

Statement of the Delegation of Georgia

ENGLISH only

at the joint meeting of the Forum for Security Co-operation and the Permanent Council

Vienna, 17 June 2009

Madam Chairperson,

Mr. Chairman,

Dear colleagues,

I am delighted to warmly welcome here today the co-moderators of the Geneva Discussions, Ambassadors Christopoulos, Morel and Verbeke, the Head of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia, Ambassador Haber, and the Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC), Ambassador Salber. I would like to thank them for their insightful presentations. Today, only a few days after the Russian veto on the continuation of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), it is extremely important that the co-moderators of the Geneva Discussions have gathered here to demonstrate that the discussions are alive and that the process of dialogue between Georgia and Russia is continuing in accordance with the existing ceasefire agreement.

Georgia deeply regrets the termination of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia brought about by the unconstructive position of the Russian Government. UNOMIG has long played an important role in bringing a certain level of security and stability to the Abkhazia region of Georgia. It is especially worrying that Russia's rejection of the Mission is not an isolated act but, rather, part of a larger strategy. Russia seems determined to roll back the international community's presence in Georgia: just last month, it also vetoed the continuation of the OSCE Mission here in this hall.

It is important that we stand united and join forces to ensure that Russia does not succeed in destroying the Geneva Discussions as well. Our gathering here and our deliberations should give a new impetus to the Geneva talks, especially today, when due to the obstruction of one State the roles of the United Nations and the OSCE have been weakened.

Excellencies,

Today, when the international monitoring missions of the OSCE and the United Nations no longer have the mandate to monitor the occupied territories of

Georgia, it is extremely important to maintain a strong EU monitoring mission and to continue efficient work within the Geneva Discussions, that is to say, within the international forum in which these organizations, together with the European Union, co-moderate discussions on security and stability in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region.

Moreover, we believe that now is the time to reinvigorate the Geneva talks. This should be done by adding more substance to the discussions and by solving outstanding procedural issues in an assertive and efficient manner. We need to make sure that the Geneva Discussions address the issues of mutual importance: non-use of force, the establishment of international peacekeeping and police operations, the creation of modalities for safe movement over the administrative border, the result-oriented implementation of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism, and agreement to regular joint visits to the most sensitive areas of mutual interest. At the same time we must not forget the issues related to IDPs and refugees. It is indeed the case that their safe and dignified return depends on the creation of a secure environment, though one should not underestimate the importance of continuing discussions within the Geneva framework over other modalities for their return. Today we have around 400,000 men, women and children who are unable to go back to the places where they were born and spent most of their lives. Accommodating their legitimate interests should become a primary task of the Geneva talks.

We believe that in order to achieve the goal of ensuring their safe and dignified return we need first and foremost to consider the possibility of creating strong and effective international peacekeeping and police missions on the occupied Georgian territories. These police/peacekeeping missions can be either under the aegis of the EU or of other international organizations, including the OSCE. We all remember how the Russian delegation first entertained the idea of establishing the OSCE police mission in Georgia. I would like to revive this idea and hereby propose establishing the OSCE-led police mission on both sides of the administrative borders of the Tskhinvali Region and Abkhazia in addition to the rest of Georgia. We could certainly adopt the status-neutral approach in order to defuse the obvious controversies over the mandate and wordings of such a mission. If we are truly interested in the outcome and the improvement of security on the ground we need to strive for the establishment of such a mission.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the same time, we cannot talk about the dignified return of those who were evicted as a result of three waves of ethnic cleansing without looking for ways to

secure their human rights after their return. And that the human rights of those who still reside inside the occupied territories are being violated in a blatant manner is not a secret to anyone. A number of well-respected international office-holders and institutions, including the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), have reported on the ongoing flagrant violations of human rights in the occupied Georgian territories. This has to be stopped and the best way for this to be done will be through the establishment of internationally led missions designed to protect the human rights of those who are in constant danger.

Dear colleagues,

These substantial issues need first and foremost to be discussed within the framework of the Geneva talks. We are ready to start talking with all sides about the necessity of establishing international police and peacekeeping missions, also with those who we believe to have been responsible for grave acts of ethnic cleansing. We are ready to start discussing ways to protect the rights and freedoms of our citizens with all the stakeholders, but first and foremost with the Russian Federation, as it is a party to this conflict and effectively exercises control over 20 per cent of the territory of Georgia. Our responsibility to future generations and towards those evicted from their homes leaves us no other alternative but dialogue. And we call upon everyone to engage in this dialogue constructively, without any preconditions.

Madam Chairperson,

As I have mentioned already, we need to reinvigorate Geneva Discussions by solving certain procedural dilemmas that have haunted the format from the day of its creation. We have only been able to convene the plenary session once, and even then it was boycotted by the Russian Federation. Unless the Geneva Discussions start functioning fully at all levels, we will be unable to reach substantial results. Moreover, we have been held back by Russia's unconstructive attitude towards determining the next dates for the talks. The same unconstructiveness is found in practice on the ground, where we seem to face similar procedural problems within the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism. Over the last few months we have seen several boycotts, walkouts and other instances of destructive behaviour. We would like to call upon all participants in the Discussions to refrain from such acts and to engage in the dialogue in a constructive and result-oriented spirit.

We believe that the co-moderators need to reinvigorate their role and become more assertive in exercising their powers regarding the directing of the negotiations

process. Unless this assertiveness is effectively exercised, we will be misled and blackmailed by one single participant State, which has already demonstrated its unserious attitude towards the format and reluctance to engage productively in the most acute security issues. Having said that, I would like to thank the co-moderators for the outstanding job they have done over the past months. Without their endurance and flexibility Geneva would have been discontinued long ago.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For Georgia, the Geneva Discussions are an important forum in which a number of breakthrough decisions need to be made. This is the kind of negotiation format we have been striving to see for many years. It is true that not many agreements have been reached on important issues at the Geneva Discussions over the short period of time that this format has existed – however, there have been a number of achievements, first and foremost the joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM). Unfortunately, the IPRM has not yet been fully institutionalized and thus has no visible achievements to show for itself. It has not yet been launched in relation to Abkhazia, Georgia, and the first two meetings concerned with the Tskhinvali Region ended in deadlock over procedural issues. This is especially worrying as some of the issues had already been agreed in Geneva – for instance, who matter of would be the co-moderators. Revisiting agreements already signed and sealed will not do any good to the Geneva format and will undoubtedly raise further questions concerning the credibility of Russia's role in the talks.

Secondly, we have managed to reach an agreement on the principle of the safe and dignified return of IDPs and refugees to their places of permanent residence. Although we have not been able to follow up this agreement, it is our firm belief that we will be able to achieve some positive results during the forthcoming meetings.

Madam Chairperson,

By way of conclusion I would like to say a few words on the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM). We are satisfied with its work. Georgia will diligently implement the obligations it has undertaken towards the EUMM, especially now that all other international presences have been eliminated by Russia. Given that the OSCE and the UN have left the occupied territories, the role of the EUMM has to increase and we need to join our efforts to make sure that the EU monitors gain access to the occupied Georgian regions. This will be an important step towards the maintenance of peace and security in the region.

There are number of ways in which the effectiveness of the EUMM can be increased. We have our vision on this issue and you are probably well aware of it, so I will not go into the details. However, I wish to make one final point, namely, that it would be very useful if the regular reports that EUMM shares with the 27 EU Member States could also be shared with the OSCE community. Today, when we are about to lose the OSCE monitoring capabilities in the Tskhinvali Region and the UN capabilities in Abkhazia, it would be of a tremendous added value for the OSCE to receive regular information about the situation on the ground. I would thus propose that the Chairperson-in-Office, the FSC Chairmanship, Ambassador Haber and the current and upcoming EU presidencies seek to work out ways in which the EUMM reports could be shared with the OSCE community on a regular basis.

Thank you