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World Condemns Russian Actions in Abkhazia, Georgia

NATO, EU, OSCE, US & others call for reversal of illegal actions by Moscow that dangerously increase risk of conflict & violate Georgian sovereignty

I. INTRODUCTION

Leaders around the world have condemned Russia's recent actions in Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia for violating Georgia's sovereignty and for recklessly increasing the risk of conflict in the region. Russia's recent moves include:

- On March 6, Russia unilaterally withdrew from a long-standing CIS economic and arms embargo on the secessionist leadership of Abkhazia.
- On April 16, Moscow established direct legal links with the Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a de facto recognition that in effect integrates these two regions into Russia's legal space and violates both international law and Georgian sovereignty.
- On April 20, a Russian fighter jet shot down an unarmed Georgian aircraft over Georgian airspace, an act of aggression confirmed by UNOMIG (a UN mission on the ground), and most recently by OSCE.
- In direct contravention of peacekeeping norms, Russia introduced offensive military troops and heavy weaponry to the Abkhazia region, actions verified by UNOMIG.
- In May—in a clear, imminent, and unacceptable military threat—Russia sent 400 "railroad forces" to prepare Abkhaz railways to transport military equipment to its Ochamchire base and to extend that network to the central government controlled Kodori gorge in Upper Abkhazia.

Below are excerpts from statements made by leaders and institutions from around the world in response to Russia's recent actions (statements appear in reverse chronological order).

II. INTERNATIONAL REACTION

"Noting the growing instability within the conflict zones in Georgia against the backdrop of the decision of the Government of the Russian Federation to strengthen official ties with secessionist regimes in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions...

"Concerned by the unilateral decision of the Government of the Russian Federation to move additional military personnel into the Abkhazia region of Georgia under the aegis of the Commonwealth of Independent States Peacekeeping Force, of which Russia is the only troop-contributing country...

"Acknowledging that the Russian Federation's issuance of passports to residents of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions of Georgia, and the Government of the Russian Federation's assertion of the right to defend these people by military force constitute a challenge to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia...

"Noting that the Government of Georgia has offered extensive autonomy to Abkhazia and South Ossetia within the framework of a sovereign Georgian state...

"The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly: Urges the Government of the Russian Federation, in its contacts with the de facto authorities of the secessionist regions of Georgia, to refrain from maintaining ties with those regions in any manner that would constitute a challenge to the sovereignty of Georgia...

"Urges the Russian Federation to abide by OSCE standards and generally accepted international norms with respect to the threat or use of force to resolve conflicts in relations with other Participating States.

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Resolution (July 1, 2008)

http://www.oscepa.org/oscepa_content/documents/astana/Supplementary%20Items/PDF%20Files%20ENGLISH/09.%20Expressing%20Concern%20over%20the%20Security%20-%20ENG.pdf

(continued)

"Georgia has made a choice to join NATO. The United States and the nations of NATO welcome this choice, and Georgia's neighbors should respect it."

"We do not believe that any outside power – neither Russia nor any other – should have a sphere of influence over these countries [referring to Black Sea and Caucasus region]; no outside power should be able to threaten, pressure, or block the sovereign choice of these nations to join with the institutions of Europe and the transatlantic family if they so choose and we so choose."

Daniel Fried, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State (June 18, 2008)

<http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18570&search=>

"We reiterate our commitment to the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders, and call on all parties, in particular on Russia, to support these principles. We welcome the Georgian President's recent peace initiatives on Abkhazia, as well as the recent direct talks between the parties, hoping that they will contribute to a peaceful resolution to the conflict."

2008 EU-U.S. Summit Declaration (June 10, 2008)

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Press_Releases/June/0610EU_USA_Declaration.html

"The European Parliament expresses its deep disapproval at Russia's announcement that it would establish official ties with institutions within the separatist authorities of South Ossetia and Abkhazia," the Parliament said in a resolution agreed last week, adding that it "deplores, in this regard, the decision taken by the Russian Ministry of Defence on 31 May 2008 to send its forces to Abkhazia to restore the rail and road infrastructure in the breakaway region in accordance with the presidential decree."

European Parliament Resolution (June 5, 2008)

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/030-30836-156-06-23-903-20080604IPR30820-04-06-2008-2008-false/default_en.htm

"I am concerned by the current deployment of several hundred Russian military personnel into the Georgian region of Abkhazia. "This deployment of Russian Railroad Forces does not appear to have any legal basis; it is not taking place in the context of the CIS peacekeeping mission, and it is against the express wishes of the Georgian Government. "

"As such, this deployment is clearly in contravention of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which NATO strongly supports. These forces should be withdrawn, and both Russia and Georgia should engage quickly in a high-level and open dialogue to de-escalate tensions."

NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer (June 3, 2008)

<http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-076e.html>

The United States is dismayed by Russia's Defense Ministry announcement on May 31 that it intends to send more military forces, including railroad construction troops, into the Georgian region of Abkhazia without the consent of the Georgian Government. This announcement is particularly difficult to understand in light of Georgia's forthcoming statement at the UN Security Council on May 30 that it was suspending UAV flights over Abkhazia, as well as the constructive efforts by President Saakashvili and others to invigorate the Abkhazia peace process.

Sean McCormack, Spokesman of U.S. Department of State (May 31, 2008)

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2008/may/105472.htm>

"The Council reiterated the European Union's serious concern about the recent series of events that have raised tensions between Georgia and the Russian Federation. In this context, the Council reaffirmed its full commitment to the principles of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders, as most recently reaffirmed in the UNSC Resolution 1808 of 15 April 2008."

Council of the European Union Conclusions on Georgia (May 26, 2008)

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/Council_Conclusions/May/0526_GAERC-Georgia.pdf

"Absent compelling evidence to the contrary, this leads to the conclusion that the aircraft belonged to the Russian air force...."

"From a strict peacekeeping perspective, therefore, the Mission considers that enforcement action by third-parties—in this case the Russian Federation—in the zone of conflict undercuts the ceasefire and separation of forces regime."

UN Observer Mission in Georgia, Report on Downing of Georgian Aircraft (May 26, 2008)

http://www.unomig.org/data/other/080526_unomig_report.pdf

“Recent events, such as the downing of a reconnaissance drone and the deployment of additional Russian forces in the Abkhazia region of Georgia, have raised tensions and made a difficult situation worse.”

“Canada fully supports the United Nations’ leading role in resolving the protracted conflict in Abkhazia, and stresses the importance of full cooperation and responsible actions from all involved in the peace process. We reiterate the necessity of peaceful and constructive negotiations leading to a resolution of this conflict in a manner that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia.”

Maxime Bernier, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada (May 12, 2008)

http://w01.international.gc.ca/minpub/Publication.aspx?isRedirect=True&publication_id=386168&language=E&docnumber=112

“We welcome and praise Georgia for remarkably restraint response to series of provocative steps by Russia in recent weeks,” he said at a news conference. “We find Russian statements talking about the possible threat of Russia launching military operations against Georgia as deeply troubling.”

“We find those actions, as well as lifting of CIS military sanctions and of course the unilateral decision to increase Russia’s CIS peacekeepers as working against cause of peaceful settlement of Abkhazia conflict.”

Mathew Bryza,

U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs (May 9, 2008)

<http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17800&search>

“We do not like the heated rhetoric that has come out of Russia. Sometimes Georgian rhetoric is hot as well. While we have urged restraint on Georgia, there is a difference between a very small vulnerable country and a very large country that we have to keep in mind. Even though we do counsel restraint on the Georgians, they are the vulnerable party and it is their territory that is under threat.”

Daniel Fried, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State (May 8, 2008)

<http://www.voanews.com/english/2008-05-08-voa65.cfm>

“The recent decisions taken by the Russian Federation on strengthening links with the separatist de facto authorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia represent an erosion of Georgia’s territorial integrity, and these measures have increased expectations of future recognition in the two separatist regions and, therefore, undermine efforts to find a peaceful solution. The Commission therefore calls on the Russian Federation to withdraw these decisions – or, at least, not to implement them, as the European Union has also clearly expressed in its statement.”

“We have welcomed President Saakashvili’s proposed new peace initiative for Abkhazia. I think it is important that this is developed in a way that constitutes a basis for a constructive dialogue with all parties involved. That means, in the first instance, with the Abkhaz themselves, who I hope will be ready – and I hope also will be allowed – to engage in the diplomatic process.”

“I think that an overall revision of peace mechanisms, as for instance suggested by the UN Secretary General in his latest report on Abkhazia, could help bring forward the peaceful settlement of these conflicts, if this is supported by all parties. We should all stand ready to play a more active role in supporting these efforts.

Let us not forget that, in the past four years, Georgia has made tremendous efforts to move forward toward a democratic and market-oriented society.”

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations (May 7, 2008)

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20080507+ITEM-012+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

“The EU reiterates its firm commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders as reaffirmed in the UNSC resolution 1808 of 15 April 2008. The decision of the Russian Federation jeopardises the implementation of these principles. The EU calls on the Russian Federation not to implement its decision. Furthermore the EU considers that this decision risks further increasing tensions and undermines the international peace efforts where the Russian Federation participates too.

“The EU welcomes the fact that the Georgian President put forward a new initiative for the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, and hopes that it will contribute to a constructive dialogue on the issue. The EU stands ready to contribute to these efforts.”

Presidency of the European Union (May 2, 2008)

http://www.eu2008.si/en/News_and_Documents/CFSP_Statements/May/0502MZZ_Gruzija.html

"It is extremely important that Russia respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are integral parts of Georgia. They are not lands that are somehow disconnected from the Georgian state. And so, when things are done, they need to be done through the Georgian state."

Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Secretary of State (May 2, 2008)

<http://www.reuters.com/article/asiaCrisis/idUSL01155971>

"Some of these Russian actions in terms of troop buildups along the border certainly risk destabilizing the region, and we would ask Russia to reconsider some of the steps that they have taken recently."

Sean McCormack, Spokesman of U.S. Department of State (April 30, 2008)

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2008/apr/104228.htm>

"...I reaffirm full support for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. I express deep concern over any attempt to infringe on Georgia's territorial integrity and... call on the Russian Federation to refrain from any unilateral action that runs counter to international law. Based on the information confirming the ethnic cleansing conducted in Abkhazia, I urge the international community to condemn these [Russia's] steps unilaterally."

"The Republic of Poland is determined to press the forums of the UN, European Union, NATO and other international organizations to take immediate steps envisaged by the international agreements to ensure respect for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and to put an end to such actions of the Russian Federation which pose a threat to Georgia's independence and contradict the norms of international law."

Lech Kaczynski, President of Poland

"The international community reaffirmed its support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia in its internationally recognized border through resolution 1808 of the UN Security Council. We support without reservations the efforts of the OSCE and the Group of Friends of the UN Secretary-General to find a full and lasting settlement of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia."

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France

"The Russian decree we think is provocative, counterproductive. and ultimately wrong. We think that this kind of decree should be withdrawn or revoked.... One possible interpretation is that the refusal, the opposition to giving MAP by some members, some allies, was perceived in Moscow as a green light to proceed with this rather dangerous step. Georgia's response (to Putin's decree) has been remarkably and commendably calm."

Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves (April 19, 2008)

<http://www.president.ee/en/duties/interviews.php?gid=112536>

"The April 16 Russian Presidential Instructions...challenges Georgia's territorial integrity and would not be in keeping with Russia's status as a 'facilitator' of the peace process. We urge Russia to live up to its statements of support for the principles of Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity and to repeal the April 16 instructions."

"... we also regret the Russian decision to withdraw unilaterally from Commonwealth of Independent States economic and military sanctions on Abkhazia.... We believe the withdrawal of sanctions undermines the peace process."

"The United States welcomes the new initiatives put forward by the Georgian president to advance a negotiated political resolution of the Abkhazia conflict. We urge the de facto authorities in Abkhazia to seriously consider these initiatives, as well as the previous confidence building measures proposed in Geneva in 2007."

United States State Department (April 18, 2008)

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2008/apr/103732.htm>

"Yesterday's news that Moscow will be taking a number of measures to establish closer ties with the Georgian areas of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is deeply disquieting. Georgia's territorial integrity contributes to the stability of the wider Caucasus region, where not least Russia should have a very great interest in stability in particular."

"Moreover, this comes after Georgia presented far-reaching new proposals on how the conflict over Abkhazia could be settled. In my opinion these proposals could form an important basis for political talks on the question—but these would, if anything, be undermined by measures of the kind Moscow now seems to be considering."

"If measures are now taken that create the impression that this territorial integrity is in fact being violated—and with the aim of actually integrating these areas with Russia—it may have serious consequences. A political conflict in the immediate neighbourhood of the future winter Olympics is not in anyone's interest—least of all Russia's."

Carl Bildt, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden (April 17, 2008)

<http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/7967/nocache/true/a/103337/dictionary/true>

"Such actions destabilize the situation and threaten the security and stability of the whole region. I urge Russia to respect Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty and to continue dialogue with Georgia's government. I welcome the position expressed by NATO Secretary General Jaap De Hoop Scheffer regarding Georgia's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence, and I encourage EU governing bodies and EU Member States to have and state their clear position regarding Russia's actions."

Valdas Adamkus, President of Lithuania (April 17, 2008)

<http://www.president.lt/en/news.full/8971>

"Russia is openly siding with the separatists, calling into question Russia's facilitator role... Georgia understandably views the instructions as a provocation and a serious challenge to its sovereignty and territorial integrity."

"This move, coupled with Russia's recent lifting of CIS sanctions that opens the possibility for military assistance to Abkhazia, has significantly increased tensions in an already volatile region. In this regard, we expect Russia to live up to its recent assurances that Russia will abide by its international commitments and responsibilities not to supply weapons to conflict zones and to maintain Russian sanctions on the transfer of military services and equipment to separatist regions."

Julie Finley, U.S. ambassador to the OSCE (April 17, 2008)

http://osce.usmission.gov/archive/2008/04/st_041708_georgia.pdf

"I am deeply concerned by the actions Russia has taken to establish legal links with the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. NATO Allies, at their recent Summit in Bucharest, reiterated their support for the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of Georgia. The Russian steps undermine that sovereignty. I urge the Russian Federation to reverse these measures."

NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer (April 16, 2008)

<http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-056e.html>

"The UK is concerned that the proposed package of Russian unilateral measures relating to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia, would only increase tensions in the region."

Sir Brian Fall, the UK Special Representative for the South Caucasus (April 16, 2008)

<http://www.britishembassy.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1054572034881&a=KArticle&aid=1208248001135>