



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to OSCE Special Representative for the South Caucasus Günther Bächler

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 9, 2016

Before beginning let me just say that the statement we just heard from our distinguished Russian colleague reminded me of our Ukrainian colleague's statement last week that hearing the Russian Federation's position about Georgia should encourage all of us to have a bit more sympathy for the concerns that the Ukrainian government and people have with Russia's good faith with respect to its engagement in the implementation of Minsk.

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador Bächler to the Permanent Council. Ambassador, it is clear from your comprehensive report that you have plunged fully into your new responsibilities, following your successful tenure as Swiss Ambassador in Tbilisi. We are grateful to you for your work on behalf of the OSCE.

The United States firmly believes that the Geneva International Discussions are critical to enhancing security, stability, and respect for human rights in Georgia. We remain convinced that through the Geneva format, the OSCE, the EU, and the UN play an invaluable role in monitoring the security situation, human rights, and humanitarian conditions in the conflict-affected regions. We believe that the EU, the UN, and the OSCE possess the expertise needed to tackle the challenges inherent in the process. We would like to express gratitude to Ambassador Bächler and his fellow Co-Chairs for their efforts to move negotiations forward.

In this context, we are hopeful that participants will build on the Geneva discussions and take practical steps to address the security and humanitarian concerns of the people in the conflict-affected areas. We urge parties to refrain from divisive acts, such as reported calls for a referendum to divide Georgia, and work constructively and creatively to support future Geneva talks, particularly the next round scheduled for later this month.

We would like to recognize the work of the Ergneti Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), which has helped to restore a degree of confidence between participants after increased "borderization" along the South Ossetia Administrative Boundary Line. As we stated at the Permanent Council on June 2, the United States also applauds the resumption of the Gali IPRM to increase transparency along the Abkhazia Administrative Boundary Line, particularly in light of the fatal shooting of an unarmed man in the village of Khurcha, close to the Nabakevi Crossing Point. It is important that this incident is investigated and that those responsible are prosecuted. We believe that regular meetings of the IPRM are important to defuse tensions along the Boundary Line.

Russia's ongoing occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which together constitute 20 percent of Georgia's territory, remains unacceptable. Russian security services, in coordination with the de facto authorities, are committed to a policy of "borderization" along the Administrative Boundary Lines, restricting individuals' freedom of movement and preventing international and humanitarian organizations from fully assisting those affected by the ongoing conflict. Russia's OSCE commitments include the principles of respect for the rights inherent in sovereignty, the inviolability of frontiers, and the territorial integrity of States. We continue to call on Russia to fulfill its obligations under the 2008 ceasefire agreement, including the withdrawal of all its forces to pre-conflict positions and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance.

The United States would like to stress once again the need for the return of a meaningful OSCE presence to Georgia. We unequivocally support Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, as well as its aspirations to integrate into Euro-Atlantic institutions.

As a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, the United States is firmly committed to a peaceful and lasting settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We were alarmed by the escalation in violence along the Line of Contact in early April, and took immediate steps within the co-chair format to reduce tensions. Secretary Kerry took the initiative to organize a 3+2 meeting in Vienna on May 16, recognizing that the joint efforts of the United States, Russia, and France at the highest levels could advance the peace process. The meeting produced tangible results. The sides reaffirmed their respect for the ceasefire, and indeed, the situation along the Line of Contact has quieted significantly. The sides also agreed to expand the OSCE Monitoring Mission and they agreed to finalize a proposal to establish an OSCE investigative mechanism. Finally, they committed to a meeting in June with an aim to resuming negotiations on a comprehensive settlement.

The United States appreciates the close collaboration we have had with the German Chairmanship and Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office Ambassador Kasprzyk to support the Co-Chairs' mediation efforts and to stabilize the situation on the ground. We will continue to coordinate on implementing the outcomes of the May 16 meeting and ensuring progress toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict at the meeting in June.

Once again, I would like to thank Ambassador Bächler for his report and ongoing efforts as Special Representative.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.