



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Maia Panjikidze

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 10, 2013

The United States warmly welcomes Her Excellency Maia Panjikidze, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, to the OSCE Permanent Council.

Georgia is an important partner of the United States. We have broad cooperation based on shared values and common interests. The strength of our relations is affirmed by the “U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership,” which includes cooperation in priority areas such as: democracy; defense and security; economic, trade, and energy issues; and people-to-people and cultural exchanges. We are also grateful for Georgia’s steadfast partnership in Afghanistan, where Georgian troops stand alongside American servicemen and women, working without caveats as the largest non-NATO contributor, in some of the most dangerous regions. We appreciate the sacrifices and efforts being made every day by Georgia.

Your Excellency, the United States remains deeply concerned by accelerated and ongoing “borderization” activities along the administrative boundary lines (ABL) for the Russian-occupied Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which first began several years ago. The increased pace of these activities near villages like Dvani, Ditsi and Khurvaleti further separates families and neighbors, and has a profound negative impact on the lives and livelihoods of populations on both sides of the barbed wire, cutting off local communities from their farm land, keeping children from attending school, and blocking access to cemeteries. Such “borderization” is inconsistent with Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

We continue to call for these barriers to be removed in accordance with Russia’s commitments under the August 2008 ceasefire agreement and its obligations under international humanitarian law – a call we will continue to make in Washington, here in Vienna, and at other international venues, including at the Geneva International Discussions. We appreciate the ongoing efforts of the Geneva Co-Chairs to facilitate progress towards these goals, and reiterate our support for the vital work of the European Union Monitoring Mission in promoting transparency and stability along the ABLs with the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions of Georgia. We welcome the Georgian government’s continued, peaceful approach to the resolution of these conflicts, and encourage all sides to engage in meaningful dialogue to resolve this situation.

The United States also looks forward to the upcoming presidential election on October 27 as an opportunity for Georgia to demonstrate its continued democratic development and advance its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The fairness of the campaign environment – including adherence to the rule of law, media access, and transparency – will directly affect Georgia’s progress towards its Euro-Atlantic goals. We commend the government for its early invitation to the OSCE to monitor this election, and we commend the work of domestic and international monitors, whose impartial election observation efforts will be a key factor in whether the election process is assessed as democratic, both domestically and internationally. At the same time, challenges remain and must be addressed. We urge the appropriate authorities to respond in a timely manner to recent concerns, including reports of the participation of civil servants in pre-election campaigning during business hours, continued dismissals (or pressure to do so) of local officials, reports of disruptions and/or violence at minority party campaign events, the Georgian Public Broadcaster’s (GPB) recent closure of two political talk shows and firing of their hosts, and reports of pressure on the GPB Board of Trustees.

We support the OSCE’s on-going activities in Georgia in all three dimensions. The education project of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the water project on both sides of the South Ossetia ABL, and ODIHR’s trial monitoring project demonstrate the value the Organization can provide in promoting security and stability in the region based on its comprehensive approach. As we look to the near future, the United States hopes there will be further opportunities for Georgia to expand its cooperation with the OSCE. Indeed, as the United States has stated on numerous occasions, we continue to support the re-establishment of a meaningful OSCE presence in Georgia.

In conclusion, we look forward to timely, concrete and peaceful actions to resolve the conflicts in Georgia. We welcome Georgia’s efforts to conduct elections in line with democratic commitments and call on the country to address shortcomings and recommendations. We also value Georgia’s engagement with the OSCE, and we hope that your appearance here today will help to further those relations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.