

Joint statement of the "Group of Friends of Georgia"

03 September 2020 15:00

Delivered to the 1279th meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council, 3 September 2020

1. This statement is delivered on behalf of Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.
2. We reaffirm our full support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.
3. Twelve years since the Russian military invasion of Georgia, we remain deeply concerned over the continued occupation of parts of the territory of Georgia and underline the need for the peaceful resolution of the conflict based on full respect for the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act.
4. We call upon the Russian Federation to fulfill immediately its clear obligation under the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement to withdraw its forces to pre-conflict positions, as well as its other commitments under the ceasefire agreement, and to reverse its recognition of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions as independent states.
5. We are concerned by the intensified provocations by the Russian Federation and the regimes in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali that continued unabated amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. We are particularly concerned over the installation of barbed wire fences and other artificial barriers along the administrative boundary lines (ABLs) of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, and the lengthy closure of so-called crossing points in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions along the ABLs. These actions have destabilized the situation on the ground and severely impacted the security, safety, well-being, and humanitarian conditions of civilians in conflict-affected areas, particularly in Akhalkalaki and Gali districts. The deaths of more than a dozen who were deprived of the possibility of getting prompt and adequate medical care, due to the closures of the so-called crossing points since September last year, is another tragic illustration of the grave consequences of the continuing restrictions on the freedom of movement for the local population. We are deeply concerned by continuous detentions and kidnappings along the South Ossetia ABL including the shooting and wounding of Georgian citizen Zaza Gakheladze on July 11, 2020. We call for the International Committee of the Red Cross to be provided prompt access to all detainees, and further for immediate release of those under illegal custody.
6. We support the Geneva International Discussions (GID) as an important format to address the security, human rights, and humanitarian challenges stemming from the unresolved Russia-Georgia conflict. We underline the necessity of progress on the core issues of the discussions, including on the non-use of force, establishing international security arrangements in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and ensuring the safe, dignified, and voluntary return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees in accordance with international law.
7. We express our support for the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) in Ergneti and Gali and emphasize the important role they can have in preventing the escalation of the conflict and in helping protect the safety and security of people on the ground. We express our great concern over the lengthy suspension of the Gali and Ergneti IPRMs. Acknowledging the resumption of Ergneti IPRM on July 30, 2020, we stress the necessity for resuming the meetings in Gali without further delay or pre-conditions, and underscore importance of their functioning in full respect of the founding principles and ground rules of the IPRMs.
8. We reaffirm our unwavering support to the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) and call upon the Russian Federation to allow the EUMM to implement its mandate in full, including by enabling the EUMM's access on both sides of the administrative boundary lines.
9. We reiterate our deep concerns over the increased Russian military exercises and build up in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. We welcome Georgia's compliance with the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement and Georgia's unilateral commitment not to use force, and we call on the Russian Federation to reciprocate, and to affirm and implement a commitment not to use force against Georgia.
10. We remain deeply concerned over the ethnic discrimination against Georgians residing in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and about human rights abuses, including the reported use of torture, destruction of Georgian IDP houses, and severe violations of rights related to freedom of movement, residence and property. We support the voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees to the places of their origin in safety and dignity. We call on the Russian Federation to enable full and unfettered access by international human rights organisations to the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
11. We are following closely the case of the death of Georgian citizen Irakli Kvaratskhelia in detention at the Russian Military base in Georgia's Abkhazia region.
12. We condemn the killing of Georgian citizens Archil Tatumashvili, Giga Otkhozoria, and Davit Basharuli, and urge the Russian Federation, as the state exercising effective control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, to remove any obstacles to bringing the perpetrators to justice. In this context, we reiterate our support for Georgia's preventive steps aimed at eradication of the sense of impunity for crimes committed in its territory under the Russian Federation's control and note the adoption of the Otkhozoria-Tatumashvili List by the Government of Georgia.

13. We welcome the Georgian Government's policy of dialogue with the Russian Federation in order to de-escalate tensions with full respect for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

14. We support the peace initiative of the Government of Georgia, 'A Step to a Better Future', aimed at improving the humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of people residing in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and at fostering confidence building among divided communities to the benefit of all affected people. We welcome the program's initial successes, including the launch of its education programs and the "Enterprise for a Better Future" grants program, which already registered high interest and engagement of communities from both occupied territories, as well as the establishment of the Peace Fund for a Better Future, and we look forward to supporting its continued implementation. We encourage Georgia to work further with the OSCE and other multilateral organisations to promote confidence-building measures on the ground. We also encourage Georgia to keep the Permanent Council informed of its progress in addressing developments on the ground and in further strengthening its democratic institutions and processes.

15. We encourage the OSCE's engagement in the process of finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Georgia. We regret the closure of the OSCE mission to Georgia in 2009 and encourage the OSCE participating States to decide on the re-opening of the OSCE cross-dimensional mission in Georgia, including a monitoring capacity able to operate unhindered across the administrative boundary lines. The re-opening of the mission would strengthen considerably the OSCE's engagement in the GID and IPRMs, and in implementation of confidence-building measures.

16. The Group of Friends of Georgia will continue to raise awareness of the conflict and of developments on the ground, hold Russia accountable for its obligations and commitments, and advocate for the conflict's peaceful resolution.

