



EMBASSY OF GEORGIA TO THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA  
PERMANENT MISSION OF GEORGIA TO THE OSCE AND OTHER  
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENNA

**S T A T E M E N T**

by the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the OSCE, Ambassador Paata  
Gaprindashvili

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Mr. Chairman,

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to begin by thanking all those delegations who have made their candid comments and have shown genuine interest on the matter of the "Special Report" aired by the independent TV Station "Imedi" on March 13, 2008. I would like to particularly express our gratitude to the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mrs. Dunja Mijatovic for a timely and adequate reaction.

As some of you already mentioned, the "Special Report" has caused anxiety amongst the Georgian public still living with the fresh memories of Russia's invasion of August 2008. There can be absolutely no defense of TV station's reckless and damaging act, which was in complete violation of journalistic standards and particularly the Georgian Code of Conduct of the Broadcasters. This act of "irresponsible journalism" as correctly pointed out by Mrs. Mijatovic, was especially regretful, since it used the footage of the high officials from our partner states.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The President of Georgia, Chairman of the Parliament, as well as the senior Government and Parliament officials condemned the decision by the Imedi TV to broadcast news of a simulated Russian attack on Georgia. This program was assessed as "meaningless" and "harmful for the society".

Furthermore, on March 15, the Georgian National Communications Commission adopted a decision instructing Imedi TV to make an on-air acknowledgement of the violation and to apologize for the simulation; the station has already done so. According to the preliminary information, the station also plans to apologize for using a footage of the foreign high officials in the "Special Report". To

prevent recurrence of such acts in the future Georgian National Communications Commission instructed all media companies to elaborate effective self-regulatory mechanisms to enforce the Code of Conduct, which undoubtedly should not be confused with commitments to safeguarding free expression.

Mr. Chairman,

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to assure everyone here that Georgia is focused on preventing unethical and manipulative behavior by the media, while at the same time maintaining our commitment to the freedom of speech and a pluralistic democratic society. Media freedom is unrestricted in Georgia and the legislation is based on the concept of self-regulation, example of which is the Code of Conduct of the Broadcasters.

Currently Georgian media offers a variety of all types of opinions without censorship, through press, radio, TV or internet. The current status of the media freedom in Georgia is an important achievement and represents the result of both, the active engagement of the civil society in line with the Governmental reforms and the International contribution, including the OSCE and its representative on Freedom of Media. As we are all well aware, unfortunately, deregulation can sometimes lead to the unexpected reports, which could be damaging and misleading; but this is the nature of a free speech, and there is not much the Government can do about it.

Dear Colleagues,

In order to further promote and create further guarantees for political pluralism, the Parliament of Georgia last month finalized plans for a C-Span/BBC Parliament type of channel that has support across Georgia's political spectrum and the operational framework of which was negotiated by the National Democratic Institute (NDI); the channel began broadcasting at the end of February.

Furthermore, in December 2009 the Parliament of Georgia further strengthened the independence of the Public broadcaster, by linking its budget to the GDP of the country. This approach was assessed by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Mr. Haraszti as innovative and was hailed as "an affirmation of the principle that television must be exempt from government influences".

Moreover, currently the Parliament of Georgia is considering further amendments to the legislation that will ensure that ownership of the media outlets is transparent and that the owners of the media companies are not registered in the offshore. In short, even though we still have a long way to go, we are motivated to pursue with the reforms, which will further strengthen the freedom of the media and improve the journalistic standards.

Dear Colleagues,

I have agreed with almost all assessments that have been made here today. The only assessment I disagree with is the statement that the TV report has caused, or can cause a "very concrete damage to the security and stability in the region". What actually deteriorates the situation on the ground, are further dangerous provocations by Russia, or its proxy regimes, which can be sparked almost by anything, as long as the current political will persists in Moscow. May I remind you that the situation in

Georgia, and the occupied regions of Georgia is already tense, and the situation is further exacerbated by the various acts and statements of the high Russian officials, including the head of the FSB and a Deputy Minister of Interior, preparing grounds for further provocations. These acts and statements openly challenge sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Georgia. Concerns about the security and stability sound especially cynical from the country, which is responsible for ethnic cleansing, forcefully redrawing the borders of the sovereign state and occupation of its territories, as well as the continuous denial of the access of humanitarian aid to the population in need. Believe me, these are the very acts that jeopardize the stability and security, and not the reports of the independent media, no matter how provocative and misinforming they are.

Mr. Chairman,

In our strong opinion, the OSCE should continue being assertive and strong on the compliance of the OSCE participant states with the high journalistic standards and freedom of media, as well as the problems related to the state control of media, killings and beatings of the journalists, poor progress in investigations of assaults on the journalists, as it has rightly done over the last months and years. However, it is also our strong view that the attention of the international community should continue to be focused - as it also is - on such real facts as Russia's occupation of Georgian territories, imminent threats stemming from this occupation, ethnic cleansing, non-fulfillment of the cease-fire agreement, continuous and recent threatening statements of the Russian officials, as well as the open actions by Russia directed towards overthrow of the democratically elected Georgian government and attempts to restore the so-called spheres of influence.

Dear colleagues,

In the end, allow me to remind you that despite the tremendously unprofessional, damaging and provocative nature of the Special Report, overwhelming majority of the citizens of Georgia, regardless of their political views, never doubted that Russia could actually invade the country. What contributed to the panic is that vast majority of the citizens of Georgia are sure, and they have legitimate reasons to be sure, that Russia is aiming at destroying Georgia's sovereignty and if given an opportunity, would do so by once again using the large-scale military invasion.

Thank you very much.