



U.S. Mission to the
OSCE

Joint statement of the Group of Friends of Georgia

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As delivered by Ambassador Aurimas Taurantas, Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the OSCE to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 5, 2019

This statement is delivered on behalf of Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. We reaffirm our full support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

Eleven years since the Russian military invasion of Georgia, we remain deeply concerned over the continued occupation of the territory of Georgia and underline the need for the peaceful resolution of the conflict based on full respect for the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and the fundamental norms and principles of international law.

We call upon the Russian Federation to fulfill immediately its clear obligations under the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement, including the withdrawal of its forces to pre-conflict positions, and to reverse its recognition of the so-called independence of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions.

We do not recognize the legitimacy of the so-called "presidential elections" held in Georgia's Abkhazia region held on August 25, 2019 and will not acknowledge their outcome. Similarly, we do not recognize the legitimacy or outcome of the so-called "parliamentary elections" held in Georgia's South Ossetia region.

We concur with the statement of the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions of August 28, 2019 that the newly erected structures in the Gugutiantkari area hinder freedom of movement for people living there, prevent them from reaching their orchards and threaten access to irrigation water. These

developments, as well as the recent/periodic closure of so-called crossing points, further aggravate the humanitarian situation on the ground.

We support the Geneva International Discussions (GID) as an important format to address the security, human rights, and humanitarian challenges stemming from the unresolved conflict. We regret the lack of progress on the core issues of the discussions, including on the non-use of force, establishing international security arrangements in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and ensuring the safe and dignified voluntary return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and refugees in accordance with international law.

We express our support for the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) and emphasize their important role in preventing the escalation of the conflict and in helping protect the safety and security of people on the ground. We express our great concern over the suspension of the Gali IPRM for over a year now and call upon the participants to resume the meetings without further delay or conditions, and in full respect of the founding principles and ground rules.

We reaffirm our unwavering support to the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) and call upon the Russian Federation to allow the EUMM to implement its mandate in full, including by enabling the EUMM's access on both sides of the administrative boundary lines.

We reiterate our deep concerns over the increased Russian military exercises and build up in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. We welcome Georgia's compliance with the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement and Georgia's unilateral commitment not to use force, and call on the Russian Federation to reciprocate, and to affirm and implement a commitment not to use force against Georgia.

We remain deeply concerned over the ethnic discrimination against Georgians residing in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and about human rights abuses, including the reported use of torture, destruction of Georgian IDP houses, and gross violations of rights related to freedom of movement, residence and property. We support the voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees to the places of their origin in safety and dignity. We call on those in effective control, to enable full and unfettered access by international human rights organizations to the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

We are following closely the case of the death of Georgian citizen Irakli Kvaratskhelia in detention at the Russian Military base in Georgia's Abkhazia region.

We condemn the killing of Georgian citizens Archil Tatunashvili, Giga Otkhozoria, and Davit Basharuli, and urge the Russian Federation, as the state exercising effective control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, to remove any obstacles to bringing the perpetrators to justice. In this context, we reiterate our support for Georgia's preventive steps aimed at eradication of the sense of impunity and note the adoption of the Otkhozoria-Tatunashvili List by the Government of Georgia.

We welcome the Georgian Government's policy of dialogue with the Russian Federation in order to de-escalate tensions with full respect for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

We support the peace initiative of the Government of Georgia, 'A Step to a Better Future', aimed at improving the humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of people residing in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and fostering confidence building among divided communities to the benefit of all people. We encourage Georgia to work further with the OSCE and other multilateral organizations to promote confidence-building measures on the ground. We also encourage Georgia to keep the Permanent Council informed of its progress in addressing developments on the ground and in further strengthening its democratic institutions and processes.

We encourage the OSCE's engagement in the process of finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Georgia. We regret the closure of the OSCE mission to Georgia in 2009 and encourage the OSCE participating States to agree on the re-opening of the OSCE cross-dimensional mission in Georgia, including a monitoring capacity able to operate unhindered across the administrative boundary line. The re-opening of the mission would strengthen considerably the OSCE's engagement in the GID and IPRMs, and in implementation of confidence-building measures.

The friends will continue to raise awareness of the conflict and the need for its peaceful resolution.

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