



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on OSCE Presence in Georgia

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 14, 2009

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

We commend the Chairmanship's intensive efforts over the last four months to ensure a continued OSCE presence in Georgia, which we and other delegations consider critical to efforts to restore stability in the region, promote the implementation of OSCE commitments, and contribute to greater European security. You and your staff have worked tirelessly to find a solution acceptable to all delegations, and we sincerely appreciate your remarkable dedication and extraordinary creativity.

The United States strongly supports the Chairmanship's May 8 draft decision. The proposed OSCE Office in Tbilisi could do important work in the human, economic, and political-military dimensions, and continue the OSCE's long-standing efforts to build confidence, encourage dialogue, promote respect for human rights, and improve security. OSCE monitors likewise could continue to play a key role in reducing tensions in the region and in furthering implementation of the August 12 and September 8 agreements through their observation of events on the ground, particularly if they are allowed free access to the South Ossetian region of Georgia.

We believe the Chairmanship's proposal, crafted through months of intense negotiations, artfully seeks to avoid the primary divisive issue, focusing instead on practical arrangements which would allow the OSCE to continue to support the jointly-agreed Geneva process and facilitate conflict resolution efforts. In our view, the proposal goes to great lengths to be neutral on the status of the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia – something we at first had a hard time accepting, given the priority we place on Georgia's territorial integrity.

Regrettably, the opposition of one participating State this week has brought us to an impasse. The Russian Federation rejected the Chairmanship's sound draft decision, preferring instead to submit extensive amendments that it knew in advance were entirely unacceptable to the great majority of OSCE participating States. This action followed a similar move at the end of last year, when Russia blocked consensus on the Finnish Chairmanship's constructive proposal for the renewal of the mandate of the OSCE Mission to Georgia, forcing it to cease many of its activities, and demanding a rapid move to close out operations, dismiss personnel, and sell off OSCE assets.

At the same time negotiations on an OSCE presence in Georgia were taking place, Russia established military bases in the breakaway regions and deployed its FSB border guards to the administrative boundary lines, claiming these boundaries are now international "borders." These actions are inconsistent with Russia's declared interest in seeing a continued OSCE presence in the region, and cast doubt on Russia's commitment to ensuring long-term peace and stability within the territory of a fellow OSCE participating State and neighbor. They also violate Russia's commitments in the August 12 agreement to withdraw Russian troops to pre-war levels and locations and to allow free and unhindered humanitarian access to the South Ossetian region of Georgia.

The United States sincerely regrets the Russian Federation's decision to block the Chairmanship's proposal. Despite our differences with Russia over the causes and consequences of last summer's conflict, we were and are prepared to work with Russia and other OSCE participating States in common efforts to stabilize the situation in Georgia. We sought genuine compromise, in the belief that a continued OSCE presence in Georgia would facilitate the international community's efforts to build confidence and resolve the protracted conflicts peacefully. We call one last time for the Russian Federation to reconsider its response to the Greek compromise proposal, in the spirit of cooperation, to avoid the deterioration of a critical security architecture we have worked so hard over the years to build.

Despite this week's lamentable development, the United States remains committed to finding a peaceful resolution to the conflicts in Georgia, and will continue to support Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.