

Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Permanent Council No. 592
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EU Statement on Georgia

1. The EU welcomes the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, H. E. Mr. Gela Bezhuashvili, to the Permanent Council. The EU appreciates this opportunity to exchange views on the situation in Georgia again, after Prime Minister Noghaideli introduced the Peace Plan of the President of Georgia in the Permanent Council of 27 October 2005. The EU would like to use this occasion to refer to the close co-operation between the EU and the Georgian government in numerous areas.

2. At the Ministerial Council in Ljubljana, on 6 December 2005, all participating States to the OSCE expressed their firm commitment to support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. Furthermore the participating States welcomed the steps taken by the Georgian side to address the peaceful resolution of the conflict and expressed the belief that the recent proposals, in particular the Peace Plan built upon the initiatives of the President of Georgia presented at the 59th United Nations General Assembly, will serve as a basis for the peaceful settlement of the conflict. Subsequently, the South Ossetian side has put forward proposals on next steps for conflict resolution.

3. It was expected that these developments would open up the welcome possibility of intensive negotiations. The EU firmly believes that the momentum should not be lost. However, recent incidents seem to have been detrimental to the earlier positive developments. Last week, a minor traffic incident in the zone of conflict escalated into a dangerous stand-off between the Joint Peacekeeping Force and Georgian servicemen. Most of the latter were introduced to the scene of this incident in clear violation of existing agreements, including the basic 1992 Sochi agreement.

4. In the end, armed confrontation in the zone of conflict was prevented. The EU encourages all parties involved to continue the political dialogue, despite all difficulties encountered and to refrain from statements or actions that may undermine the restoration of trust between all sides. The EU believes that all parties should now move forward together. The opportunities are there and should be used. The EU welcomes the proposal for a JCC meeting in Vienna.

5. In order to defuse tension in the zone of conflict, full implementation of all existing demilitarisation agreements remains of extreme urgency, as was also underlined at the Ministerial Council in Ljubljana. Demilitarisation of the zone of conflict appears as a first priority in the peace proposals by both sides. Agreements on demilitarisation were reached in the JCC in the past. Therefore, there can be no excuse for any further delay in this process. The EU urges both sides to complete demilitarisation in the shortest possible timeframe and reiterates its support for enhancing the OSCE military observation in South-Ossetia in order to reinforce confidence.

6. The EU welcomes the consensus between the sides on the importance of economic rehabilitation of the region, as indeed economic rehabilitation can help to restore mutual trust and create more favourable conditions for a constructive political dialogue. The EU recalls its contribution of 2.5 million euros which it has made available for such projects, as well as the support it is providing for the ongoing Economic Needs Assessment. The EU is now awaiting the results of this assessment, based on which it will consider, hopefully with other important partners, further assistance in support of the peaceful settlement of the conflict in South-Ossetia.

7. More generally, the EU reiterates its support for the ongoing democratic reforms in Georgia. The EU believes that relevant efforts could be further strengthened in some areas, including in the criminal justice system and the Georgian border guard reform.

8. In conclusion, Mr Chairman, the EU will continue to support peaceful settlement of the South Ossetian conflict, it also strongly reaffirms its support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. The EU encourages all steps that would re-establish mutual trust and welcomes the proposal of the JCC meeting in Vienna. The EU furthermore reiterates its readiness to support further political, economic and administrative reforms in Georgia.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, the EFTA country Iceland, a member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

*Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process