

**Georgia(/country/geo)**

## **Group of friends of UN Secretary-General on Georgia visits Sukhumi**

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On 10 August, following the fourth UN-led Georgian-Abkhaz meeting on security guarantees held on 4 August at the UNOMIG Tbilisi office, representatives of the Group of Friends of the UN Secretary-General on Georgia paid a one-day visit to Sukhumi.

Among the members of the delegation were ambassadors to Georgia: German Ambassador Uwe Schramm, US Ambassador Richard Miles, Russian Ambassador Vladimir Chkhikvishvili, British Ambassador Donald MacLaren and Fabienne Drout-Lozinsky, Charge d'Affairs of the French Embassy. The UNOMIG acting Deputy Head of Mission Marian Staszewski accompanied the Friends.

The delegation met with de facto Abkhaz President Sergey Bagapsh, for the first time as a Group since he assumed his position, as well as de facto Prime Minister Aleksandr Ankvab and de facto Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba.

During the discussions, the Group of Friends expressed their appreciation to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, for her efforts in facilitating and chairing the fourth meeting between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on security guarantees in Tbilisi on 4 August. They noted that the meeting was successful and welcomed the constructive engagement of both the Georgian and Abkhaz sides in the United Nations-led Geneva process.

Sergey Bagapsh also stated his gratitude to SRSG Tagliavini for her efforts towards a comprehensive settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, as well as to the representatives of the Group of Friend for their contribution to the process of conflict settlement, and reiterated the readiness of the Abkhaz side to continue talks.

"This was my first meeting in the capacity of president with the Group of Friends, and I have found it to be very constructive," Sergey Bagapsh stated after the meeting."

Many issues regarding bilateral relations with Georgia have been discussed, such as security and our future talks. We expressed that we are ready to discuss any topic conducive to peaceful dialogue. However, we maintain our stance, which has been, is and will continue to be, that we are building our independent state. In

what manner the situation evolves depends not only on the Abkhaz side, but also on the Georgian side as well as on the position of the UN Secretary-General's Group of Friends and the international community," said Bagapsh.

German Ambassador to Georgia Uwe Schramm described the visit to Sukhumi as a promising start for a "successful relationship".

Ambassador Schramm explained, "We had a very constructive, open dialogue today and I was amazed how president Bagapsh spoke openly. He addressed the issues and gave direct answers and apparently looked at things in a very pragmatic way".

The meeting discussed, among others topics, the issue of the ethnic Georgians detained in July by the Abkhaz militia on charges of illegal border crossing and logging in the Gali district, as well as the maritime incident involving the interception of a Sukhumi-bound Turkish ship by Georgian border guards early July.

US Ambassador Richard Miles noted that this was his last visit to Abkhazia as the American Ambassador, as his term in office expires soon, but added that his departure comes "on a little of note of optimism".

"Some of the steps which have been taken by the two sides are conducive to a lessening of tension rather than the opposite," Richard Miles said. "What we need to do, and we explained that today at our meeting with Mr. Bagapsh, is to build on that and to try to look at ways in which the international community can help the two sides to come a little closer together and to work on that fundamental problem which is the resolution of the issue of the relationship between Abkhazia and Georgia," the US Ambassador concluded.

The representatives of the Group of Friends reiterated that the Group remains committed to supporting the United Nations-led negotiation process and urged both sides to use every opportunity to establish peace through dialogue, for the benefit of the population and its right to live in stability and security.

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