

Statement
of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia
H.E. Mr. Gela Bezhushvili
At the OSCE Permanent Council Meeting
(February 9th 2006, Vienna)

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentleman,

I am grateful to the OSCE Chairmanship for inviting me to inform the Permanent Council on the urgent issues facing my country.

As we are at the beginning of a new year, I want to talk with you about how we in Georgia see the road ahead. We face many challenges and we see many opportunities. This year will be pivotal for us as we consolidate our democratic gains, implement a South Ossetian Peace Plan, and rededicate our efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Abkhazia.

Mr. Chairman,

Georgia is determined to build a genuine European state based on liberal, democratic values. The Georgian people won their freedom because we were absolutely determined and we believed in the importance of peaceful dissent and self-governance.

We created a new, independent country. The work is continuing every day, and it is difficult, and it is exciting to be a part of it.

Georgians have chosen to be led by an accountable, democratic government that strives to deliver on its promises to fight corruption, to improve public service, to re-build Georgia's roads and infrastructure, and to turn around its once-ruined economy.

This year we will see GDP growth of 9% and a state budget that is five times larger than before the Rose Revolution. The economy is growing because it is free from complex taxes, disorganized Customs or corrupt police, and it is not stifled by hundreds of unnecessary regulations and permits.

Mr. Chairman,

We hold out these benefits to the people of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, whom Georgians have always considered as integral members of our multi-ethnic society.

Georgia's determination to take initiatives for peace resulted in elaboration of a comprehensive Peace Plan, presented by President Saakashvili to the UN and Council of Europe,

and by Prime Minister Noghaideli to the PC in fall of 2005. I would like to focus on the developments Georgia has made since that time.

Because of successful diplomatic efforts involving all OSCE participating states, the Ljubljana Ministerial adopted the Statement on Georgia, which recognized the Peace Plan as a basis for solution of the conflict. Georgia is determined to implement the plan, and with the support of its friends, has already started.

In fact, just yesterday we received a positive reply from the Venice Commission on the Restitution Law. They proposed some amendments which Parliament will soon consider before it takes a timely decision. We are implementing economic rehabilitation measures and villages in conflict zone are being provided with basic infrastructure, medical service equipment and supplies for winter.

The response of our Ossetian partners to the Peace Plan after the Ljubljana Ministerial gave us a serious and sincere hope that a breakthrough in the process was near. I know that many of you in this room shared the belief that our shared vision of the future would be soon realised. We believed it too, so we made the proposal to set up the Working Group within JCC, which would elaborate project of joint actions for implementation of existing and internationally recognized Peace Plan. I also believe that many of you in this room were as disappointed as we were when the JCC in Moscow did not produce positive results.

Since that time my government has become increasingly concerned with the dramatic shift in the tone of discussions over the Tskhinvali and Abkhazia regions of Georgia, most recently at UN Security Council in New York among the friends of Georgia. Proposals were made there which questioned, for the first time, the status of Abkhazia in Georgia. Besides that, numerous facts of violation of the sovereignty of Georgia and the human rights of its citizens repeatedly happen in the conflict regions. I see myself obliged to at least outline and remind you of some of those facts - the so called South Ossetian Government is mostly staffed with Russian citizens, even with representatives of its law enforcement or military structures; the population of the conflict zones is illegally granted with Russian citizenship; there is no guarantee to have even very basic human rights protected - even just mentioning the sympathies to Georgia in a public results in arrest and detention of a person in the conflict zones; diplomas, issued by high schools in Tskhinvali are authorized by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation etc.

The recent fact of finding of an uncontrolled anti-aircraft mounts and "Iglu" type rockets in Tskhinvali region proves that there are still many illegal arms in the conflict zone. Therefore, we want to make it clear once again - demilitarisation should proceed immediately.

What, to our belief, South Ossetian side urgently needs now is not the mixed and confusing messages to its leadership, which, accordingly lead them to more destructive policy, but rather engaging them to cooperate.

In South Ossetia, we are also very concerned about the effectiveness of the JPKF. It would have been logical and understandable to include only Georgian and Russian peacekeepers in its composition. At the same time, prior agreements should be implemented. These include

expanding its area of activities to the whole region of South Ossetia, establishing permanent and transparent control over the Roki tunnel, and providing conditions for free movement and monitoring by the OSCE inspectors. Once demilitarization is accomplished, the JPKF should be replaced by joint policing activities by Georgians and our South Ossetian compatriots.

These measures are critical, because the Prime Minister is obliged to report the Parliament soon whether the JPKF is fulfilling its obligations.

If these proposed steps are successful, then the Prime Minister would be in a position to report improvements to the Parliament in the performance of the JPKF and in the situation in general.

Alternately, should the Parliament conclude that Russian Peace keepers should leave Tskhinvali Region, the Government of Georgia will remain determined to implement the Peace Plan. And hereby I need to make it very clear, the implementation of our Plan does not depend on the presence of peacekeepers.

Mr. Chairman,

Georgia, supported by the international community, will proceed with appropriate caution and thoughtfulness. We are determined to find creative and peaceful ways to work with all our citizens, including those in Tskhinvali Region and Abkhazia to jointly find constructive ways to rebuild the whole country. We will draw our inspiration for our own history. In our rose revolution, not one person died, not one person was injured.

We welcome the initiative of the Chairman-in-Office to hold the next Joint Control Commission meeting as soon as possible in Vienna with the aim of reaching consensus on the outstanding issues. In order to achieve real progress, it is important for this JCC meeting to be held on high level and to be open to the OSCE, EU and the US participation as observers. We sincerely hope to come to an agreement in Vienna.

We also propose holding a meeting of the Economic Steering Committee in Vienna as soon as possible after the JCC meeting. Such a meeting in Vienna would serve as a good basis for the donors' Conference in Brussels.

We are determined to justify the confidence of our European, American and other friends, who have indicated their readiness to financially contribute to the implementation of the Peace Plan.

We know we have our own work to do.

Mr. Chairman, we are determined to do it. I do remain optimistic that after all the peace will prevail, which is the best guarantee for the prosperity of all citizens of Georgia, which in my belief, serves the best interests of Russia, and the whole OSCE community as well.

We will proceed with the Needs Assessment Study and other confidence building measures, which in general aim at socio-economic rehabilitation of the region. With the support

of the international community we will do our utmost to engage the Ossetian side in further fulfilment of the Peace Plan.

Speaking about the security issues for Georgia I cannot help mentioning one issue that has emerged on the European security agenda. The recent energy crisis in Georgia caused by the explosion of the gas pipelines and electric lines on the territory of Russia forced us to reconsider our energy supply policies.

The crises proved the solidarity of the Georgian nation to overcome such a challenge. Georgia especially appreciated the help provided by Azerbaijan, as well as other friendly neighbours. I am pleased to inform the PC that the electric and gas systems are fully operational.

Now it is no secret that Europe is seeking to diversify its energy sources as well. Georgia has a great potential for contributing to the Euro-Atlantic Energy Security Strategy. The further diversification of energy supplies to Europe has become an essential part of agendas of GUAM meetings at all levels. We hope to fruitfully cooperate with the European Community and the G8 in the resolution of this critical issue.

By mentioning the cooperation with the Euro-Atlantic community I would like to close the circle and come to the point where I started:

Key to our overall efforts is continuing to build ties with the Euro-Atlantic region in a democratic and market-oriented state at peace with our neighbours in region. The reforms in my country show our determination to respect and protect the Human Rights of our citizens regardless of which ethnic, religious or other group they belong to. We believe that this is the most durable and sustainable basis for the security and stability of our country.

As Georgia has said many times, most recently at the OSCE Ministerial Council in December 2005, we are not in favour of process for the sake of process itself. We want results. Georgia will appreciate the support of all 55 OSCE participating States in the next difficult weeks as we work to stabilize the situation in the region and promote the peaceful resolution of our conflicts.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.