



Statement of H.E. Mr. GRIGOL VASHADZE

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At the OSCE 17th Ministerial Council

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to express my appreciation for the wonderful hospitality and the warm welcome. I would like to commend the hard work and perseverance of the Greek Chairmanship during the past year and thank you for your tireless efforts in making this organization more effective and our dialogue more fruitful. I would also like to use this opportunity and extend my best regards to the incoming Kazakh Chairmanship and my dear friend and colleague, Foreign Minister Saudabayev.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me share with this distinguished audience my thoughts on the topics of mutual concern and the threats and challenges that we together and this organization faces today, as well as on the ways how we can still overcome them.

Dear Colleagues,

We meet today in Athens, in the birthplace of democracy, in the year commemorating the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall and reunification of Europe, as well as the 65th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. As we celebrate these important dates, we need to stay mindful of the threats and challenges that are ahead of us, of the dividing lines and conflicts that still continue to persist in Europe. While we remember with the pride great victories that the free world acquired over the totalitarian regimes, we need to realize that today, new forms of totalitarianism are creeping into European soil.

This Organization was created to tackle the problem of divided Europe; to deal with what at that time seemed an insurmountable task of developing the OSCE area into a secure space, where fundamental human rights and freedoms are respected, where the states can coexist peacefully, where the security is common and comprehensive, where there are no dividing lines and where diplomacy and peaceful negotiations are favored over aggression, occupation and ethnic cleansing. This organization was created with an aim of bringing us together in the quest of common security in all three dimensions.

Unfortunately, today we find ourselves in the situation, where the basic principles, upon which the Helsinki Final Act dwells, are shattered. Last year's invasion of my country has shown that our common goals are on the verge of being defeated. Today, we are facing a choice – either we uphold, nurture and protect the principles that hold us together, or we follow the policy of complacency and appeasement. It is the first path that can lead us out of the current impasse and security dilemma. This path requires more robustness and astuteness; it requires greater will and patience. Second path, however, as any path of appeasement, will create an illusion of relative short-term stability, but will jeopardize the European security in

the longer future.

Dear Colleagues,

Last year Russian Federation tore apart the Helsinki Final Act and used military force and ethnic cleansing as instruments of achieving its political goals. As a result of this breach of international law 35 thousand persons still remain internally displaced and my country is divided. As we speak, two regions of my country are forcefully occupied and ethnically cleansed; around 10.000 foreign occupying troops are stationed in these regions and those residing there are deprived of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While we discuss here within the OSCE the need to implement all our outstanding obligations and commitments, while we call upon each other to be more prudent in implementing the agreements that we are party to, all commitments towards Georgia are disregarded by the occupant state. The August 12 Ceasefire Agreement, which ended the aggression against my country, remains unfulfilled, as occupants refuse to withdraw their military forces and do not allow the humanitarian aid and international presence into the occupied territories. Commitments undertaken towards all of us in Istanbul are completely disregarded, as the arms control regime remains paralyzed. But, further than that, the territorial integrity of my country is shaken when one country, represented here at this table, does not recognize the most fundamental principle that govern inter-state relations in the modern world.

Dear Colleagues,

We in Georgia understand that the reunification of my country may be a long journey, which will require joint and tireless efforts. However, we should keep in mind that it is not only a fate of my country, which is at stake, but a fate of international law.

We are currently working on the strategy, how to engage the our fellow citizens of various ethnic backgrounds, whether Abkhaz, or Ossetian, who unfortunately happen to be on the occupied side of the occupation line by accident, by a mere whim of those decision makers, for whom human fates do not matter. We have seen such divisions in Europe before and we know that with a correct strategy and engagement we can break any artificial wall and overcome any obstacle preventing free movement, or a free choice.

To achieve the goals that we have set in front of us, we need to have a progress on a number of issues that Georgia nowadays faces. For us, the notion of progress is very tangible and has concrete measurable dimensions. Several months ago, in Corfu, my dear friend, Bernard Kouchner pleaded for at least a one millimeter progress on the issue of access of international monitors to the occupied regions. So far we have not had even a half millimetre movement in this direction. OSCE still remains out of the occupied regions; EU monitors are unable to cross the occupation line, whereas United Nations has suspended its operation on the ground. Without international transparency and presence, these regions are developing into the black holes, where no legitimate authority is exercised and where no respected international institution can monitor the security and humanitarian situation. These regions, if no international control is exercised, will continue to be black holes where gross and mass human rights violations, trafficking, terrorism, abductions, ransom and other illegal activities take place.

Dear Colleagues,

We believe that the OSCE has instruments and tools to stay engaged in the conflict resolution with regard to my country. Some of these mechanisms are outdated, some are inflexible, but we have a toolbox in front of us that we can together develop.

Two of the most prominent OSCE institutions reported on the systematic violations of human rights in the Tskhinvali Region last year. I am sure that once the current or future OSCE Chairmanship decides to task the relevant OSCE institutions to examine the status of the implementation of the recommendations elaborated by the ODIHR and HCNM in 2008, OSCE will become involved more strongly in the situation on the ground.

We also believe that OSCE has to continue its involvement in the only dialogue format that we possess today with the occupying power - the Geneva Discussions. Stronger OSCE involvement and more robust OSCE participation in the discussions can only contribute to our

mutual security. The lesser the OSCE role in the European affairs, the weaker this organization will become.

Dear Colleagues,

We believe that our problems transcend Georgian concerns and should be of interest to all OSCE participant states. It is not only because, Georgia is a test case for future European dialogue and security and a battlefield of international law, but also because the history often repeats itself.

And in fact we have a reason to be worried. Never since the break-up of the evil empire of Soviet Union have we heard about the need to redraft the European security in accordance to the whims of one revisionist power; never before have we heard so blatantly that the interests of small states should be violated, as long as its powerful neighbors so desire; never before have we seen statements and draft treaties as bald and worrying, as we have seen during the recent days.

Mr. Chairman,

Yes, indeed there is a need for more effective and robust security architecture in Europe, but this should be achieved within existing institutions and organizations. We cannot afford losing OSCE and its three dimensions. Neither can we afford to legitimize the so-called spheres of influence in Europe.

We are currently at a very important crossroads within the OSCE. We have launched a wide-ranging and open political dialogue on European Security, for which I commend the Greek Chairmanship. The Corfu process had a promising start and we seem to be grasping this opportunity of moving towards stability and security in the OSCE area. In the course of profound discussions we have identified the areas where we need to strive for further progress. Indeed, we have to reaffirm, renew and reinvigorate the already existing instruments, tools and mechanisms and where necessary create the mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution.

We also fully support the recommendations elaborated by the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Bolzano/Bozen recommendations and join the call for their endorsement by the participating states.

Dear Colleagues,

We strongly believe that reinvigoration of the Helsinki spirit through the Corfu process should be based on five main priorities – (1) implementation of all OSCE norms and principles; (2) conflict resolution in the OSCE area and increase of OSCE capabilities and concrete mechanisms related to the conflict prevention and crisis management; (3) arms control and confidence building regimes; (4) protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the OSCE area and (5) finding ways how to adequately tackle newly emerging transnational and multidimensional threats and challenges.

I hope that the wider security dialogue anchored in the OSCE will bring concrete results. And I want to continue believing that today, or tomorrow we will manage to materialize this strategic ambition of ours in the relevant decision by the Ministers.

Dear Colleagues,

Before I completely exhaust your patience, allow me to say a few words in the capacity of the GUAM Chairmanship. This statement very well reflects the feeling that we, the GUAM states have within the OSCE.

- “The CSCE/OSCE principles and the statements of the Helsinki Final Act have been always on the cornerstone of cooperation within GUAM. We fully share the OSCE approach to comprehensive security, which sees security not only from politico-military point of view, but also from human dimension, economic and environmental viewpoint.

- However, while talking about security we first have in mind protracted conflicts in GUAM region. GUAM Member states have always been consistent in drawing the attention of the OSCE community to the need for speedy solution of these Conflicts on the basis of norms and principles of the international law, including those pertaining to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of international borders, relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the OSCE decisions. Unfortunately international law has been seriously undermined after August 2008 Russian-Georgian war. This also seriously damaged European security architecture.

- Taking this opportunity I would also like to briefly touch upon the main achievements which have been done during recent years within GUAM. After high level political interaction was ensured in Organization, we are advancing to the stage of generating and implementing of concrete GUAM projects and Programs. In addition to the already existing projects – “GUAM Free Trade Zone” and “Virtual Law Enforcement Centre” - we have developed the “Concept of GUAM Transport Corridor”, “Common Tourist Product”, “Common Telecommunication Space” etc. At the same time we welcome enhancing cooperation between the OSCE and GUAM leading us to the implementation of common projects.

- At the end of my presentation as GUAM Chairman, let me invite all of you interested in GUAM achievements to look through the written contribution already disseminated at this forum by the GUAM Secretary General, Ambassador Valeri Chechelashvili.

Thank you for your attention.