



EMBASSY OF GEORGIA TO THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA
PERMANENT MISSION OF GEORGIA TO THE OSCE AND OTHER
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENNA

S T A T E M E N T

of the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the OSCE,

Ambassador Paata Gaprindashvili

at the 864th session of the OSCE Permanent Council

Vienna, June 2, 2011

Mr. Chairman,

Starting on Saturday May 21, a series of protests by radical elements in opposition parties were organized in Tbilisi and Batumi. The radical political groups, which organized these protests, have a very low public support, which is demonstrated not only by a small number of people attending their rallies, but also by all polls conducted by either local or prominent international organizations. The protests have remained largely peaceful, despite calls by radical leaders on overthrowing the Government. Mainstream opposition parties did not support the protests.

The Government has done everything possible to enable demonstrators to freely exercise their democratic rights of assembly and expression. During demonstrations, police kept their visible presence to a minimum and was instructed not to intervene except in case of major disorder or life-threatening circumstances. However, in a few instances

where demonstrators, carrying truncheons and wearing masks, resorted to violence amongst themselves and towards representatives of the media, the police was compelled to intervene to preserve public order.

The Government continued to protect the safety of all citizens and to safeguard the civil liberties of all those who choose to demonstrate. The Government has called on the demonstrators to maintain a sense of public order and to keep disruptions for other Tbilisi residents to a minimum. Demonstrations have been aired live by Georgian Public Broadcaster (as well as by opposition leaning channels). All other Georgian TV channels have also extensively covered them, inviting protest leaders as guests to main talk shows.

Demonstrators intended to disrupt the official Independence Day celebrations, including the military parade, planned on Tbilisi's central Rustaveli Avenue on May 26 and were therefore intentionally provoking clash with the police, which is obvious not only through the released video recordings but also through the assessments made by the representatives of international community. Tbilisi City Hall, in an official statement released at 8:00 pm on May 25, had requested that the protest organizers move the demonstration to another area and offered them several alternative venues, so that they would not disrupt the Independence Day celebrations (including a military parade). But the radical leaders refused. Later, at 11:30 pm, a City Hall representative approached the protest organizers to personally ask them to fulfill City Hall's legitimate and legal request – making clear that after 12 midnight on May 26, the rally would be considered illegal. Unfortunately, the organizers again refused to comply and several hundred protesters remained in front of Parliament.

On May 26, 2011, at about 00:10 am, the police had to undertake a legal and legitimate operation to clear a group of protesters who had occupied an area near Parliament at Rustaveli Avenue. In few cases, the police was compelled to use water cannons, rubber bullets, and tear gas to disperse groups of violent demonstrators. Riot police was not armed, it only had batons. The orders of riot police, however, included only the dispersal of rally by using minimally required force. A number of protesters were detained for resisting the police. Let me emphasize that the police is one of the most trusted institutions in the country and they take the preservation of that trust seriously.

I have to inform you with deep sorrow that as a result, two people, one policeman and one demonstrator died and a total of 37 people were injured, including 8 police officers, 1 journalist, and 27 civilians. The two people were killed when they were hit by cars carrying the organizer of the rally, Nino Burjanadze, her family members, and several others who left the protest area driving at high speed through the corridor created by the police for the protesters to leave the protest area on Rustaveli Avenue. Relevant video footage is available on the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia.

Criminal cases have been opened only against the drivers of the two cars that hit and killed one civilian and one police officer on May 26, as well as against few protesters who violently attacked and crushed a police car on May 22 in the vicinity of the Georgian Public Broadcaster building. None of the organizers of the protests have been detained.

In addition, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has addressed the unfounded allegations regarding citizens who purportedly went missing after the illegal May 26 demonstration was dispersed. On May 27, the MIA released a list of 103 detainees; since then, no one notified the police about any additional missing people.

Unfortunately, it cannot be overruled that there were isolated stand-alone cases of excessive use of force by some policemen. Government will take closer look at these allegations.

Furthermore, let me bring to your attention several evidences that were disclosed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and that reveal the real plans of the extreme political elements to provoke violence and confrontation:

On May 26, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia released an audio recording that reveals that prior to the start of the protests, Nino Burjanadze and her son, Anzor Bitsadze, discussed scenarios for violently overthrowing the government, including fostering civil war and bloodshed. On the audio recording, Anzor Bitsadze is heard saying that the goal of overthrowing the government is worth the lives of 100-500 men. On the same recording, Nino Burjanadze predicts that 30 000 demonstrators would gather for the rally. Anzor Bitsadze says that he believes that the army is weak and that if the Kojori Special Tasks Battalion dares to shoot at the protesters, they will have to deal with the Russian Military Intelligence's GRU Special Task Forces.

On May 26, 2011, in the village of Kinstvisi in Georgia's central Shida Kartli region, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) detained a group of 24 armed men. They are members of the newly established "Nationalist-Religious Movement," which is aligned with the "People's Assembly," led by Nino Burjanadze, and its paramilitary wing, "Sworn-in-brothers." The evidence gathered thus far indicates that the group of 24 detained criminals was directed from Moscow by Teimuraz Khachishvili. He formerly was one of the leaders of a notorious paramilitary group, "Mkhedrioni," and also served as Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia in early 1990s. He spent 7 years in prison for organizing a terrorist attack in 1995 that targeted Georgia's former president, Eduard Shevardnadze, and is currently residing in the Russian Federation. The evidence also clearly indicates that leaders and members of this criminal group coordinated their actions with Nino Burjanadze's husband, Badri Bitsadze, and other leading members of the "People's Assembly."

According to the testimony of one of its members, on May 26 this armed group planned to move from the village of Kinstvisi to the village of Igoeti, on the central highway of Georgia, where it would be joined by a larger armed group led by T. Khachishvili. He had planned to sneak into the country through the Russian-occupied Georgian territory of Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia in order to join the violent protests in Tbilisi and seek to provoke massive disorder.

On May 27, the Ministry of Internal Affairs released a new video recording in which leaders of the radical opposition movement "People's Assembly," together with members of its "Sworn-in-brothers" wing (a group of about 3,700 men), are seen making preparations to spark violence during the recent demonstrations in Tbilisi and Batumi. They discuss instigating clashes with the police by using sticks, shields, slingshots, and other improvised weapons, as well as using Molotov cocktails to set police cars aflame.

On May 30, the MIA released videotaped testimonies of several detainees, as well as intercepts of their telephone communications among each other and with individuals in Russia. These recordings—which were the result of court-approved sting operations—reveal plans to provoke violence during the recent demonstrations in Tbilisi. The conspirators aimed to storm the headquarters of the Georgian Public Broadcaster, as

well as other public buildings, to set police vehicles aflame, and to violently resist the police.

Video evidences of all mentioned facts are available on the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Let me assure you once again that the Government remains fully committed to doing everything possible to enable all Georgians to freely exercise their democratic rights of assembly and expression, while protecting the safety of all citizens and safeguarding the civil liberties of all those who choose to demonstrate.

Thank You.