

Twenty-First Century in the OSCE Region

The Status of the Istanbul Commitments regarding Georgia and their Relationship to the Adapted CFE Treaty

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Distinguished Colleagues,

It is my honor to attend the hearings “Twenty-First Century Security in the OSCE Region.” I thank you for your continuing interest in the critical issues of arms control and security in Europe.

Georgia considers the CFE Treaty as a cornerstone of the European security and, like other nations, is greatly interested in seeing the Adapted Treaty enter into force. It must be emphasized, that since the Istanbul OSCE Summit of 1999, Georgia has done its utmost to foster the complete implementation of all obligations undertaken in the Istanbul Joint Statement.

As you know, the Istanbul Joint Statement provided for the withdrawal of the Russian military personnel and equipment and the closure of Russian military bases on the territory of Georgia. Georgia considers the full implementation of the commitments as a necessary precondition for the ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty. This is a view shared by almost all signatories to the CFE Treaty

There has been progress in implementing the Joint Statement, but much remains to be done.

In particular, the Russian side fulfilled its obligations concerning the reduction in the levels of Russian Treaty-Limited Equipment (TLE) before 30th of December 2000, the withdrawal or utilization of the TLE located at the Russian military base at Vaziani and the repair facilities in Tbilisi, the withdrawal of the Vaziani Russian military bases from the territory of Georgia by 1st of July 2001.

The Joint statement called also for Georgia to assist in the process of reduction and withdrawal of the Russian forces by providing conditions necessary for their unimpeded withdrawal. Georgia has fully complied with this requirement. The financial assistance provided by the international community through OSCE Voluntary Fund was also important in facilitating the Russian withdrawals to date.

Finally, the Joint Statement stated that Russia and Georgia would complete negotiations regarding the duration and modalities of the functioning of the Russian military bases at Batumi and Akhalkalaki within the territory of Georgia during the year of 2000. Despite our best efforts – with the strong support of the OSCE, the US and many others – agreement with Russia was not achieved until May 30, 2005 with the signing of a Foreign Ministerial statement in which Russia agreed to complete the withdrawal of the remaining Military Bases and other facilities by 2008. This Statement was codified in an agreement signed on March 31, 2006 in Sochi. Implementation of the 2006 Sochi agreement is underway. The base at Akhalkalaki was already closed, all Russian TLE were withdrawn from Georgia and the Russian military base at Batumi will be closed next year.

| The most significant outstanding issue is the Russian military base at Gudauta. The facilities of this base have not been legally transferred to Georgian authority. According to information provided by Russia to the Georgian side Gudauta contains combat helicopters, about 60 vehicles, more than 200 active military personnel. In fact, this means that today, the base is actively used by the Russian military forces. And the access to the base has never been provided to the Georgian Government or to the international observers to independently verify any aspect of its scope or operations except the OSCE group's visit in 2000 with limited scope and without possibility to make a conclusion on the modalities of the base. At the same time, Georgia has never provided host-nation consent for any military base at Gudauta and, therefore, the continued Russian presence has no basis in international law. Until Russia has completely withdrawn its forces from Gudauta, a core part of the Istanbul Commitment will remain unfulfilled. Georgia has been and remains committed to negotiate with Russia on this issue to aid and facilitate the entry into force of the Adapted CFE Treaty. Georgia would like nothing more than to see this chapter of history closed once and for all.

At this point, allow me to express Georgia's concern regarding the Russian decision to suspend its compliance with the CFE Treaty. This unfortunate decision jeopardizes a cornerstone of the OSCE regional security system and we stand with the international community in urging Russia to return to compliance with the CFE Treaty. We are concerned about a potential Russian military build up in the flank zones which would further complicate regional security. Georgia supports the idea of a parallel action plan introduced by the US, and we believe that a common approach by the CFE community is essential to preserve the CFE mechanisms and its important confidence building measure and security roles.

Finally, let me also touch on the issue of the effectiveness of OSCE efforts to monitor weapons trade, enhance border security and combat terrorism. Unfortunately, we have direct experience what it means to have uncontrolled borders. The so called "grey zones" that exist on the territory of Georgia as a

result of the conflicts are a danger to Georgia and to the region as a whole. While we value the efforts of the OSCE, it has not been enough. Russia vetoed the extension of the Border Monitoring Operation in 2004, the Roki tunnel on our northern border remains inaccessible to OSCE monitors, and OSCE freedom of movement in South Ossetia is limited. The OSCE mission has expressed its serious concerns about the presence of heavy military equipment (over 100 mm calibre) brought into the zone of conflict by the Ossetian forces. Likewise, the OSCE has reported a build-up of armoured combat vehicles by the Ossetians. Tskhinvali region is landlocked and the only way for a military build-up in this region is by the transfers of weapons and armaments to the secessionist regimes from and by the Russian Federation – ostensibly a “mediator” in the conflict resolution process. These are the concrete problems Georgia is facing that result from uncontrolled borders in the “grey zones” both in the S. Ossetia region as well as in Abkhazia.

Georgia supports the involvement of the OSCE in its historic mission of preventing and resolving conflicts. But we also recognize the limitations of the existing arrangements in “grey zones” and support greater involvement of other international actors committed to preserving Georgia’s territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Thank you for the opportunity to address these important issues, and for your continued interest in the security and freedom of my country, and of Europe as a whole.