mandates, it is stated, will not be changed and can be adopted only if Russia "makes up its mind" to join the consensus. This line runs counter to the functions of the OSCE as a forum for flexible political dialogue on the basis of equal rights.

A few days ago, South Ossetia held its first parliamentary elections under the new conditions, elections that a number of OSCE participating States hastened to not recognize. Do you really think that the lives of those men and women who voted at those elections depend in any real sense on "acts of non-recognition" of this kind? Is this the right kind

signal for the outside world to be sending the population of this country, which suffered so much during the recent aggression? In any case, a position of this kind will not help to change for the better the image of the OSCE in the eyes of the South Ossetian population.

A further point. I have already mentioned the deployment of Russian border guards along the borders of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The benefits of this are clear. They include both the combating of drug trafficking, arms smuggling and organized crime as well as the overall strengthening of law and order and the orderly functioning of the border control regime. But in response we hear the same old tiresome comments about Russia's alleged intentions to annex South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our only aim is that clear and comprehensible arrangements should be put into place in the border regions.

We find deeply disturbing the Georgian leadership's plans to remilitarize the country, plans that in a number of Western countries have elicited a surprisingly positive response. Along with this, there is evidence of a desire to conceal military co-operation with Georgia, *inter alia* by masking it in the guise of "humanitarian assistance in overcoming the consequences of the conflict". We cannot regard this as anything other than political short-sightedness. Further rearming of the Georgian army, assistance in the restoration of military infrastructure and the training for special forces provided by several Western countries merely encourage the authorities in Tbilisi to continue their belligerent approach and their policy of threats and provocations against their neighbours and contribute to a rise in tension in the region. It is a pity that by no means everyone in the world understands the danger of supporting the reckless policy of the current Georgian leadership. Prolonged demonstrations by the Georgian opposition and deepening instability within Georgia's domestic political structures are causing serious systematic disruptions to the work of the current State machinery in Georgia.

As far as Russia is concerned, we cannot permit ourselves the political luxury of standing idly by in the face of what is happening. The question of stability in the Trans-Caucasus is also a question of our strategic security. We have no right to shirk our responsibility for preventing violence and injustice towards small nations.

This then is the dramatic situation, distinguished colleagues, in which we all find ourselves today. We have a responsible choice before of us. We can resort to contrived arguments in order to put an end to the international presences in South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Georgia, to force the OSCE Mission and United Nations observers out of those areas and to abandon the region to its fate under new reckless decisions envisaging the use of force.

There is fortunately a second option – to find healthy compromises that would make it possible to maintain the international observers, to stabilize the situation in the vicinity of the Georgian-South Ossetian border and to involve both sides in the development of serious dialogue based on mutual respect. As of today, this is the only possible way of restoring normal relations between Georgia and South Ossetia. These are the objectives of the amendments proposed by the Russian Government to the Greek draft decisions before the OSCE Permanent Council.

What in our view constitutes our shared task with the international community? The answer is simple – to preserve the international presences in Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia and to work together to help these States restore normal political dialogue in the

new politico-legal conditions in the region in the interests of the constructive advancement of their peoples. Are we to believe that someone will once again give thought to the possibility of using force to contest the right of South Ossetia to determine for itself its own destiny? Any efforts to exert staggered pressure on Russia over a period of many years to force it to change its decisions on the recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia are likewise doomed to failure. Were that to happen, we would simply be condemning ourselves to a protracted period of unconstructive confrontation from which ultimately all the peoples of the Trans-Caucasus would suffer.

Russia believes that ensuring lasting stability and security in so sensitive a region is impossible without the involvement of the international community. In this context, we regard as useful the Geneva discussion forum established on the basis of the Medvedev-Sarkozy agreements, and we view it as an effective auxiliary instrument for the adoption of decisions within the United Nations and the OSCE.

The five rounds of discussions that have been held since October 2008 have shown that, in spite of the significant differences in the positions of the participants, this forum may prove useful. At a time of continuing tension in the areas adjacent to South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the Geneva discussions provide an opportunity for reducing the level of confrontation through the exchange of information and the joint discussion of confidence-and security-building measures that are acceptable to all parties. I would note that a key to the viability of the Geneva discussions is the direct involvement in them of representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In May, the Russian delegation presented in Geneva a set of principles for the preparation of draft agreements on the non-use of force between Georgia and Abkhazia and Georgia and South Ossetia, which would be of legally binding nature. I firmly believe that the inclusion of the relevant paragraphs on the need to conclude agreements on the non-use of force in OSCE decisions and United Nations Security Council resolutions would also be useful.

The proposals on the joint incident prevention and response mechanisms agreed during the February round of discussions were the first practical documents produced with the involvement of Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia since the events of last August. On 23 April 2009, the first meeting within the framework of this mechanism took place in Ergneti. We regard this as a success that should be built on. The second meeting was held in Dvani on 29 May. There are plans to arrange for the next exchange of views on 11 June. Evidently, all the participants agree that it is necessary to provide for the regular functioning of these mechanisms. This is the example that must be followed.

If we genuinely want stability in the region and the introduction of a normal language of communication (which is the only possible way for Georgia to restore good neighbourly relations with the peoples that live close to it), we need to leave the OSCE observers in South Ossetia and Georgia, after finding acceptable compromises. It is time for the Georgian political élite to moderate their geopolitical ambitions and to begin the gradual process of normalizing relations with their neighbours. Ultimately, this will give Tbilisi the chance to assume its rightful place in regional politics.

We are all faced with the choice of the continuation of political confrontation with the illusory goal of the forceful return of lost peoples and territories or the sensible search for

solutions that are acceptable to all and that strengthen rather than undermine stability and confidence. More than ever we need responsibility and realism if we are to make the right choice.

Thank you for your attention.