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World Deplores Russia’s Illegal Attempt to Recognize the “Independence” of Georgia’s Territories of South Ossetia & Abkhazia

EU, US, European Parliament, NATO, OSCE express unyielding support for Georgia’s territorial integrity; Moscow fails to win backing even from closest allies

I. INTRODUCTION

Leaders around the world have deplored Russia’s decision to illegally recognize as “independent” the Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Moscow’s latest provocative move follows Russia’s invasion of Georgia on August 7 and its subsequent campaign of ethnic cleansing that has driven over 100,000 Georgians from the occupied territories and the adjacent “security zones” declared by Moscow. It is in direct violation of international law, dozens of UN Security Council decisions, and of the six-point ceasefire agreement negotiated by President Nicolas Sarkozy of France and signed by Russia, Georgia, and the French President.

Despite its strenuous diplomatic efforts and fierce political pressure, Moscow failed to win the backing of even its closest allies. Members of the Commonwealth of Independent States and of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), as well as allies such as Iran and Venezuela, have not recognized the two Georgian territories. The SCO, whose members include China and the four Central Asian states, issued a statement stressing the importance of territorial integrity in resolving the conflicts—a clear snub of Moscow’s actions.

Almost all countries rejected Russia’s attempts to draw parallels between the territories and Kosovo; they underscored that intervention in Kosovo was aimed at preventing ethnic cleansing, while in the case of Georgia’ Russia has used ethnic cleansing as a brutal tool to advance its annexation of these Georgian regions.

Rape, pillage, the burning of houses, and executions have been used by Russia and its affiliated militias to drive over 100,000 ethnic Georgians from the territories—actions that have been documented by international human rights organizations, respected international journalists, and other observers. This ethnic cleansing literally cleared the ground for the subsequent declaration of independence by South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The move could have profound consequences relations between Russia and the West. The EU responded to the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by convening a Summit on September 1, only the first time an emergency European Council summit has been called since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States.

EU leaders decided to respond to Russia’s latest provocation by, among other measures, sending monitors to Georgia; postponing talks with Russia on a strategic partnership until Moscow withdraws its troops from Georgia; and speeding the European integration of Georgia by fast-tracking a free-trade agreement and visa facilitation.

Sections II and III below capture some of the reactions by the international community to Russia’s attempt to recognize the “independence” of Georgia’s territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

II. INTERNATIONAL REACTION

"The European Union strongly condemns this decision. This is contrary to the principles of the independence, the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Georgia."

Statement by the Presidency of the European Union

<http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/1219767158.89>

"The recognition of independence for South Ossetia and Abkhazia violates fundamental OSCE principles. As all OSCE participating States, Russia is committed to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of others."

"Russia should follow OSCE principles by respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia. Russia should immediately withdraw all troops from Georgia and implement the ceasefire agreement, including the modalities defined in the 16 August letter of French President Nicolas Sarkozy. The international community cannot accept unilaterally established buffer zones."

OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb

<http://formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=135447&nodeid=15146&contentlan=2&culture=en-US>

"Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is absolutely not acceptable.... This contradicts principles of territorial integrity as a fundamental right."

Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany

<http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19297&search=>

"Our country is gravely concerned about the move.... Our country hopes that Russia ... will take responsible actions for the region's stability."

Statement by the Foreign Ministry of Japan

(26 August 2008)

http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6676&Itemid=65

"I reject the decision of the Russian Government to extend recognition to the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia. This is in direct violation of numerous UN Security Council resolutions regarding Georgia's territorial integrity, resolutions that Russia itself has endorsed. Russia's actions in recent weeks call into question Russia's commitment to peace and security in the Caucasus. NATO firmly supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, and calls on Russia to respect these principles"

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Secretary General of NATO

<http://www.unomig.org/media/headlines/?id=11277&y=2008&m=08&d=26>

"Canada is gravely concerned about Russia's recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This recognition violates Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty and is contrary to UN Security Council resolutions supported by Russia, as well as to the six-point peace plan brokered by President Nicolas Sarkozy on behalf of the EU. Canada supports the democratic and legitimate government of Georgia. Russia must fulfill its international obligations, reconsider its actions and cooperate fully with the international community to resolve the crisis in Georgia in a peaceful manner."

David Emerson, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada

http://w01.international.gc.ca/minpub/Publication.aspx?isRedirect=True&publication_id=386468&language=E&docnumber=184

Russia's recognition does not apply in an international legal framework.... An ethnic-based balkanisation of the Caucasus is a serious danger for all"

Franco Frattini, Foreign Minister of Italy

(26 August 2008)

http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6675&Itemid=65

"It will also not work. It is contrary to the principles of the peace agreement, which Russia recently agreed, and to recent Russian statements. It takes no account of the views of the hundreds of thousands of Georgians and others who have been forced to abandon their homes in the two territories.... [The decision] further inflames an already tense situation in the region."

"We fully support Georgia's independence and territorial integrity, which cannot be changed by decree from Moscow," the British foreign secretary said. "We again call on Russia to abide by international law as the basis for resolving this crisis; and to implement urgently and in full Russia's commitments to withdraw forces from Georgia to pre-7 August positions."

"I am holding talks today with international partners and will be visiting Ukraine tomorrow to ensure the widest possible coalition against Russian aggression in Georgia."

David Miliband, UK Foreign Secretary

<http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19302&search=>

"I condemn the decision by President Medvedev to recognise the independence of the two Georgian regions of South-Ossetia and Abkhazia. This decision seriously jeopardises the possibility of a peaceful resolution of the conflict in line with the principles of international law. It blatantly contradicts the fundamental principles of the Council of Europe, the commitments taken by the Russian Federation towards the Council of Europe, as well as the repeated assurances given by the Russian authorities in favour of the full respect of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia. "

Carl Bildt, Foreign Minister of Sweden

[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR598\(2008\)&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR598(2008)&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE)

"This deeply regrettable decision is contrary to the principles of Georgia's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Moreover, it can only complicate the urgent task of finding political solutions to the acute difficulties in the region and to the wider international tensions which have developed over the past weeks."

Micheál Martin TD, Foreign Minister of Ireland

<http://foreignaffairs.gov.ie/home/index.aspx?id=72518>

"Greece gave its full support to the need for immediate implementation of the 6-point peace plan to end the crisis – which was signed by both Moscow and Tbilisi – and we gave our full support to the need to respect Georgia's territorial integrity.... We express our dismay at today's developments and we subscribe to the French Presidency's statement condemning the decision to recognise the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in their secession from Georgia."

Dora Bakoyanis, Foreign Minister of Greece

http://www.mfa.gr/www.mfa.gr/Articles/en-US/27082008_SB1201.htm

"Since the United States is a permanent member of the Security Council, this simply will be dead on arrival in the Security Council..... [The move] puts Russia in opposition to the Security Council resolution to which it is a party."

Condoleeza Rice, US Secretary of State

<http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=19298&search=>

"Russia's move is a deliberate breach of international law and the principles of stability in Europe. Estonia, like all European Union and NATO member states, adheres firmly to the principles of Georgia's territorial integrity. This step clearly shows that Russia does not want to find a solution to the conflict situation, but would rather intensify it further," said Paet. "This decision does nothing to help stabilise the situation or improve the prospect of peace in the Caucasus."

Urmas Paet, Foreign Minister of Estonia

http://www.vm.ee/eng/kat_138/10067.html?arhiiv_kuup=kuup_2008

"The United States condemns the decision by the Russian President to recognize as independent states the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This decision is inconsistent with numerous United Nations Security Council Resolutions that Russia has voted for in the past, and is also inconsistent with the French-brokered six-point ceasefire agreement which President Medvedev signed on August 12, 2008. The six-point agreement offered a peaceful way forward to resolve the conflict. We expect Russia to live up to its international commitments, reconsider this irresponsible decision, and follow the approach set out in the six-point agreement.

"The territorial integrity and borders of Georgia must be respected, just as those of Russia or any other country. Russia's action only exacerbates tensions and complicates diplomatic negotiations. In accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolutions that remain in force, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are within the internationally recognized borders of Georgia, and they must remain so."

George Bush, President of the United States

http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=78&info_id=7718

"This step goes against all the principles of Georgian sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, which Russia has repeatedly accepted in the UN Security Council.... The Georgian conflict must be solved through dialogue and international mediation, not through unilateral measures.... The Russian declaration in no way alters our position: Austria and the EU will continue to defend Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty over its entire land."

Ursula Plassnik, Foreign Minister of Austria

http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6735&Itemid=65

"Foreign Minister Maris Riekstins condemns the decision by the President of the Russian Federation, Dmitrij Medvedev, to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Such a decision is contrary to the principles of Georgia's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, which are recognised by the United Nation's Charter, the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and the UN Security Council resolutions. The Foreign Minister expresses steadfast support to the principle of Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. The Foreign Minister calls for a political solution to the conflict in Georgia and believes that Russia's decision does not, in any way, facilitate the achievement of a settlement."

Statement by the Foreign Ministry of Latvia

<http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/press-releases/2008/August/26-4/>

"Norway emphasizes the use of peaceful means in the efforts to settle conflicts in Europe, based on the UN's assumption of respect for territorial integrity. A recognition of the breakaway Georgian regions are in breach of these assumptions. And it is not a constructive contribution to a long range and peaceful solution to the conflict."

Jonas Gahr Støre, Foreign Minister of Norway

<http://www.norwaypost.no/cgi-bin/norwaypost/imaker?id=187533>

"The decision of Russian authorities to recognise the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is causing serious worry.... This point has been repeatedly made by Foreign Minister Ivailo Kalfin and is shared by all Nato and European Union member states, which have called on Russia to withdraw its troops from Georgia immediately and have committed themselves to helping the [local] population."

Statement of the Foreign Ministry of Bulgaria

http://www.sofiaecho.com/article/bulgaria-worried-by-russia-s-recognition-of-south-ossetia-abkhazia-independence/id_31387/catid_68

III. ANNEX: FULL STATEMENTS

A. EUROPEAN COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS, 1 SEPTEMBER 2008

Brussels, 1 September 2008 (01.09)

BRUSSELS

1 SEPTEMBER 2008

The meeting of the European Council was preceded by an exposé by the President of the European Parliament, Mr Hans-Gert Pöttering, followed by an exchange of views.

1. The European Council is gravely concerned by the open conflict which has broken out in Georgia, by the resulting violence and by the disproportionate reaction of Russia. This conflict has led to great suffering on both sides. Military action of this kind is not a solution and is not acceptable. The European Council deplores the loss of human life, the suffering inflicted on the population, the number of displaced persons and refugees, and the considerable material damage.

2. The European Council strongly condemns Russia's unilateral decision to recognise the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. That decision is unacceptable and the European Union calls on other States not to recognise this proclaimed independence and asks the Commission to examine the practical consequences to be drawn. It recalls that a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict in Georgia must be based on full respect for the principles of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity recognised by international law, the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and United Nations Security Council resolutions.

3. The European Council emphasises that all European States have the right freely to determine their foreign policy and their alliances, while respecting international law and the principles of good neighbourliness and peaceful cooperation. It is also legitimate for the security interests of each to be taken into account, so long as the fundamental principles of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and the independence of States are respected.

4. The European Council is pleased that the six-point agreement achieved on 12 August on the basis of the European Union's mediation efforts has led to a ceasefire, improved delivery of humanitarian aid to the victims, and a substantial withdrawal of Russian military forces. The implementation of that plan has to be complete. The European Council calls on the parties to continue the full implementation in good faith of the agreement they have signed. The military forces which have not yet withdrawn to the lines held prior to the outbreak of hostilities must do so without delay. Besides the provision of assistance to the victims, the urgent issue at the moment is to finalise the international monitoring mechanism, in which the Union is prepared to participate, and which is provided for in point 5 of the agreement, so as to replace the Russian additional security measures in the zone adjacent to South Ossetia. It is also a matter of urgency to begin the international talks provided for in point 6 of the agreement concerning the security and stability arrangements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

5. The European Union is ready to commit itself, including through a presence on the ground, to support every effort to secure a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict in Georgia. To that end, the Member States of the European Union are making a significant contribution to strengthening the OSCE observer mission in South Ossetia, by sending observers and by making substantial material and financial contributions. The European Union has also decided on the immediate dispatch of a fact-finding mission with the task of helping to gather information and defining the modalities for an increased European

Union commitment on the ground, under the European Security and Defence Policy. The European Council invites the relevant Council bodies to conclude all the necessary preparatory work in order that a possible decision to commit such an observer mission can be taken by the Council by 15 September 2008, depending on how the situation develops, and in close coordination with the OSCE and the United Nations. To this end the European Council requests the President of the Council and the SG/HR to undertake all the necessary contacts and discussions.

6. The European Union has already supplied emergency aid. It is prepared to supply aid for reconstruction in Georgia, including the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It is ready to support confidence-building measures and the development of regional cooperation. It also decides to step up its relations with Georgia, including visa facilitation measures and the possible establishment of a full and comprehensive free trade area as soon as the conditions are met. It will take the initiative of convening an international conference shortly to assist reconstruction in Georgia and requests the Council and the Commission to start preparations for this conference.

7. The European Council notes with concern the impact which the current crisis is having on the whole of the region. The European Union considers that it is more necessary than ever to support regional cooperation and step up its relations with its eastern neighbours, in particular through its neighbourhood policy, the development of the "Black Sea Synergy" initiative and an "Eastern Partnership" which the European Council wishes to adopt in March 2009; to this end it invites the Commission to submit proposals in December 2008. In this context the European Council stresses the importance of the forthcoming summit between the European Union and Ukraine on 9 September.

8. The European Council decides to appoint a European Union Special Representative for the crisis in Georgia and asks the Council to make the necessary arrangements.

9. Recent events illustrate the need for Europe to intensify its efforts with regard to the security of energy supplies. The European Council invites the Council, in cooperation with the Commission, to examine initiatives to be taken to this end, in particular as regards diversification of energy sources and supply routes.

10. With the crisis in Georgia, relations between the EU and Russia have reached a crossroads. The European Council considers that given the interdependence between the European Union and Russia, and the global problems they are facing, there is no desirable alternative to a strong relationship, based on cooperation, trust and dialogue, respect for the rule of law and the principles recognised by the United Nations Charter and by the OSCE. It was for this reason that we launched negotiations for a new framework agreement between the Union and Russia last July.

11. We call on Russia to join with us in making this fundamental choice in favour of mutual interest, understanding and cooperation. We are convinced that it is in Russia's own interest not to isolate itself from Europe. For its part, the European Union has shown itself willing to engage in partnership and cooperation, in keeping with the principles and values on which it is based. We expect Russia to behave in a responsible manner, honouring all its commitments. The Union will remain vigilant; the European Council requests the Council, with the Commission, to conduct a careful in-depth examination of the situation and of the various aspects of EU-Russia relations; this evaluation must begin now and continue in the run-up to the forthcoming summit scheduled to take place in Nice on 14 November 2008. The European Council gives a mandate to its President to continue discussions with a view to the full application of the six-point agreement. To that end, the President of the European Council will go to Moscow on 8 September, accompanied by the President of the Commission and the High Representative. Until troops have withdrawn to the positions held prior to 7 August, meetings on the negotiation of the Partnership Agreement will be postponed.

B. REPORT ON REACTION OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

MEPs call on Russia to honour its commitments and withdraw its troops from Georgia, in a resolution adopted by the European Parliament. MEPs are in favour of a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) monitoring mission to Georgia and ask the European Commission to propose visa facilitation and readmission agreements. They also call for a boost to the EU's neighbourhood policy and reaffirm the importance of Georgia in improving EU energy security.

The resolution was adopted with 549 votes in favour, 68 against and 61 abstentions.

MEPs call on Russia to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Georgia and to honour all its commitments under the ceasefire agreement, beginning with the complete and immediate withdrawal of its troops. They strongly condemn the recognition by the Russian Federation of the independence of the breakaway Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Otherwise, MEPs call on the Council and Commission to review their policy towards Russia. They back the European Council's decision to postpone the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement negotiations until the withdrawal of the Russian troops to their positions prior to 7 August.

In order to facilitate de-mining operations, MEPs call on the Russian and Georgian authorities to provide full information concerning the areas where their armies dropped cluster bombs.

Visa facilitation and international investigation

MEPs call on the Commission to propose visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Georgia at least equivalent to those for Russia.

MEPs demand that an independent international investigation be carried in order to establish the facts and bring greater clarity to certain allegations. The House urges Georgia, which ratified the Rome Statute of the ICC, and the Russian authorities to lend support to and fully cooperate with the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

European Security and Defence Policy monitoring mission

MEPs ask the Council to consider the deployment of an ESDP (European Security and Defence Policy) monitoring mission to complement the UN and OSCE missions. MEPs welcome in particular the decision to appoint an EU Special Representative for the crisis in Georgia.

Neighbourhood policy and energy dependence

The European Neighbourhood Policy should be developed and more adapted to "the needs of our eastern partners", including a strengthening of EU involvement in the Black Sea region, according to MEPs. They back the proposal to speed up the establishment of a free trade zone with Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

The House stresses the importance of Georgia in improving EU energy security by providing an alternative to the Russian energy transit route. MEPs expect a strong EU commitment in pursuing the Nabucco pipeline project which would cross Georgia's territory. The need to diversify sources of supply is also underlined by MEPs.

Socialist group would have preferred mention of Saakashvili "inappropriate" initial action

Martin **Schulz** (PES, DE) speaking in the plenary in the vote said that the PES group would have preferred that a mention of Georgia's "inappropriate initial behaviour" at the start of the conflict be included in the joint resolution. In the negotiations with the other groups on the joint resolution this mention was not included.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/030-35955-245-09-36-903-20080902IPR35954-01-09-2008-2008-true/default_en.htm