



Chairmanship: Finland

556th PLENARY MEETING OF THE FORUM

1. Date: Wednesday, 17 September 2008

Opened: 10 a.m.
Closed: 12.50 p.m.

2. Chairperson: Mr. M. Kangaste

3. Subjects discussed — Statements — Decisions/documents adopted:

Agenda item 1: GENERAL STATEMENTS

None

Agenda item 2: SECURITY DIALOGUE

(a) *Presentation by the Director of the Department of Security Co-operation, Brigadier General Ulrich Heider, on politico-military activities carried out by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina*: Chairperson, Brigadier General U. Heider (FSC.FR/3/08 OSCE+), United States of America, Germany, Austria, Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina

(b) *Presentation by the Russian Federation on events in and around Tskhinvali from 7 to 12 August 2008*: Russian Federation (Annex 1), France-European Union (Annex 2), Georgia (Annex 3), Chairperson, United States of America

Agenda item 3: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Organizational matters: Chairperson

4. Next meeting:

Wednesday, 24 September 2008, at 10 a.m., in the Neuer Saal



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Forum for Security Co-operation**

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Annex 1

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

556th Plenary Meeting
FSC Journal No. 562, Agenda item 2(b)

STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished colleagues,

Today, the Russian delegation is delivering a presentation to the OSCE Forum on the events that occurred in and around Tskhinvali during the period from 7 to 12 August. Unfortunately, it was impossible to do this earlier owing to the summer break. However, it is by no means too late to share this information even now, all the more since the consequences of Georgia's criminal aggression against South Ossetia will, in all likelihood, continue to be felt one way or another in international relations for quite some time to come. There is also another reason. As it happens, yesterday and today marked the passage of 40 days since 7 and 8 August, when in accordance with an ancient Christian tradition it is customary to remember the dead.

As President Medvedev put it, for Russia 8 August 2008 is almost like 11 September 2001 for the United States of America. On that day, Russian society experienced a genuine shock with the news of the treacherous attack and huge loss of life among a peaceful population, including Russian citizens, not to mention peacekeepers. On that day, in the words of Dmitry Medvedev, we once and for all lost any illusions we may still have had as to the kind of world we are living in and how effective the present-day system of international security actually is.

All humanity drew many useful lessons from the events of 11 September in the United States. We should be pleased if appropriate lessons could also be drawn from the events that began on the night of 8 August this year.

The purpose of today's presentation is to inform our colleagues of the Russian view of the events of 7 to 12 August, filling in as far as possible the obvious gaps in the information that has been circulated. It goes without saying that we are not indifferent to the views of our partners. We should like it if their judgements and assessments were to be based on a more complete picture of what happened and not merely on the information that is being manipulated by the Georgian side and also by those in the media and in politics known to be biased.

First of all, I must mention that although the events that took place on the night of 7 to 8 August did in fact shock Russia, they did not come as a complete surprise to us. The entire policy pursued up to that point by the Georgian Government regarding South Ossetia had led us to conclude that Tbilisi had adopted a course envisaging a solution based on force. I might recall that the first president of Georgia following its independence, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, even before taking office, proclaimed in 1989 the slogan “Georgia for the Georgians, out with the Ossetians”. This marked the start of a conflict during which, over the period from 1989 to 1992 alone, according to the South Ossetian side, more than 3,000 persons were killed, more than 40,000 were forced to resettle in Russia, and dozens of Ossetian villages were burnt to the ground. By mid-June 1992, there was a real threat of the seizure of Tskhinvali and the annihilation of a considerable part of its population. It was only the agreement concluded on 24 June 1992 in Sochi on the principles for the resolution of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict and the deployment of joint peacekeeping forces that made it possible to prevent this from happening.

During the period from June to August 2004, shortly after Mikheil Saakashvili took office, the Georgian side made yet another attempt to solve the problem by military means. That attempt was thwarted, but on the basis of all the evidence the Georgian authorities made a final choice in favour of a scenario involving the use of force. In Tbilisi they began drawing up plans for military action. There began a relentless militarization of Georgia, in which, I regret to say, a number of OSCE participating States played a role as arms suppliers. This subject deserves a discussion in its own right, and we intend to return to it at one of the next meetings.

Today, the Georgian side is actively pushing the view that the actions of its army on the night of 7 to 8 August were practically a spontaneous response to provocations by the South Ossetian side. This version will not stand up to criticism. In its “factual documentation”, which has been circulated within the OSCE, the Georgian side is offering a selective presentation of only some of the facts, while carefully avoiding any mention of other facts that attest to the careful preparations by Georgia for the war. The truth is that as early as July shock troops had begun to be secretly moved up to the conflict zone. Over-flights had been conducted over South Ossetian territory using reconnaissance drones. At the same time, Georgian units were attempting to occupy strategic heights in the conflict zone and were establishing new checkpoints equipped with all the latest military engineering devices. There were periodic exchanges of fire, which, like an avalanche, led to a heightened state of armed confrontation. Because of their limited number (only 500 men), the Russian peacekeepers were physically unable to put a prompt end to all these excesses.

During the night of 3 August, an artillery column consisting of a division of D-30 artillery pieces and two mortar batteries made its way from the military base at Gori towards Tskhinvali. Throughout the day information was received to the effect that the Georgian side was systematically increasing the concentration of its troops and equipment in the conflict zone.

On the night of 5 to 6 August 2008, eight flights by jet aircraft heading from the south (Gori) to the north (the village of Dzhava) were observed over the conflict zone. On 6 August, Georgia continued its concealed concentration of artillery systems and Grad

multiple rocket launchers in the immediate vicinity of the borders of South Ossetia. Army trucks carrying soldiers, armoured infantry fighting vehicles, multiple rocket launchers and artillery began to move out of Kutaisi towards Gori. As a result, by the time of the large-scale military operation against Tskhinvali Georgia had deployed an invasion force numbering up to 12,000 servicemen. All told, three infantry brigades, an artillery brigade, a detached tank battalion and special forces units of the Georgian Ministry of Defence and Ministry of the Interior were operating in the Tskhinvali area. There is, therefore, no way that one can speak of “spontaneity”. What we are dealing with is an action that had been prepared in advance and carefully planned.

It is revealing that at 2.45 p.m. on 7 August, a few hours before the invasion, all of Georgia’s military representatives left the compound of the Joint Peacekeeping Headquarters, referring to an order received from their command. This fact has been documented in the report submitted by the OSCE observer group. To all appearances, the recall of the Georgian military personnel is a clear indication that by noon of 7 August the decision to proceed immediately with an operation involving the use of force had already been taken.

Nevertheless, at 7.40 p.m. on 7 August, Mikheil Saakashvili, appearing on all channels of Georgian television, stated in particular that he had given the order not to return fire in the conflict zone. The people in Tskhinvali went to bed without fear only to be awakened three hours later by the sounds of artillery fire.

The full-scale aggression against South Ossetia began at 10.35 p.m. on 8 August, that is, almost simultaneously with the opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing, when, it would have seemed, the guns ought to be quiet. The thinking, obviously, was that the start of the Olympics would divert the attention of the international community from the events in the Caucasus. This thinking was partially borne out. Neither the United Nations Security Council nor the OSCE Permanent Council reacted as they should have to the Georgian aggression.

Simultaneously with the commencement of military activities, Mamuka Kurashvili, the commander of peacekeeping operations of the joint staff of the Georgian Ministry of Defence, stated that the Georgian side had taken the decision to restore constitutional order in the conflict zone. As we see, there was at that moment no talk of any external factors. It was only later that the Georgian side put out the version that its military action had been taken in response to the alleged introduction of 150 units of Russian armour into the territory of South Ossetia. This is not in accord either with the real state of affairs or with the statements of the Georgian leadership itself. I might recall that by noon on 8 August, according to reports by the authorities in Tbilisi, the Georgian army was in control of the entire territory of South Ossetia with the exception of the village of Dzhava and the territory around the Roki tunnel.

As a result of massive artillery fire, including from 203 mm guns, multiple rocket launchers using cluster ammunition, mortars and small arms, the Ossetian village of Khetagurovo was for all practical purposes completely destroyed. Tskhinvali was subjected to the most intensive shelling. The Parliament building burnt down, the government building complex and the university were destroyed, multi-storey residential houses and other structures in the centre of the city were destroyed by fire, considerable damage was inflicted on the municipal clinical hospital, schools, kindergartens, and a large part of the old town,

including the historically important so-called “Jewish quarter”, were practically razed to the ground.

In the light of these facts, the extremely ominous and revealing name given to the Georgian operation against South Ossetia — “Clean Field” — becomes understandable. On the basis of all the evidence, the Georgian troops did indeed intend to leave behind them a clean field by launching untargeted strikes over large areas and without distinguishing between civilian structures and military facilities.

Today, the Georgian propaganda machine is attempting to create the impression that Georgian servicemen during the operation allegedly observed the highest possible standards with respect to human rights and refrained from harming the civilian population. In support of this assertion, reference is made to alleged or genuine assessments by non-governmental organizations, particularly Human Rights Watch. This is one more flagrant and cynical lie. Permit me to show some pictures that a certain good Georgian warrior, not without satisfaction, took using the camera on his mobile telephone. You can see how Georgian armour, advancing along one of the streets of Tskhinvali, is using large-calibre machine guns to fire indiscriminately at civilian homes. I can assure my colleagues that this is not an isolated episode. There were very many incidents of this kind. The investigatory agencies are currently engaged in collecting and analysing information on them.

Something should also be said in particular about the way the Russian peacekeepers were treated. The Georgian side is attempting to create the impression that no deliberate actions were taken against them and that, if there was indeed shelling, then it was only in response to the actions of the South Ossetian forces located nearby. This is also a blatant lie. In actual fact, the military compounds of the peacekeepers in Tskhinvali were on a list of priority targets for destruction. Fire was opened against the peacekeepers’ positions using multiple rocket launchers, artillery, and missile and bomb strikes by SU-25 fighter jets, and later on point-blank firing by tanks. At the very beginning of the military operations, direct hits destroyed two armoured infantry fighting vehicles and one armoured reconnaissance patrol vehicle. The Russian peacekeepers suffered their first dead and wounded. A number of observation posts were set ablaze. Initially, our military did not return fire. It was only after Georgian tanks began firing at point-blank range at locations where the headquarters of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces and Peacekeeping Battalion were quartered that the command was given to open fire. But the opposing forces were unequal. The peacekeepers were armed only with small arms and light weapons and grenade launchers. Virtually all the peacekeepers’ equipment, including their armoured infantry fighting vehicles and cars, were destroyed in their depots and storage facilities.

Directly involved from the north in the attacks on Tskhinvali were former Georgian peacekeeping units, who in effect stabbed the Russian peacekeepers in the back.

The investigations committee under the Office of the Public Prosecutor of Russia has before it a great deal of factual material attesting to the commission of atrocities by the Georgian army against the peacekeepers. For example, an examination of the body of one of these men revealed, in addition to a wound in the leg, a wound through the head. Powder burn traces indicate that the victim was shot in the head at close range. And this is not the only instance in which a wounded peacekeeper was later killed. A burnt body with bound

hands was found, on which only the insignia that had miraculously survived indicated that this had been a Russian soldier. Bodies crushed by heavy equipment were discovered, as well as a Russian serviceman who had been killed and whose mouth had been stuffed with stones. Accordingly, there is every reason to talk about premeditated aggressive actions against Russian servicemen with the aim of totally annihilating the small peacekeeping contingent.

On the morning of 8 August, the Georgian air force flew missile and bomb strikes over the entire territory of South Ossetia. As a result of the shelling of Tskhinvali, the city was brought to the brink of a humanitarian disaster. The civilian population attempted to escape from the surrounded city using the Zar road, the only bypass artery around the town, dubbed by the Ossetians "the road of life". However, all the transport vehicles were fired on at close range and were ambushed and burnt by Georgian special forces, who had occupied the nearby heights. By 10 August, the total number of refugees from South Ossetia exceeded 34,000.

The situation was further exacerbated by the fact that the shelling by Georgian artillery had resulted in the complete destruction of the medical centres and of facilities of vital importance to the population (settlements were without electricity or water and the only bakery in the area was destroyed).

Obviously, the Russian Federation could not stand by idly in the face of this massive loss of life among peaceful civilians, including many Russian citizens, and among the peacekeepers. A point that might be mentioned is that as long ago as the spring of this year we openly warned that in the event of a military adventure by Tbilisi we would take all the necessary measures to protect the victims of the aggression. This was stated directly and unambiguously. If you remember, the delegations of Georgia and the United States of America attempted at that time to interpret this statement as a threat. We had to explain to them the difference between a threat and a warning referring exclusively to the case of a military adventure by Georgia, an adventure that, as was already clear at that time, was becoming increasingly likely. Regrettably, no heed was paid to our warnings, in the same way that no heed was also paid to the demands for the immediate conclusion of a legally binding document on the non-use of force between the parties to the conflict, which could have prevented the war and saved persons on both sides from death and suffering.

At 3 p.m. on 8 August, the President of the Russian Federation, speaking on Russian television, delivered a statement on the situation in South Ossetia. In that statement Dmitry Medvedev stressed in particular that as President of the Russian Federation he was obliged, under the Constitution and the federal laws, to protect the life and dignity of Russian citizens, wherever they might be. In the circumstances that had arisen, the Russian Federation had been compelled to undertake an operation to force Georgia to peace and also to protect Russian citizens in South Ossetia. Russia's actions in the Caucasus can be viewed only as an unavoidable response to the violation by Georgia of international commitments and as the exercise of the right to individual and collective self-defence in accordance with article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations.

All told, on 8 August there were introduced into the territory of South Ossetia two battalion-strength tactical groups and artillery units of the 19th motorized infantry division of the 58th army, which during the second half of the day began to advance towards

Tskhinvali, fighting their way and encountering artillery and air strikes by the Georgian forces. Additional units of the 58th army and parachute troop units were brought into the conflict zone on 9 August.

We do not believe that there is any need at this point to describe in detail how the operation to force Georgia to accept peace proceeded. We shall mention only a few aspects. The operation was not a simple one, considering the scale of the tasks to be accomplished and the colossal numerical superiority of the Georgian forces at the initial stage. In parallel with the conduct of combat operations the Russian military had also to provide emergency aid to the population in dealing with the aftermath of the destruction and fires, in addition to helping with the evacuation of the wounded.

Our Western partners reproach Russia for an allegedly disproportionate use of force. The use of this term, as we understand it, means that our partners recognize the legitimacy of the use of force to repel Georgian aggression, but regard the scale of that force as excessive. But what are the criteria for “sufficiency” or “proportionality”? There are none. In the final analysis, everything can be seen through comparison. Let us compare the scale of the force used during the operation to compel Georgia to accept peace and during the NATO operation against the former Yugoslavia in 1999, when over a period of two-and-a-half months not only the military but also the socio-economic infrastructure of a sovereign country located hundreds of kilometres from Kosovo was destroyed by missiles and bombs. It would seem to us that a comparative analysis of this kind might provide no little food for thought and would inevitably lead to the conclusion that during the actions to force Georgia to peace Russia in fact displayed maximum restraint. It is our conviction that the scale of the force used was appropriate to the task of repelling an aggressor who had unleashed a bloody war and of preventing a return to aggressive actions. The operation also resulted in the suffering of innocent civilians, something that can only be regretted, but in the final analysis the responsibility for this lies with the Saakashvili regime, which decided to embark on a criminal military adventure.

It is appropriate in this context to suggest to those present that they compare the satellite pictures of Tskhinvali and of Gori. On the first of these one can clearly see that the Georgian army was waging war with a view to the total destruction of Tskhinvali and its population. And this is true even considering that the satellite images show only the total or serious damage of buildings, while extensive damage to walls is not evident on them. In the second picture you can see how the Russian strikes were targeted in a strictly selective way against military facilities in the city of Gori, which were being used by the Georgian side in its operation against South Ossetia. Incidentally, we have curiously heard no complaints against Georgia for having used multiple rocket launchers against a civilian population. It is interesting to ask why. Only one Pentagon official has expressed regret at the use by the Georgian army of the Grad missile launchers. Our partners obviously lack the necessary courage to condemn these actions.

At the present time it is difficult to establish the exact number of persons who died in August in South Ossetia. The Office of the Public Prosecutor of that republic has used a kind of questionnaire to gather information, on the basis of which it is possible to state that there were 1,694 victims of the aggression. More than 4,400 persons are recognized as having been

affected, more than 30,000 citizens of South Ossetia were made refugees, and 64 Russian servicemen (including 15 peacekeepers) died, with 341 wounded.

As of 10 September, 364 persons have been confirmed dead and identified by the investigatory bodies. During the week of 4 to 10 September alone, more than 50 persons were added to that list, which is continuing to grow.

To all of these persons must be added those who have suffered among the Georgian population, including refugees from the territory of South Ossetia, who fell victim to the consequences of the criminal actions taken by Tbilisi. Such is the price of this adventure, which it was possible to stop only thanks to the timely intervention of the Russian Federation. Had it not been for that intervention, the scale of the disaster would have been immeasurably larger.

On 12 August, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armed Forces, Dmitry Medvedev, ordered the cessation of the operation to force Georgia to accept peace, the objectives of which had been achieved.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairperson, we should like to return once again to the question of whether the large-scale aggression against South Ossetia was a “spontaneous” act. The head of the military section of the Russian delegation will now demonstrate the operational plan of action of the first brigade of the armed forces of Georgia to seize Tskhinvali. This is a secret document, but its security classification was given to it not by us, and we are taking the liberty of making public this material, which says a great deal. I might add that this plan was drawn up as long ago as 2006. It makes it clear that the Georgian military learned well their planning lessons received from their foreign instructors, but decided to use these skills to conduct a combat operation employing barbarous methods and for barbarous objectives. This particular plan was not put into effect during the August events, since, as we understand it, the first brigade was stationed at that time in Iraq. However, other Georgian units that did take part in the attack on Tskhinvali were guided by similar plans.

We think that once you have familiarized yourselves with this document, no one present here today will ask the question whether the aggression was spontaneous.



556th Plenary Meeting

FSC Journal No. 562, Agenda item 2(b)

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF FRANCE
(ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION)**

The European Union (EU) would like to draw the attention of the Forum for Security Co-operation to the conclusions of the General Affairs and External Relations Council of the European Union of 15 and 16 September 2008 on Georgia.

“1. The Council welcomes the agreement on implementing the plan of 12 August, which was recorded in Moscow and Tbilisi on 8 September as a result of mediation by the European Union. That agreement should lead initially to Russian forces being completely withdrawn from the zones adjacent to South Ossetia and Abkhazia to the lines held prior to the outbreak of hostilities, within 10 days of the deployment in those zones of the international mechanisms, including at least 200 observers from the European Union, which should take place by 1 October 2008 at the latest.

2. With reference to the Council conclusions of 1 September, the Council calls on all parties to fully implement this agreement, as well as the agreement of 12 August, and to do so in an effective manner and in good faith within the time limits that have been set, including the withdrawal of all Russian forces and the return of Georgia’s military forces to their bases.

3. The Council recalls that the European Union is ready to play a full role in the resolution of this crisis, including on the ground and in future international discussions and the preparations for them, and in supporting efforts towards a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict in Georgia. The Council recalls that a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict in Georgia must be based on full respect for the principles of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity recognized by international law, the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and United Nations Security Council resolutions. In this context, the Council deplores any action that runs contrary to a solution based on these principles.

4. The Council supports the idea of an independent international inquiry into the conflict in Georgia.

5. The Council has decided to appoint Mr. Pierre Morel as the Special Representative of the European Union for the crisis in Georgia.

6. In accordance with the conclusions of the Extraordinary European Council meeting on 1 September, the Council has decided to send an independent civilian observer mission to Georgia, under the European Security and Defence Policy, which will be deployed by 1 October in accordance with the arrangements set out in the agreement of 8 September, in close co-ordination with the OSCE and the United Nations and in addition to the international mechanisms of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and the OSCE. The Council notes with satisfaction the contributions announced by the Member States with a view to deploying at least 200 observers by 1 October.

7. The Council invites the Commission to actively and swiftly prepare for the donors' conference to help with the reconstruction and recovery of the Georgian economy and with the return of displaced persons, and to hold it next month in Brussels in the light of an overall assessment of needs. The Council has taken note of the Commission proposal to mobilize financial aid for Georgia, which could be in the order of EUR 500 million for the period from 2008 to 2010 and which must be consistent with the financial perspective. The Council also invites the Member States to prepare a significant contribution for the conference in terms of financial support. It welcomes the Commission's commitment regarding the strengthening of the EU-Georgia relationship, in particular by expediting the preparatory work on the facilitation of visas and on readmission, as well as on free trade."



556th Plenary Meeting
FSC Journal No. 562, Agenda item 2(b)

STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF GEORGIA

Mr. Chairperson,
Dear colleagues,

Since we have already listened to two presentations today, we have decided not to overload you with a third one. We prefer to make a quite comprehensive and detailed presentation of the events before, during and after the Russian aggression, and to leave responding to Russia's concerns until the next meeting of the Forum.

However, I am compelled to make several remarks.

Firstly, I would like to say a couple of words about Russia's intervention today. I'm sure that many hours were spent crafting those detailed and scrupulous arguments and I admire my Russian colleagues for their hard work preparing the lengthy presentation, especially because each and every argument was as usual unconvincing (хотели как лучше, а получилось как всегда* :P). It is not a novelty for all of us that, in most cases and especially with regard to Georgia, Russia presents the evidence and information as they wish they were.

Here at the FSC we have on numerous occasions (in August 2007, and in April and May of this year) seen that Russians can very easily lie to the international community to avoid criticism and to attain their goals. Listening to Russian presentation today, we witnessed an excellent example of the kind of "disgraceful propaganda" that Russia has employed extensively and persuasively with regard to Georgia through the years. I will return to this propaganda issue a little later. However, I wish to declare with full responsibility for my words that almost everything that the Russian side has stated today is simply not true.

Let me very briefly go through the chain of events preceding 7 August.

The title of Russia's presentation is quite significant: The events in Tskhinvali from 7 to 12 August. The Russian Federation will of course try to put out of your mind what was happening before that day, and of course it will try to forget what it did after the invasion.

* English translation: They wanted to do their best, but it turned out as it always does.

The key developments prior to the August 2008 hostilities in the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia, were determined by the Russian military and political escalation. The invasion of Georgia was the top of an iceberg, the conclusion of the Russian plan to dismember Georgia and put an end to Georgian statehood.

Therefore, dear colleagues, allow me to give you a non-exhaustive list of remarkable episodes in this connection. From 2004 onwards, Russia repeatedly rejected Georgian peace proposals, notably undermining implementation of the 2005 Ljubljana Peace Plan, which we all agreed on in Ljubljana. Further instances of Russian actions and activities include: gaining a stranglehold over separatist governments from 2005 onwards; building an illegal base near Tskhinvali (2006); the illegal lifting of the CIS arms/economic embargo in March 2008 before the Bucharest Summit; the establishment of legal links between Russia and the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia in April 2008 right after the Bucharest Summit; downing the Georgian aircraft in Georgian airspace in April 2008; increasing troop strength and introducing paratroopers and other illegal heavy weaponry and offensive forces into Abkhazia in May/June 2008, including railroad troops to prepare railroads for invasion; responding to Georgian peace proposals with provocations in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia; the attempt by separatists to assassinate the South Ossetian unionist leader (3 July 2008); Russia's defiant acknowledgement that it had violated Georgian airspace (10 July 2008); large-scale Russian military exercises undertaken near South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Georgia, in July 2008, without the forces being redeployed to their peacetime locations after the conclusion of manoeuvres on 2 August; the rejection by separatists, on Russian instructions, of the German-mediated peace plan (18 July 2008); the failure of the separatists to appear at the EU-organized peace talks from 22 to 24 July 2008; and the rejection of the peace talks proposed by the OSCE in late July 2008. I hope no one will question the claim that Russia instructed the separatists to distance themselves from the peace talks.

Mr. Chairperson,

As I said, that was a brief list of actions that, as we saw later, were a prelude to Russia's large-scale military aggression against Georgia, invasion and subsequent occupation of large parts of Georgia's territories both within and beyond the conflict regions.

Since 29 July, for the first time since the last major hostilities in early nineties, separatist militia have begun intensive and continuous shelling of ethnically mixed villages under Georgian control with large-calibre artillery (greater than 82 mm), that is to say, weapon-types prohibited by the existing agreements. The facts of the continuous bombings have been confirmed by numerous spot reports made by OSCE monitors, and also by a report by the commander of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces issued from 28 July to 7 August 2008. Shelling of this magnitude continued on a regular basis until 8 August, in advance of the Russian land invasion into Georgia.

The attempt to justify the Russian invasion of Georgia by claiming a need to "protect Russian citizens" residing in the Tskhinvali region is without foundation. The Georgian side had to reciprocate in response to heavy and indiscriminate bombing of Georgian villages by the separatist forces.

Moreover, the materials we have distributed to various international organizations and members of the international community provide irrefutable evidence that in the early morning of 7 August massed Russian forces, including heavy armoured vehicles (main battle tanks, etc.), entered Roki tunnel, and that they established control over the tunnel on the same day. This was even confirmed by Russian soldiers in interviews with the Russian media. (These interviews disappeared from the Russian websites, but thanks to Google it was possible to retrieve them.) This was the turning point. In violation of all its international obligations, Russia now started the invasion and subsequent annexation of the Georgian territories.

In the course of these events the Georgian side three times called for negotiations. On 5 and 7 August 2008, please pay attention to the dates, the State Minister of Georgia on Reintegration visited Tskhinvali, but separatist leaders refused the meeting. The Russian representative to the Joint Control Commission Mr. Popove refused to meet the Georgian minister on 7 August, claiming that he had a flat tyre! On 7 August President Saakashvili ordered an immediate unilateral ceasefire and once again called for negotiations. The ceasefire was confirmed by the relevant OSCE Mission spot report. On 8 August the Georgian troops were once again ordered to cease fire for three hours. In spite of the ceasefires, the Russian regular army streamed into South Ossetia, Georgia.

This action constitutes a violation of the fundamental principle of international law regarding the peaceful settlement of disputes. There is no doubt that the arbitrary introduction of significant additional military force after the ceasefire severely aggravated the situation and led to the large-scale military confrontation.

In violation of the same principle, the Russian armed forces and the separatists' illegal paramilitary groups continued to intrude into the territory of Georgia far beyond the zones of conflict and to occupy significant parts of Georgia's soil even after the Georgian army had ceased fire and retreated towards Tbilisi. In addition, the military actions in Abkhazia, Georgia, aggravated the situation beyond repair.

Mr. Chairperson,

With regard to the humanitarian situation on the ground, all the aforementioned actions were accompanied by a widespread pattern of abuse, pillage and destruction throughout South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Georgia, and especially in ethnic Georgian villages, many cases being confirmed in reports issued by international human rights organizations. The reports note that ethnic Georgian civilians in the region suffered serious human rights abuses, including deliberate attacks on the basis of their ethnicity, despite the end of large-scale hostilities. This is continuing even now.

Since the Russian President's recognition of the independence of the separatist regions, the ethnic cleansing of the Georgian population has become even more intense, thus providing yet another proof that the persecution of ethnic Georgians on the occupied territories is a deliberate policy aimed at achieving political goals rather a matter of isolated cases of violence. The spot report of 16 September contains numerous instances of harassment of ethnic Georgians.

In the weeks to come, here in the Forum, you may hear contradicting stories on the Russian-Georgian war. Unfortunately this is not new to this audience. But however the parties present their cases, I hope the key facts are clear: Russia sent its army across an internationally recognized boundary in an attempt to change by force the borders of a country with a democratically elected Government and, if possible, to overthrow that Government, and not to “save” Russian citizens, as it claimed. It is absolutely clear to the whole international community that the pretext under which Russia carried out the aggression, namely, that it was defending Russian “citizens” and “peacekeepers”, is devoid of any credibility. And it is regrettable and alarming that Russia’s arguments are very similar to those used in pre World War II situation in Europe.

The highest Russian authorities obviously thought that by employing the means used by its predecessor — the Soviet Union — in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, the Russian Federation could, in the best tradition of the “empire of evil”, flex its muscles and demonstrate to the whole democratic world who was the boss in the region and in Europe. But the world has changed: what worked in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will inevitably fail in the twenty-first. This is something we all, or almost all, clearly understand.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.