

**Statement by Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia,
H. E. Eka Tkeshelashvili,
At the Sixteenth Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council,
Helsinki 4 and 5 December 2008**

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Colleagues,

Allow me to express my appreciation to the Finnish Government for the warm welcome, and to commend the hard work and leadership of Minister Stubb and his team throughout their Chairmanship.

It is my distinct honor to address this audience today, especially in the city of Helsinki, which is of such historical importance for the OSCE. While Georgia has aligned with the statement of the EU, I would like to share with you my thoughts first on behalf of GUAM presidency and then in the national capacity.

We are proud that GUAM, starting as a quadripartite cooperation in 1996 during the first CFE Review Conference in Vienna and establishing itself as a consultative forum in Strasbourg in 1997, since 2006 became a full-pledged international regional organization – the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM. Nowadays, GUAM transformed itself into a result-oriented organization with well-structured institutions, high degree of political interaction and solidarity of the Member States.

The main goal of GUAM is to establish a common space of integration and security in the GUAM area, thus promoting the development of partnership in the Black Sea – Caspian region based on the European standards and practices, and first of all on the “four freedoms”, - movement of goods, capital, services and people. GUAM has already contributed to this goal by establishing a Free Trade Area and actively implementing GUAM projects on Virtual Law Enforcement Centre, Interstate Information Management System and Trade and Transportation Facility.

The last GUAM Summit in Batumi on 1 July 2008, held under the motto “GUAM –Integrating Europe’s East”, demonstrated wide international acknowledgement of GUAM as well as the adherence of its Member States to the European norms and values and their aspirations towards the European integration. The Summit

underlined also the importance of the GUAM transit potential as a unique opportunity in developing transport, energy and communication links between Europe and Asia.

The Georgian Presidency gives special attention to use this potential as much as possible, developing the GUAM Transport Corridor, intensifying sector cooperation, elaborating new projects and making active cooperation between GUAM and the EU, thus contributing to the European security and stability.

GUAM is consistent in drawing the OSCE attention to the necessity of earliest resolution of protracted conflicts in the GUAM area on the basis of the norms and principles of the international law, including the territorial integrity, sovereignty and inviolability of internationally recognized borders as well as the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the OSCE decisions. GUAM common position is based on the Joint Declaration of the Heads of State on conflict settlement adopted by the GUAM Summit in Kyiv on 23 May 2006. This Declaration stresses, especially, *I quote*: “The territory of the state may not be a subject of acquisition or military occupation, resulting from the threat or use of force in breach of the relevant norms of international law. No territorial acquisitions and the resulting self-declared entities may be recognized as legal under any circumstances whatsoever”, *end of the quote*.

At the end of my presentation on behalf of the GUAM Presidency, let me invite those, who are interested in GUAM activities, to look through the written contribution of the GUAM Secretary General.

Mr. Chairman,

As an institution, the OSCE has had to engage in many initiatives that improve both cooperation and security among the member states. I do not think that we, as a body of countries would have imagined that in the first decade of this new century, we would have to deal with the invasion and occupation of one member state by another.

But here we are. It happened. It happened to my country.

So, let me start by presenting some facts which are relevant to all of us:

In the course of 2008:

- Georgia was invaded in August by a neighboring country.
- Georgia has since been partially occupied by that invading force.
- In the months preceding the military action, that country had undertaken a detailed and well planned program that undermined previous international agreements concerning the territorial integrity of Georgia.
- Since August 12, a ceasefire has prevented any further outbreak of widespread – I repeat widespread - hostilities.
- The invading forces have not withdrawn to lines initially agreed.
- Monitors provided under international agreement do not have any, let alone systematic, access to the occupied areas of my country.
- In those occupied areas, the new occupation forces have engaged in a systematic consolidation of their control through military and economic means.
- Local militias, claiming alliance with the invading forces, have run amok in South Ossetia creating a new wave of internally displaced Georgians.
- In Abkhazia, some 30,000 Georgians are now isolated and subject to new policies designed to eliminate their ethnic identity.
- In the last week, the OSCE has also produced a report confirming the tragic abuses of human rights provoked by the invasion of my country.
- By failing to comply with its part in the ceasefire agreement, the invading forces are deliberately undermining the economy of Georgia.
- In the last few weeks, the Parliament of Georgia has undertaken an exhaustive enquiry into the causes and conduct of this conflict. In an unprecedented move, the President of Georgia submitted to five hours of testimony last week.

Every single one of these facts is of direct relevance to the very core of the mission and existence of OSCE.

With these facts in mind, we must now look to the future.

Mr. Chairman,

Today there is much talk about creating a new Euro-Atlantic security architecture. We believe that such discussions are somewhat premature, but if this idea is to be materialized, it will only be successful as long as it is underpinned by the principles on which OSCE rests. Such pursuit can only be successful if we respect the values of democracy, peace, respect for human rights, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, non-use of force and other principles that constitute the bedrocks of European security. The big question that we have in mind is what trust can be put in the new initiatives when the country initiating these talks bluntly disrespects the shared values and principles.

Mr. Chairman,

In these very difficult times, Georgia is guided by certain principles – principles that I believe most of us would share:

- We seek unity through consent.
- We seek economic well-being of all our citizens because that is the greatest incentive to harmony within a democratic society.
- We believe that the most effective way to prevent conflict is through an honest and sustained commitment to diplomacy by my country and in cooperation with all states that have an interest in preventing a breakdown of the international order.
- To achieve these ends, we must build trust by taking steps that restore confidence where it has been broken.

Mr. Chairman,

I emphasize these principles deliberately. To many people they may appear as platitudes. In our case, they are the difference between survival and failure, between wealth and poverty, between democracy and oppression.

Confidence has been shaken. Confidence in a united future; confidence in economic well-being; confidence in the international system.

The responsibility to restore confidence is partly in our hands as a country. It is also in the hands of an international system. Both – Georgia and the international community -have started to take steps in restoring confidence and we will have much more to do.

This conflict has reinvigorated our commitment to entrenching the institutions of democracy. We will not allow Georgian democracy – and truth - to be the first casualty of this war.

We have continued our work on reform of the judiciary. We want to reinforce the freedom available to the media. We want to ensure that minority rights are respected. We believe that elected leadership should be held accountable – not just at elections but during their tenure. Hence the significance of the investigation being carried out by the Parliament of Georgia. We seek assistance in those areas where we must develop our technical capacity to match that of any country in the European Union, for example.

We, also, cannot allow our economy to be the second casualty of this war. In this, the international community has a major role to play and it has already done so. We are profoundly grateful for the generous contributions pledged to Georgia at the donors conference. The Prime Minister has already created a Task Force with major institutions to ensure that accountability and transparency govern the use of these funds.

But we should be under no illusion. You will recall that two years ago, our products were subjected to sanctions by our northern neighbor. Now, we have their troops in our country and unwilling to withdraw. It is our assessment that the purpose is not to be found in diplomatic pettiness. Rather it is part of a continuing exercise to inhibit our economy.

At the same time, their security, we would all agree, is the precondition of confidence in a liberal economy. We should therefore be very careful in not defining security too narrowly.

This is why we must understand the magnitude of the task ahead of us.

Mr. Chairman,

We cannot make the principle of lasting peace another casualty of this conflict.

As you are aware, there are two parallel but related processes at work. The first is the mission to ensure compliance with the ceasefire led by the European Union. The second is the negotiating process underway in Geneva.

Both are related because you cannot have confidence in negotiations if there is not confidence in compliance on the ceasefire.

With regard to compliance on the ceasefire, we are very grateful for the prompt response of the European Union and the OSCE following the crisis. I believe that cooperation between the OSCE Mission to Georgia and EUMM on the one hand and the Georgian government, on the other, is efficient. We will do all we can to ensure that it works smoothly.

However, these missions still do not have access to the occupied parts of our country. There are continued incidents: to date at least nine Georgian policemen have been killed. It is essential that in the nearest future all international observers gain access to the occupied regions and that afterwards international police and peacekeeping missions are launched to make sure that the security and stability on the ground are sustainable.

Mr. Chairman,

We have numerous IDPs for whom there is no indication of a possibility of return in the immediate future. No one argues that the problems of the vast numbers of the IDPs and refugees, displaced as a result of armed conflict, must be addressed, *inter alia*, by this organization. The OSCE has the powers needed address this problem, and I hope that during the Chairmanship of Greece in the coming year, human security, including the problems of IDPs, will be at the top of the OSCE agenda.

Mr. Chairman,

In this regard I must also note the outstanding job that the Organization for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and High Commissioner on National Minorities, as well as other institutions of the OSCE

have done over the last year. ODIHR took part in the monitoring of two elections in my country and has provided extremely useful recommendations on how to improve our electoral system and democratic governance. Moreover, together with the High Commissioner on National Minorities, ODIHR was involved in drafting a report presented in Vienna last week about the situation in the Tskhinvali Region and Abkhazia. It was mortifying to read the report, which described in detail the horrors of the war and clear-cut cases of ethnic cleansing. We commend the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship for asking ODIHR and HCNM to assess the humanitarian needs of IDPs and refugees who fled the guns and crimes of those who have chosen ethnic cleansing as a means for achieving their policy goals. We hope this practice of joint assessments by ODIHR and HCNM will be used by the Greek Chairmanship to ensure regular assessment missions.

Mr. Chairman,

In Georgia today have a ceasefire that is fragile and we must move to some more solid arrangements.

We are ready to think boldly to achieve this objective.

But as we move down that path it is important that all be bold.

We must all develop a package of measures and steps that will allow us to restore confidence and then normality.

We must also establish clear terms under which multilateral initiatives on the ground work effectively. We cannot afford to return to *status quo ante* where some parties treated multilateral mechanisms as a camouflage for inaction and no progress. The cost of that behavior became tragically evident in August.

We should ensure that the mandates of international missions are clear, devoid of any ambiguity and of duplication. Above all, they must be able to negotiate real access to the occupied parts of Georgia. It is our firm belief that the OSCE should support and expand the current mandate of the OSCE Mission to Georgia, so that it is adequate to deal with the conflict resolution needs. Given the OSCE's active role in the Geneva talks, it is important to reinvigorate the Mission's role vis-à-vis Abkhazia, Georgia, and to strengthen its presence in this region too.

Mr. Chairman,

Developments in my country this year demonstrate that there is much reason for the OSCE to continue its work and to thrive. I wish I could tell you that the OSCE's mandate is obsolete. It is not.

The OSCE was actively involved in the conflict resolution process in Georgia. Many promising ideas for conflict settlement were born here. It was at the OSCE gatherings in Bucharest, Lisbon and Istanbul that the ethnic cleansing that occurred in Georgia in the 1990s was strongly denounced; it was at the OSCE Ministerial Council in Ljubljana where the peace plan proposed by the President of Georgia was endorsed. OSCE monitors provided objective information from the Tskhinvali Region in recent years, sometimes being the only source of truth and the only international presence on the ground. It was the OSCE that first stated that the outdated formats for negotiation had to be changed. Now we need to find ways how to continue this useful engagement for the good of everyone, including those people on the ground who need such international presence in the first place.

Mr. Chairman,

This involvement of the OSCE should be cross-dimensional. Involvement of the OSCE institutions representing second and third dimensions are just as important as having OSCE monitors on the ground. In this respect I must note the outstanding job that the Organization for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and High Commissioner on National Minorities have done over the last year. They drafted a report in Vienna last week about the situation in the Tskhinvali Region and Abkhazia. It was mortifying to read the report, which described in detail the horrors of the war and clear-cut cases of ethnic cleansing. We commend the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship for asking ODIHR and HCNM to assess the humanitarian needs of IDPs and refugees who fled the guns and crimes of those who have chosen ethnic cleansing as a means for achieving their policy goals. We hope this practice of joint assessments by ODIHR and HCNM will be used by the Greek Chairmanship to ensure regular assessment missions.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, I would like to confirm once again that Georgia remains committed to extensive reforms aimed at strengthening our democracy in line with European standards, with the goal of full integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions. This is an irreversible process, supported by a broad consensus among Georgian society, including the full spectrum of political actors.

Mr. Chairman,

Finally, allow me to extend my sincere wishes for every success to the incoming Greek Chairmanship in 2009, and to reiterate Georgia's unwavering support of its endeavors. Georgia is looking forward to cooperating closely on our common agenda in 2009.

I thank you for your attention.