

**CENTER FOR
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**THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF GEORGIA:
IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY**

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STEPHEN FLANAGAN: Well, good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Stephen Flanagan, senior vice president and director of the International Security Program here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. We are very pleased that you could join us this morning to hear very timely words from the speaker of the Georgian Parliament, the chairman of the Georgian Parliament, Mr. Davit Bakradze. We are delighted that he could take time out of a very busy and urgent schedule of visits here in Washington to join us. And we will turn to him in a moment.

I just want to make a brief introduction. Mr. Bakradze, before assuming his duties as chairman of the parliament in June of this year, had also previously served as minister of foreign affairs. He had been a member of parliament before that for over three years and also served in a variety of senior positions within the Georgian government, in the National Security Council and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the Ministry of Defense. He has been a member of the Council of Europe in his capacity as a member of the parliamentary group of the Council of Europe and his membership as a member of parliament and he has also studied abroad in a number of positions, including in 2001 at the NATO Defense College. His earlier training, before entering government in 1998 in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was in engineering and physics.

It is really an honor to welcome him and, as I say, we are very happy that is able to share with us at such a critical time in the history of Georgia's development after independence, to hear the latest from the efforts to continue to restore stability and the full sovereignty of Georgia. His remarks and comments afterwards will be on the record. And so without further ado, let me turn to Mr. Davit Bakradze. Welcome to CSIS.

DAVIT BAKRADZE: Okay, thank you very much, Stephen, ladies and gentlemen. It's indeed my pleasure and honor to be here and to have this opportunity to address this distinguished gathering. Thanks for reminding me my early years of my previous life when I was still an innocent physicist, Stephen. It's kind of positive sentiments for me to begin, but still, you know, now I have to deal with more important, more turbulent, and, I mean, more dangerous issues than just physics, which still remains the early love of my previous years.

So I mean, we have about hour-and-a-half, as scheduled, so I'll try to make some initial comments for about 10 to 15 minutes to give you enough time for questions. And I do hope that you will have those questions because the issue is really hot. The issue is that the – the topic of today's discussion is Russia's invasion into Georgia, implications for global security. Because we do believe that what happened these days in Georgia and what is still happening, it's not only about Georgia. And what is at stake is not only security of Georgia, as a small country, or territorial integrity of Georgia, or future of these two tiny separatist enclaves in Georgia. But what is at stake is something much larger and much more important.

So let me try and underline how we see what is at stake as a result of this crisis. First thing which is at stake is the fundamental principle of inviolability of borders. And you know, this is a fundamental principle of European and world security. This is all about Helsinki Final Act which clearly says that there should be no use of – no change of borders in Europe by use of force, and any change of borders may be done only through negotiations. And that's the principle which is the basement of such an international organization, like, for example, OSCE, is. And the fundamental question here is whether any country, however big, however strong, however important, however rich with gas and oil, whether any country is allowed to infringe this fundamental principle and change borders of the neighboring state by use of force.

Because what happened actually in Georgia, it's exactly forceful change of borders because we witnessed large-scale military invasion into Georgia, followed by recognition of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. And recognition of independence is clearly a change of borders, which is based on the fact of occupation and invasion. So we see a clear infringement upon this principle. Again, the question is that if today we all allow this precedent to take place and if borders of Georgia can be changed by use of force, obviously we are the first, but then the question is how this thing develops and who is the next? Because if you do this thing once, then it's opening of Pandora's Box and nobody knows where this will stop.

So I mean, this is a major challenge for European security and this is the major challenge for European security institution like OSCE is because, again, OSCE is solely based on the Helsinki Final Act, which is a principle of border inviolability and no forceful change of borders. So this is A.

Another fundamental issue which is at stake here is human rights. Because what happened in South Ossetia these days was evidenced and confirmed facts of ethnic cleansing and large-scale violence against Georgian villages and Georgian population in South Ossetia. That was partly conducted by Russian military forces; mostly it was done by paramilitaries, by irregulars, by so-called militias acting together simultaneously with Russians. And the fact that it was not conducted physically by Russian regular troops does not remove responsibility from Russia because by international law, the occupying force which temporarily occupies part of territory has the responsibility for protection of law and order and protection of lives and human rights on the territory which it occupies.

So whoever committed those atrocities, whether it was Ossetian militia, or it was Chechen paramilitaries, or it was Kazakh irregulars, the responsibility is on the state of Russia because that territory was, and still is, occupied by regular army of the state of Russia. And that all happened in the presence of the regular army of Russia. So there is a clear responsibility on the gross violation of human rights, which happened there, and we have a number of international organizations confirming and evidencing the gross violation of human rights, as well as we have thousands of eyewitnesses talking about ethnic cleansing conducted in Georgian villages of South Ossetia.

And the scheme was, it's so-called the Balkan scheme, which is well known, when irregulars take over the village and they separate male and female populations. The male part of population is taken out of the village, so they are subject to violence including executions. And

then the unprotected female population and children are subject to violence. And that's another kind of violence which includes also rapes and other forms of humiliation. And then the village is looted and houses are torched and houses are destroyed, including destruction (sp) using the bulldozers and other equipment. So that's a well-known scheme, how it is conducted.

And we have thousands of witnesses confirming that. We have reports from the Human Rights Watch confirming. We have a report from Council of Europe observers, reporters who visited the region confirming what happened. I mean, nobody else was allowed to go there because it's still the closed area. But we have again all these evidences and it's about major responsibility and the fundamental question, also, is whether any country, however big and important, is allowed to conduct ethnic cleansing on the territory of neighboring state and whether the international community today can tolerate such a gross violation of human rights.

The third question which is at stake is energy. And this is something which was secured by three U.S. administrations, starting from 1991. Because geographically, I think most of you know, that Georgia is a bottleneck, controlling access to Caspian and Central Asian oil resources and the only alternative way of transportation of Caspian and Central Asian oil resources to Europe is via Georgia. So by controlling Georgia, Russia actually will be able to cut off Central Asia and Caspian resources. It means Russia will be able to isolate and cut off Azerbaijan and Central Asian countries and it will significantly strengthen its energy monopoly over Europe with all results outcoming from that fact. So it's about major shift in the energy policy and major shift in geopolitics based on this energy policy and Russian energy monopoly.

The next fundamental thing which is at stake as a result of Russian invasion is the concept of security itself because the biggest lesson learned for Europe during and before Second World War was that the security is indivisible concept. And the only way to guarantee security is to guarantee security of every state, including small states. And the concept of spheres of influence and the concept of buffer zones and buffer states only generate instability and only encourage aggressor countries to act further.

So that was the lesson learned in between First and Second World Wars in Europe. That's why entire concept of European security is based on the fact that there are no big and small states; security of every country is guaranteed and there are no longer spheres of influence. And the unification of Europe after the Cold War is clearly and objectively seen as the biggest step with that direction.

So by doing what Russia did, actually, Russia reclaimed that policy of sphere of influences back because justification for action in Georgia was that, I mean, there are Russian citizens in Georgia, so it is within the Russian area of influence, it is within the Russian area of interest and Russia can act within that area, including by using military force.

Well, first of all, the question is why there are Russian citizens in Georgia, in Abkhazia and South Ossetia? And the answer is very simple: because Russians themselves artificially manufactured these citizens by distributing Russian passports to them. And that happened about – that started about six, seven years ago when Russian foreign ministry started, in a very speedy and special way, distribution of Russian passports to all citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

And now Russia claims that it has legitimate reason to intervene. First of all, by international law, it's not a reason to intervene. And secondly, it's not proper behavior to manufacture your own citizens in neighboring countries. You can imagine that if United States starts distribution of American passports, for example, in Mexico, there will be a lot of people willing to accept American passports there. And then I don't think that United States have a legitimate reason to intervene and occupy Mexico because there are American citizens or American passport-holders there. So it's more or less similar to what they did.

So by making these kind of claims, by making a claim that Georgia was part of the Russian empire during 200 years so we have a special interest there, by making a claim that every country which borders Russia is part of our legitimate interest, by making these kind of claims and by clearly saying that there is this exclusive area of so-called near abroad as it is called in Russia, and it is very interesting what the near abroad is, whether it is abroad or it is not abroad. So near abroad means in their understanding that, well, de facto this is abroad, but really it's not real abroad, you know, it's something near to us, so it's not real abroad like, for example, United States or Canada. So this is something where we still can intervene.

So by introducing this concept of spheres of influence and buffer zones and today we hear a lot of discussions in Russia about the buffer zones in Georgia, about buffer zones around Georgia, about buffer zones between Russia and NATO, and one of the roles which Georgia is supposed to play in Russian understanding is possibly a buffer zone between Russia and NATO. And so by introducing this concept of influence, spheres of influence, and buffer zones, Russia actually challenges the very basic of European security, that security is indivisible and security is not – cannot be based on the concept of areas of influence and buffer zones. So that's actually a major setback for European security concept, which leads this concept back to the beginning of 20th century and that's also a major challenge how Europeans manage to deal with this approach.

And the last point which is at stake and which is, I believe, more important than just again the fate of this small country is what happens to Russia itself and how Russia itself develops and what kind of Russia do we all have as a partner. So I don't think that either United States or Europe wants to have Russia and may have Russia which sends tanks to the neighboring countries to invade that country. I don't think that it is good to have Russia which changes borders by use of force. I don't think that we may have Russia which cosponsors and organizes ethnic cleansing on the territories of neighboring countries.

I don't think that this kind of Russia may act as a reliable international partner when it comes to other things. I don't think that this kind of Russia may be a reliable partner when it comes, for example, to nonproliferation, which is a hot topic of cooperation between United States and Russia. I don't think that this kind of Russia can act as a responsible partner for Europeans when it comes to European energy security and Russian gas and oil supplies to Europe. I don't think that Russia, which signed exactly 30 days ago, 31 days ago, signed ceasefire agreement and took a clear commitment to withdraw immediately from Georgia, Russia which does not respect signature of its own president for 31 days already, I don't think that this kind of Russia may be seen as a reliable partner in any other deal or any other business.

So the fundamental issue here is what to do with Russia and what kind of Russia do we have as a partner. So there are these fundamental issues and reasons which are related to security, which are related to human rights, which are related to energy, which are related to geopolitics, and which are related to the future of U.S.-Russian and EU-Russian relations. So all this set of questions make this issue very important, make this issue, again, much more important than its just the fate of small and remote Georgia, as my country is sometimes seen, and which makes this country an important topic which should be handled by international community.

So because it's a challenge – it's a challenge not only for us because we are immediate victims of what happened and, of course, we have huge problems which we need to manage, but this is a challenge also for international community because of all the reasons I named. And if international community fails to take a proper response, I believe, and I am afraid, that Georgia will be just first step in this journey and I wonder whether we have representatives of, for example, Ukrainian Embassy here, because we have very close consultations with our Ukrainian friends, Ukrainian politicians, and they are very worried what happens in Ukraine next because what happened already in Ukraine is that Russia started distribution of Russian passports in Crimea, which is Russian-populated part of Ukraine. And by last numbers I had, it was about 80,000 passports have already been distributed and this is exactly what Russians did in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

So the question is unless it is handled in a proper way, where do these things end? And I'm afraid that unless it is handled properly, it will not end. And the price to pay tomorrow will be much higher than price to pay today. So it's about reaction and it's about challenge. And you obviously have a question, how to handle and what is our vision. But I'll stop here because I promised to have just 10-minute introduction and I leave space for your questions. So I'm available, you can fire, and you can ask any question you wish. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. FLANAGAN: Thank you very much. All right, I'll moderate the – (inaudible) – and as the chairman mentioned, we – if you'd just please identify yourself and ask – wait for a microphone that will come to you, so – and we have – we can go until hopefully about 12:15 p.m. or so. Anyone, first question? Perhaps – yes, the gentleman in the back there.

Q: Sir, Tim Muchmore (ph) from the Army. Given that Russia has artificially issued passports to many of the Georgian citizens, does Georgia have the ability to expel foreigners like Russians holding foreign passports? Or are they also considered Georgian citizens?

MR. BAKRADZE: Well, we cannot and we will not expel citizens who live in South Ossetia and Abkhazia because most of the passport-holders are not ethnically Russians. They are ethnically either South Ossetians or Abkhazians. So what happened that Russia offered Russian passports to local inhabitants of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and making it lucrative because Russian passports clearly means for them a possibility to travel in Russia, it means for them exemption for the visa regime, which Russia imposed on Georgia, it means for them much better access to Russia and much better access in terms of traveling to Russia, so it brings a lot of

practical benefits. So many people, majority of population in these two areas, accepted Russian passports.

And we think that these people are our citizens. And when we reintegrate these pieces of Georgia, we are going to build a multi-ethnic society where these people will be part of Georgian society and Georgian state. So we cannot and we will not expel these people from Georgia. And we will not deprive them Georgian citizenship. So Russians did wrongly and we are not going to respond wrongly as well. These people will be our citizens and we will build this multi-ethnic – we have already multi-ethnic society and we will build, upon reintegration of this region, multi-ethnic society where these people will be part of us.

But not to be misunderstood as well or to bring more clarity on the issue of citizenship, I mean, what happened in those regions, for example, what happened in Abkhazia, the current population of Abkhazia is about 20 (percent), 25 percent of its pre-war population, which they had in 1991, 17 years ago. So what happened in Abkhazia, there was an organized ethnic cleansing conducted in 1992-1993 where from 75 (percent) to 80 percent of population was expelled from that territory. Mostly, they were ethnic Georgians, but not only ethnic Georgians, they were ethnic Ukrainians, ethnic Estonians, ethnic Jews, even ethnic Russians, and even ethnic Abkhaz who were loyal to central government and who saw their future within the state of Georgia. So based on ethnicity and based on belief, there was an ethnic cleansing where up to 80 percent of population was expelled from their homes and the remaining 20 percent then got – I mean, almost remaining 20 percent got Russian passports.

So the case is that Russians, I mean, expelled everybody who thought different way, who wanted to be citizens of Georgia, they distributed their passports there for the remaining population and now these people, foreign citizens, people with Russian passports in their pockets make a decision whether to be in Georgia or not. So when you hear speculations that we love Abkhaz people, we love Abkhaz population, please know they are talking about 20 percent of pre-war population. And everybody who was a wrong ethnic origin, as they thought, or who was a wrong belief that Abkhazians should live together with Georgians, everybody was expelled from that territory, 80 percent of population. And now these remaining Russian citizens make a decision whether to live in Georgia or not.

So it's very simple. It's as simple as it is. We are not talking about ethnic problem. We are not talking about just separatism. We are not talking about ethnic grievances. We are talking about politically driven process where Russia plays a key role in not allowing us to reconcile with these societies.

And another fact about South Ossetia, it will be interesting because we frequently hear arguments that Georgians and Ossetians cannot live together, it's the same as Kosovars and Serbs could not live together, so I mean, we should do the same here. There are 125,000 Ossetians living in Georgia, out of which 75,000 live outside South Ossetia, and they are integrated part of Georgian community. And we have no single problem with them. They have Ossetian schools. They have Ossetian education. They have Ossetian-language newspapers. And we have no problem in any other city of Georgia, in any other village of Georgia with Ossetians. So it's not a problem of Georgian-Ossetian relations.

We have a problem in the city of – (inaudible) – which is governed by Russian-appointed governmental officials, so-called governmental officials, and which is again part of the political project against Georgia. So it's not about ethnic relations between Georgians and Ossetians and Georgians and Abkhaz. It's a broader political project and this passport-ization, this illegal distribution of passports, is just one component of this game.

MR. FLANAGAN: Mr. Chairman, before we get off that point, I wondered if you could clarify for us the situation as you know it of the ethnic Georgians living in South Ossetia. You mentioned some of the – and the well-documented incidents of ethnic cleansing and intimidation by South Ossetian militias and others. But I wondered, there are some OSCE monitors in the region, are you getting reports from them and others about the situation and how many – within the figures that your government has put out about internally displaced persons, I think, in excess of 110,000, how many of those are ethnic Georgians from South Ossetia.

MR. BAKRADZE: Yeah, we had 118,000 registered IDPs; I underline registered IDPs because plus to that we had some amount of people who were not registered. Now, this number is down to about 68,000 because part of the people returned back to Georgian cities and villages like Gori and others, which were under Russian – under temporary Russian occupation and once Russians removed their tanks, people started to go back home. So I mean, that number of IDPs is slightly reduced and it's now about 68,000.

As of OSCE observers, as I said it's a very, very limited access to South Ossetia, so maximum which they are allowed to do is to access the so-called buffer zone, because you know geographically Tskhinvali is located north of Gori, so here are two cities; it's Tskhinvali and Gori and the area between Tskhinvali and Gori is seen by Russians as the so-called buffer zone where they still have their arms. So what international people are allowed to do, they are allowed to travel into this security zone, but the South Ossetian territory itself is very much closed for them, so they do not have access and that's why – I mean, even in terms of numbers, even in terms of casualties, even in terms of damage, we still do not have final figures because we cannot access the area where the main damage was caused.

But we have some satellite imagery and I encourage you to see, for example, the – is it on U.N. website? Yeah. Pardon me, UNSA—UNSAD – okay, okay, he will write down this website and give me the address so I can show you in the next two minutes the website where there are satellite images of the destroyments and there you can see Tskhinvali, city of Tskhinvali, surrounding Georgian villages. And these are images taken from satellite and these images have marks of destroyments. And if you see, you will see very few destroyments in Tskhinvali and you will see the massive destroyments in Georgian villages around Tskhinvali.

So what we know from satellite imagery is that all villages around Tskhinvali are heavily destroyed. But so far nobody was allowed really to go and check, except few people who traveled there on their risk. And I mean, I cannot – I should, I believe, praise the Human Rights Watch people who were there in the very moment of crisis at the risk to their lives and whose witnesses and evidences are really invaluable for us. So there were people on their own risk.

But I mean, they do not allow institutional representatives, including OSCE or Council of Europe, or others, to travel freely inside.

Q: David Poplack from the Fund for Peace. Thank you, sir, for your informative talk. I was in Georgia last autumn and was able to speak with the OSCE observation mission there and was particularly looking at nuclear smuggling for materials that could be acquired by non-state actors, terrorists. And the observer mission told us that basically above the line of control, which was north of Tskhinvali at the time, essentially OSCE observers could only be two at a time for several hours a day and that the so-called road of life that went from the Roki tunnel down to Tskhinvali was essentially a free-for-all, even after cleaning out the Arineti (ph) market around Tskhinvali and basically smugglers had free reign. Now, I suspect that like in – (inaudible) – you know, smuggling will die down because of – as a result of the hot conflict.

But if Georgia fails to recognize – sorry, I'll rephrase that, if Georgia's been put in a very difficult situation and there are no longer sort of international borders, but there's a de facto international border with Russia in occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the surrounding buffer zones, how will the Georgian government seek to stem the flow of normal smuggled goods and potentially very dangerous smuggled goods, like highly enriched uranium, with the situation on the ground as it stands? Thank you.

MR. BAKRADZE: Okay, thanks. Indeed, you know, if you know what South Ossetia represents, it's a tiny piece of land and it is all surrounded by the rest of Georgian territory and it has one connection with Russia, which is Roki tunnel. And by the way, it's interesting that this tunnel was built in the late '70s of the previous century, so I mean all the speculation that South Ossetia was part of Russia, I mean, it's simply funny because if you look on the maps, South Ossetia is separated from Russia by the range of Caucasian Mountains. I mean, the altitude of those mountains is up to 10,000 feet, so how can once tiny region can be split with this huge mountainous range with the only access which was built in late '70s of the previous century, so I mean, itself this claim is funny, but I'm not going to respond and to talk about history, because I don't think that this is helpful topic of the moment.

As of smuggling, so why I said it, because there is no economy. There is no functional economy at all in South Ossetia. There is not a single factory. There is no economic activity there. And the only source of their incomes traditionally was smuggling. And that smuggling was well integrated into overall Georgian economy before 2003 when Georgia was also, I mean, very much failed state and Georgian economy was very much based on smuggling and illegal activities as well. So South Ossetia was a center of smuggling, out of which, you know, many Georgian bureaucrats that time were benefiting and getting personal profits as well.

So after revolution, one of the first things which we did in 2004, we cut off smuggling completely. And that was the point when things started to escalate in South Ossetia from the side of local Tskhinvali leadership because smuggling was the main source of their income. And once we cut off smuggling, immediately these people got very irritated and immediately they started to be very aggressive, responding to our actions with aggressiveness, shooting our policeman. And that was the initial point of the recent escalation; that was now four years ago.

But you know, we continued doing what we did. And South Ossetia, up to the very last moment, was completely cut off; there was no smuggling from South Ossetia or to South Ossetia, I mean, the rest of Georgian territory, and it will remain as it is. So it has nothing to do with recognition of border because I mean de facto we will control all smuggling ways, all ways coming to and from South Ossetia and the rest of Georgia. So we will control smuggling again based on, I mean, simple geography, not on borders. It has nothing to do with recognition, which will, of course, not happen.

But as of the rest now, I mean, South Ossetia is under Russian military presence. And Russian military presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia now is absolutely lawless, because you know by recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russians actually ruined the previous peace formats and Russians denounced the previous peace agreements because by all those peace agreements, which were the legal basis for presence of these Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, by both peace agreements, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were recognized as part of Georgia and this mechanism was based on an assumption that Russia is a neutral mediator and facilitator of the peace process, which is a process of conflict resolution in Georgia.

So now by openly recognizing these territories and by openly take one side of the conflict and using its military force against the other side of the conflict, Russians destroyed all the previous agreements. So their presence now in South Ossetia and Abkhazia is completely lawless. So they have military forces. They are seen now the only status which they may have now on those territories is status of occupational forces, which our parliament already made the decision on.

And so again, by international law, it is responsibility of the state which de facto implements control over the territory to take responsibility on what's happening there. So if there are cases of nuclear smuggling in South Ossetia again – and I guess you are referring to previous cases which became publicly known – if there are those cases again, that should be responsibility of Russia because it is the state which de facto implements control on the territory now.

But again, as I said, we will keep all these channels closed and there will be no smuggling from South Ossetia and Abkhazia to the rest of Georgia because we care about our economy. And before we cut off smuggling from South Ossetia, it was about 15 percent of Georgian economy. You can imagine, I mean, we are talking about huge numbers. And that was a huge black hole for our economy, so we had to close it immediately. And we did.

And by the way, I mean, just three days ago, the World Bank released last figures of doing business survey and Georgia moved to 15th place in the world as a business-friendly economy. So we will not open smuggling, of course, because then it destroys our economy. So we will control smuggling, but responsibility is on the Russian side.

MR. FLANAGAN: Back over there, on the left. Brian.

MR. BAKRADZE: I'm sorry, before you start, this website is unosat.org and you can see this satellite imagery there: unosat.org. Thanks.

Q: Thank you very much for your presentation which was very informative. Alexander – (inaudible) – Monterey Institute of International Studies. Parallel to this meeting there is, as you know, the series of meeting in Russian Federation organized by the Russian government and under the aegis of the Valdai Discussion Club. And this week, at the Valdai Discussion Club, the leader of the separatist government, Kokoiti, had a Freudian slip. He first said that it is the aspiration of the South Ossetia to basically integrate with North Ossetia into the Russian Federation. And then two hours later, he sort of completely recast this statement, retracted it and said that South Ossetia envisions itself as an independent state. Now, we're facing a very interesting actually legal paradox because in a sense Russia recognized independence of a whole bunch of Russian citizens, quote unquote, which spells interesting situation for Russia itself. But my question to you is that what do you think will be – as you know, among South Ossetians, the majority want to actually reintegrate with North Ossetia, so do you think this spells out potential trouble for Kokoiti? Thank you.

MR. BAKRADZE: Well, it's not the first case, you know, when these people on the ground have no clear vision what is their goal. And from time to time, we hear statements that South Ossetia wants to be and will be independent. From time to time, we hear that South Ossetia will emerge with North Ossetia and create one single Ossetian state. From time to time, we hear statements that South Ossetia will become part of Russia and will become a subject of Russian Federation, so it's very unclear what these people want. I think they are just getting different messages from different guys in Moscow, so they are not clear themselves.

But the interesting case is that at the entrance of South Ossetia, at the entrance of the city of Tskhinvali, there is a huge banner with a picture of Vladimir Putin saying that Putin is our president. And interesting is that after the last presidential elections Russia, they simply forgot to change this picture, so Putin is still South Ossetian president. (Laughter.) And I think it's funny thing which explains, I think, a number of such inconsistencies in their statements.

I mean, last thing which I care about is the future of Mr. Kokoiti, who is a criminal. I don't want to sound now arrogant, but this guy is really a criminal. He has nothing to do with politics or with the interest of Ossetian people. So I care – last thing which I care about is his personal future.

But we do care about the future of the region. And when you mentioned will of majority of people, let me explain what was happening in South Ossetia in last two years because I believe we had very successful conflict resolution policy in South Ossetia in last two years and we were just a few months away from this conflict to be resolved. And this is very important to understand. And I myself, I was one of the authors of this concept and I'm still proud and I do believe that it was very effective.

Because what was happening in South Ossetia? South Ossetia was – this tiny region was divided in two parts. One part was administered by local South Ossetian guy who was loyal to central government and who was for reconciliation. This guy was former separatist himself. He was minister of defense, he was field commander, then he was prime minister of South Ossetia. But then he changed his mind, saying that I see no future for South Ossetia except being part of

Georgia, I mean, autonomous part of Georgia with broad political rights. So this guy was administering part of South Ossetia, almost half. Other half was administered by this Mr. Kokoit and his bunch of so-called government, which are actually acting high-level Russian officers. So that was it.

What we did in this part of South Ossetia, we invested heavily in last two years, heavily. And we invested not in weapons. And we invested not in smuggling. We invested in schools. We invested in swimming pools. We invested in discos. We invested in amusement parks. We invested in clubs and cinemas. You know why? To show the difference to the Yank people on the other side. To show to them that life is about movies, about disco, it's about swimming pool rather than about – Kalashnikov and trenches and it was so successful policy, we had ongoing heavy erosion of Kokoit regime. We had almost every week, people from his so-called government, his so-called parliament getting in touch with this local administration – I mean and offering incorporation and offering that, eventually, we will be glad to join you but we cannot do it now because now, it's simply dangerous for us.

So we have this process of heavy erosion. And because of the heavy erosion which Russia's leaving the last two years, they substituted entire South Ossetian leadership so all security related positions in South – so-called South Ossetian government were taken by acting Russian officials. And when I say acting Russian official, I don't mean Russian ethnicity. I don't mean Russian citizenship. I mean acting Russian official. For example, I will give you an example. Gentleman whose name is Lunev, General Lunev, Russian General Lunev from Russian Ministry of Defense. Approximately two years ago, was appointed as South Ossetian minister of defense. He served as a South Ossetian minister of defense for almost year and half. Then he was called back to Russia and now when 58th army invaded Georgia, Lunev was one of the commanders of the army. So you see what kind of relationship we're talking about. We're talking about acting generals from ministry of defense, from ministry – from border guards department, from Ministry of Security taking positions there.

So I mean, I'm explaining it to show that we had very successful process in South Ossetia and we were just few months away from this conflict to be resolved. So this is to show you the dynamic and to show you that we really care about population of the region and majority of population there wants peace and we had a very good prospect of resolving this conflict peacefully by offering them high political status, by offering them economic investments, and by offering them peace and normal life. So all this have been now brutally intervened and terminated by the actions which took place in August.

This is important for you to understand the Georgian side might have no motivation whatsoever so that happened what happened – I mean, because in case of South Ossetia, unlike Abkhazia, by the way, where the process was fully frozen. In South Ossetia, the process was on the right track. The process was on a positive track. And every months passed was moving us closer to conflict resolution. So this is important to understand that dynamic in South Ossetia was positive and Georgian side was the side which was interested in keeping peace and stability in South Ossetia because the time was on our side there, unlike Abkhazia, I underline, where the dynamic was positive. But in South Ossetia, time was on our side.

Q: Hi, Cynthia Romero from the Atlantic Council of the United States. Now, while I work in the U.S. and there's definitely been a lot of very supportive comments from our government, I do believe that – and I think we're coming to a consensus – that the future of peacekeeping in the region should fall, hopefully, on the EU. And I'm curious to hear from you, what sort of prospects you see about the EU observer mission actually getting off the ground.

I think everybody recognizes that there's a huge concern about Russian troops becoming entrenched in the new, sort of, buffer zones that they've set up and also concern about the fact that there is now 1,500 more troops within in South Ossetia than there were previously. But at the moment, while the EU has said that they will commit 200 peacekeepers, they still don't know whether they'll be actual peacekeepers, what their mission will be, and it's not even clear when they'll be deployed. And in addition, it's even less clear when they'll actually get into the conflict zones, into South Ossetia and Abkhazia. That remains completely undefined.

So I'm curious whether – aside from what we've heard, you know, in the news reports, whether your government is having talks with the EU leaders and getting a more concrete sense of when they actually think they can get the manpower.

MR. BAKRADZE: Absolutely. That's one of the – what should be done things, obviously, and that's very important for us. So we believe what should be done is that the process of conflict resolution should be maintained. Then the door should remain open because if there is no process of conflict resolution and leave everything ends with Russian recognition, it means that international community loses, clearly, because then it accepts the fact of forceful change of borders which, as I said, will be a huge challenge for – potentially for many other countries. So the process needs to be in place and the door needs to remain open.

So what I mean by that. As I said, by the fact of occupation and by the fact of unilateral recognition, actually, Russians destroyed the previously existing peacekeeping mechanisms and agreements and so now, it's an empty place. Only thing which we have in place is the Six Point Ceasefire Agreement brokered by French president Sarkozy. So now it is time to construct the new framework for conflict resolution.

On the one hand, of course, situation now is more difficult than it was. And after Russia steps and we see, Russia is not going at the moment to give up and continue still their active bullying policy vis-à-vis Georgia. In this light, of course it is and it will be very difficult. On the other hand, you know, we have difficulties but we have new opportunities as well. And among those opportunities, two things are very important: A, that there no longer the previous agreements which were inadequate to exist in realities where Russia was recognized as a facilitator, maybe even peacekeeper, so there is no longer this recognition. Calling Russia party to the conflict is much more adequate description. And if you do not describe adequately what happens, I mean, if the illness is not identified correctly, there can be no medicine. So now we have chance to identify what's happening much more accurate way than it was before.

And second is that now there is much higher readiness to engagement from the side of international community. So – just I'm working on this issues for last – I think – eight or 10 years and I could not imagine, two months ago, for example, German chancellor, in her open

remarks, speaking about necessity to have international peacekeeping operation in South Ossetia and the fact that Germany's ready to commit people on the ground. I could not imagine and if somebody told me two months ago, I would say that I do not understand anything. I could not imagine French president saying the same. I could not imagine this active position of Brits or United States. So this is the new opportunity. And based on these new positive things, again, the new framework, adequate description, and international readiness to be engaged, we need to construct a new peace process, new framework for the peace process. That is very important.

I cannot give you details at the moment. We're still working on the details. It's very important. It's very sensitive. Only thing which I can tell you is that it will be long-term process. It has to be a genuine international process and Georgian side – we act and we'll need to act in a very, very close, in a most close coordination with international community and it will be difficult and sensitive process. This is what I know at the moment. For the rest, we're thinking – we have some ideas now, we have already started preliminary consultations with Americans, with Europeans on these issues but it's – it will be too early to make these ideas public so that's the price for keeping me on the record. So off the record, I could say something, but not now. So what I can say is just that we need – and we are working on the construction of this new peace process. Again, it will be difficult, but there is no other way.

MR. FLANAGAN: Let me also welcome, we've been joined by the ambassador of Georgia. Thank you for joining us today, sir. Could I ask this – it was going into the peace mechanism. But what about Georgia's? There seems to me – and I know you've had some consultations on Capitol Hill already today. There seems to strong support for the aid package that the administration has proposed. What – could you give us some more details about the assessment of Georgia's needs and in particular, with regard to infrastructure and the damage – (inaudible) – key east-west corridors that were damaged in the conflict and also whether any others in the international community have been stepping forward with additional assistance. You mentioned the new EU commitment to the monitoring. What about other humanitarian and development assistance?

MR. BAKRADZE: Thanks, okay. So what needs to be done regarding Georgia and that's the broader question. One, I could identify three main baskets. One basket is the conflict resolution which I just described that we need to design the new conflict resolution process so that the thing continues and the door is open and we continue to resolve conflict resolution. That's one basket. Second basket is economic assistance to Georgia, since you asked this question. So what we need under that. There a few small baskets within that big one. So one is direct infrastructural damage and I should say it's not the most important one. Direct infrastructural damage approximately at this stage, is assessed as \$400 million U.S. (dollars). That's still approximate assessment because it's still a process on the way. But that's immediate economic infrastructural damage.

Let me turn to other things which are more dangerous for our economy. Second point is revenue losses and our entities, both state budget and commercial entities had huge revenue losses because of this Russian occupation. You know that during almost three weeks, port of Poti was blocked by Russians and port of Poti is the main economic gateway for Georgia. And we had ships from the Russian fleet – Black Sea Fleet, I mean, next to Poti, not allowing any

commercial shipments to Poti. And that led to huge revenue losses because obviously, those ships who could not come – that was a loss but loss was even bigger because than those ships applied to their – for example, insurance companies, and then insurance companies warned other ships to go there as well because it was not possible and it was dangerous and insurance companies didn't want to take this additional risk. So what we got that – it was fully paralyzed for almost three weeks and that's a huge revenue loss for budget and for private and commercial entities as well. And that's the second direction of our damage.

And third and the most dangerous direction of our damages, confidence of investors because, as I said, we had very open economy and we are now number 15 in business friendly. So we have very open economy – small but open. And about 23 percent of our GDP consists from the foreign direct investment inflow. And that is a successful economy because that's open economy but if something happens, like it happened and this foreign direct investment inflow is cut off immediately, then this economy has huge trouble. Because then, you immediately have that 23 percent has current account deficit and this is what's happening now in Georgia because this imagery, these pictures of Russia tanks in Poti, in Gori, in other places, is the worst possible imagery for any investor. And it's a direct sign not to go and not to invest to Georgia. So this is what damages us very much. So we need to take urgent steps to reassure investors that they may come to Georgia and despite what happened, it's still an economy which functions and it's an economy where investment works.

So these are the – and fourth, is humanitarian component. And when I mentioned infrastructural damage, I have not mentioned housing for IDPs and housing for those who suffered. And that's an additional price. So this is – these are the four key components where we need economic assistance and I mean, again, the most – what most urgent is of course, this humanitarian component of assistance for IDPs. But most important is, again, helping us in recovering the confidence of investors because that's how well our economy works. And any relief, if it is just based on a single action, you know, will not be effective unless it generates results. So we need to bring investors back and for that, it is very important.

For example, this \$1 billion pledge, it has a huge practical importance but it has a huge political and psychological importance as well because it shows to investors that Georgia is strongly backed and it's a signal that they can come back. European Union to have a donors' conference on Georgia. It will be, again, a very strong signal to investors that they may come back because European Union and the United States back Georgia. IMF made the decision to allocate \$750 million standby loan for Georgia. That's the money which we can spend but it's a stand by money in case if Georgian banking system has any problems. We hope that we do not need that money. But it's a very important thing for investors to know that Georgian banking system remains stable because it has this IMF loan behind. So there is this number of steps which help us to restore the confidence of investors and hope that in next year, we will still have FDI inflow. And as of per capital, FDI inflow in Georgia was one of the leaders in the world in previous years because again, we managed to build from the failed state economy which is number 15 in being business friendly and which is very viable and highly effective economy.

Of course, I mean, Georgia is not prosperous country because what was destroyed for so many years cannot be rebuilt in four years. But still, we had a very dynamic economy with

double-digit growth for three consecutive years. So we hope that with all this assistance, EU donors' conference, \$1 billion pledge IMF, World Bank, other donors, I should say that for example, we have consultations with Japanese government, with Chinese government, with others. I mean with all that, we will be able to be back on track for economic development.

Q: Jerry Hyman at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Sorry we keep bouncing around but I wondered if I could go back to your point about the negotiations and the conflict resolution. One of the things that was not clear in the papers here, were exactly what were the events, specifically, what were the casus belli that resulted in the response of the Georgian government – not general, not, you know, vague, but what specifically happened in the week before August 6th, August 7th, that eventuated in the response?

MR. BAKRADZE: Okay. That – that is an important question to answer. So what we hear sometimes and, this is something where our Russian colleagues play very skillfully, you know. What they're doing there – trying to single out one event out of the chain of events. For example, say that something was done by Georgians at 11 a.m. and that's the casus belli, without mentioning what happened at 10:55 a.m. or what happened at 11:05 a.m. So it's a chain of events which clearly shows what happened. And I will not fall back into history but I will just explain that, you know, within the last week before the conflict, we had a splash of violence in the region.

We had two assassination attempts. One assassination attempt was against the guy which I mentioned, the leader of this temporary unit, this guy who became loyal to central government as I mentioned, Mr. Sanakoyev. It was his assassination attempt. Afterwards, we had a terrorist attack against Georgian police car. And close to that, we had, I mean, increased amount of skirmishes on the ground. I mean, that was worrying but that was still, you know, more or less manageable because we had in the past, also, such splash of violence from the side of Tskhinvali but finally, eventually, we have been always to calm things down and to manage things.

What happened two days before conflict, they started to evacuate women and children from Tskhinvali and that was already a very alarming sign and we started to analyze why they did so. And they did it in presence of cameras, I mean, Russian TV was there and it was a big public event that Georgians going to attack Tskhinvali and we evacuate women and children from there. And the question for us was why they did it. And then maybe underestimated this and said that, okay, we believe that it's just a show and they are just continuing this psychological pressure on us and making this show as if we are going to attack. So that happened two days before.

Starting from the 6th of August, you know, Tskhinvali forces started the bombardment of Georgian villages. And you should understand that South Ossetia's much like chessboard and there are mixed villages. So there are mixed villages. There is no clear line of division between Georgian and Ossetian villages. That is all very much – or that was – unfortunately, very much mixed like a chessboard. So South Ossetian forces started to bomb Georgian villages and the intensity of that bombing was high. So it already alarmed us very much.

So what we did in the morning of August the 7, minister for conflict resolution and we have such special position in government, he was sent to Tskhinvali to meet their people from their de facto government and to negotiate the ceasefire and to calm things down. But he was not accepted and he was not met by anybody. The only person he met was commander of Russian peacekeepers, General Kulakhmetov who told that, I mean, this Tskhinvali's guys – they just got met and they really should, yes, but I mean, we peacekeepers cannot control so they are out of control and we don't know ourselves what to do with them. And our minister came back and that was a very alarming message.

We called to Russian foreign ministry and asked to send their special envoy, Ambassador Popov, to Tskhinvali in order to negotiate, again, the ceasefire and to calm things down. But they promised to do so but Popov failed to go to Tskhinvali and he justified that by explaining that his car broken so he could not go and reach Tskhinvali. It was another alarming sign. Then, President Saakashvili started to call to international leaders. He called to Finnish foreign minister, who is at the same OSC chairman. He informed him about this thing and asked him to send his special envoy on the ground in order to help us to calm things down.

That was already evening of the 7th of August. And that was the point when president made the decision to announce unilateral ceasefire on our side because the hope was that once there is a declared unilateral ceasefire regime, Ossetians will stop shootings as well. And, by the way, that was the point when president finally decided to cancel his trip to Beijing because, again, to show you how unexpected it was that president's plane was ready to depart for Beijing for the opening of Olympic Games and that was the moment when he made the final decision that it all looks very serious so he has to cancel the trip and stay in Tbilisi. I mean, that it was not Georgia's intention or purpose.

So what happened then in the evening – I mean, our ceasefire was not followed by ceasefire. And what happened then is that in the late evening, it was approximately 10:00 or 11:00, the Ossetian fire turned into the so-called carpet bombardment of villages, which is the massive artillery barrage of Georgian villages. And then the basic dilemma for government was what to do – whether still to have the ceasefire or to respond because here it is a fundamental question.

Can the democratically elected government sit and wait in the unilateral ceasefire regime how its civilians die under an artillery bombardment? And, again, it was no longer a skirmish. It was a very massive artillery attack against Georgian villages. So the fundamental question is whether you do not respond and sit and wait until you have high casualties in the civilian population of those Georgian villages. Or you respond by risking that three months. After that, you may be criticized for taking that action, but I think – it is a dilemma, but any government, any democratic government should act based on interest to protect its civilian population.

So the decision was made to backfire those positions from where Ossetians were firing our civilian population. But it was still skirmish. It was not still war. And it was still manageable. The real point where the war started was the point when we got information that Roki Tunnel was overloaded with Russian tanks and military personnel already crossing

Georgian border and moving to South Ossetia. And again, the Roki Tunnel is the tunnel which connects Georgia and Russia off the territory of South Ossetia.

And that was already a Russian military aggression against Georgia. And that information is confirmed. And I think next week, we will release additional evidences, which we have technical evidences, which we have that by that moment, Russians have already crossed border of Georgia. And that was a calling of about 150 tanks and ACVs and about 2,000 personnel troops, which crossed Georgia border, was already in the tunnel entering territory of South Ossetia.

That was the real point when the real decision had to be made – I mean, whether to – just to sit down and accept that our civilians are bombed and Russian military forces occupy our territory or try to reallocate our troops and try to contain Russians at the entrance of South Ossetia before the proper international reaction and international deterrence. And the decision was made to reallocate troops and try to contain Russians near the Roki Tunnel until there is an international reaction to follow because you understand it is not that easy to have international – immediate international reaction in the midnight of August 7, when everybody is on vacation.

So you need at least couple of days for these things to start. So the decision was made to reallocate troops and to win at least these couple of days, so that we have reaction, which will stop Russians from full-scale occupation of Georgia. And I think that – I mean, those few days won by our armed forces was exactly the reason, which helped us to generate international support. We want time for international support. And then it was that international support, which prevented Russians mostly from taking over Tbilisi.

And when I am saying taking over Tbilisi, it is not an exaggeration. We know it from a few different sources. The last source which I can tell you – it is open. Two days ago, in Russian State Duma, they had open hearing. And Russian minister of defense was harshly criticized by few Duma members for not bringing this operation to the logical end, which was takeover of Tbilisi. And minister and defense was criticized in public for being too soft in Georgian operation and for not taking over Tbilisi.

Again, this is public information. This is public hearing in State Duma two days ago. Another source, which we had was more operational source because, you know, when we had this Russian soldiers on the ground, immediately some of those officers started to approach our police people, our local government people offering them some smuggling deals, offering that well, we have a lot of gasoline, a lot of fuel now, so why wouldn't you buy that from us and let's make some money on that.

But what was important was the follow-up that – we cannot do it before we have a final order whether we march to Tbilisi or we remain where we are. So once we know for sure that we do not have march to Tbilisi, then let's make this deal and then let's make money together. And of course our people reported back to us that it was the offer from few Russian officers on the ground. And that is, I think, also the very valuable source of information. So again, what I say that maybe it was not 100 percent plan or commitment to take over Tbilisi, but at least it was

an opportunistic approach that if we can, let's do it. And thing which prevented that was international reaction.

And the international reaction was – became possible only because of the two, three days of Georgia resistance because if Russians entered Georgia without resistance on August 7, if they approached Tbilisi on August 8, there would be no international reaction because it all started the day after. So I still think that Georgia was forced to act so. And it is the case again; we have been told many times, show restraint, do not react. Russians will try to provoke you. Russians will try to entrap you. Do not react. And starting from this April – March, sorry, we have a long record of action when we tried not to react on Russian provocation. That includes numerous intrusions into Georgia airspace. That includes bombardment of Georgia airspace. That includes legal acts issued by Russian government and Russian president.

So that includes a lot of steps on the ground made by Russia. None of them was responded by Georgia, but the problem and difference of August 7 is that it was no longer a provocation. It was action. And when you have this action, when you have this de facto – beginning of de facto occupation of the territory, it is no longer a provocation. You cannot make a decision not to pay attention or not to respond or show restraint. This was the difference. So August 7 was the moment when we were no longer able to ignore Russia's behavior because it was already an action, and it was beginning of the occupation process. So that is the difference because if you look into the previous months, you will see a lot of cases when we have not responded. And we did it in close cooperation with internationals. I mean, we did it in close consultations with Americans, with the EU, and everybody was advising us, do not respond.

And on every provocation, we had consultation with them. Well, we are not responding, so let's sit down and elaborate common response, what to do, how to prevent, how to deter. So it was an ongoing process. But August 7 was different because it was already an action, not a provocation.

Thanks. Sorry. It is a long answer, but I mean, this is an important question.

MR. FLANAGAN: Could I just ask one question in that scenario, though, that there is a lot of attention has been given to the Georgian shelling on the city of Tskhinvali, but you mentioned in your own recounting of – the focus was on trying to prevent the Russians from entering into Georgia through the Roki Tunnel. Can you say were there Georgia military efforts to head off the attack through the Roki Tunnel? And what happened?

MR. BAKRADZE: Yes. What happened is that geographically, the area adjacent to Roki Tunnel is a narrow mountainous passage. It is a narrow mountainous gorge. And then it turns into the valley. And as military stole, that is the only way to stop Russia for at least couple of days was to stop them in that narrow mountainous gorge because if they cross this gorge and if they went to the valley, then it was impossible to stop this amount of Russian military equipment and soldiers.

So the objective was to stop them in the vicinity of Roki Tunnel in this narrow place. The only way to stop them there was to have a control on the strategic heights around Tskhinvali

so that artillery can reach the Roki Tunnel entrance and can reach the road, which comes from Roki Tunnel to the rest of South Ossetia, so that you, by using artillery, stop Russian tanks, prevent Russian tanks from moving further into the Georgian territory.

So that was the reason why the decision was made to take over these strategic heights around Tskhinvali and city of Tskhinvali because this was the only way to control the road leading from Roki Tunnel to the south of the rest of the territory. Again, you know – it is a war, and it is a military action. And everything happens during the military action. And there may be and probably they are aware way of mismanagements of Georgian side. And they are aware of mistakes of Georgian side. And we are very open for that because we have internal investigation on that, of course. Ministry of defense conducts that internal investigation.

We are thinking about parliamentary investigation and most probably in the near future, we will set up a special parliamentary investigation commission, which will very thoroughly look at every action. And we are looking at international investigation. I personally asked U.N. secretary general four days ago when I was in New York to send U.N. team – fact-finding team to check situation on the ground and to check and investigate what happened and why it happened. I asked it in person and he agreed to send such team.

We asked for debates within the U.N. General Assembly. We asked for debates within the OSC. We asked the political debates within the Council of Europe. So we are very open. I mean, if there are any mistakes or mishandlings or problems on Georgian side, we are very open to that. We will make all the steps necessary because, again, when it is war, obviously mistakes happen. And it is a responsibility of democratic government to react to those mistakes and try to correct those mistakes. So we will do it on our side.

But, again, we are very open and we are looking forward, I mean, to these debates. I hope debates in General Assembly will be in October. Debates in OSC, parliamentary assembly will be next week. And debates in the Council of Europe will be end of September. So I mean, we will use any occasion, you know, to bring this issue. We are very open for that.

MR. FLANAGAN: There is a question back there. (Off mike, inaudible.)

Q: Thank you very much for your presentation. Before August 7, there was a lot of comments in Russian press that Georgia was going to start an attack. And so there was this preparation for it. Now that President Saakashvili has signed on the use of force pledge, again we see in the Russian press similar kind of statements that oh, Georgia is going to once again use force. And are you concerned about similar type of provocations given the killing two days ago of a – and how do you prepare this time because from the questions and what has been going on, it seems that despite everything building up before August 7, few people really appreciated what was happening. And could we see a similar kind of development again?

MR. BAKRADZE: Absolutely. Thank you. And I failed to mention what was our response to the provocations taking place in previous months. For example, when Russian president issued the famous decree of April 16 on almost recognizing Abkhazia and South

Ossetia – and this was decree allowing the establishment of direct legal, political, and economic ties between Russia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia. And it was a very provocative step.

You know what we did responding to that? President Saakashvili tabled a new set of peace offers and new set of increased autonomy offers for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. So that is how we responded. And these are not my words. This is documented case. And you know what we did in Abkhazia – and, by the way, mentioning South Ossetia and blaming Georgia somehow that we provoked things in South Ossetia. Who provoked things in Abkhazia? I mean, Russian troops together with Abkhaz took over Kodori Gorge in upper Abkhazia. And they expelled the remaining Georgian population from there.

So who provoked anything in Abkhazia? You know what happened about Abkhazia in July? We had two visits in a row. I mean, first it was German Foreign Minister Steinmeier, then it was Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. I mean, we started very promising negotiations on the future status of Abkhazia – very promising negotiations how Abkhazian conflict should be resolved. We accepted the so-called German plan – Steinmeier plan on peaceful resolution, which was about more openness, which was about more confidence building, which was about soft European approach how to resolve this conflict.

And we were supposed to have first high-level meeting to implement this plan in July. And you know why this meeting did not take place? Because Russian foreign ministry told us that all relevant officials are on vacation, so they cannot meet us in July. So obviously, you all know what happened in the beginning of August. So when we are talking about preparations – I mean, Georgian response to all this provocations was clearly more initiative, more proactiveness, more peace offers, and more peace proposals, while we saw, unfortunately, very different thing on the other side.

I mean, now, again, Saakashvili signed formally this non-use of force letter to President Sarkozy. That is a formal commitment on our side. So I really see no logical reason why it may worry our Russian friends and the Russian media. But what happened there, again, I don't think that it will be another major offensive against us because at this moment, we are very much an international focus. And I don't think that EU will accept such an open violation of the ceasefire agreement because it will be humiliation of French presidency, humiliation of European Union. And I don't think that Russians will launch massive offensive.

But what they are trying to play now – they are trying to make as long as possible the period of their withdrawal from the so-called buffer zones. So now they invent different reasons to justify their presence in these buffer zones and to delay as much as they can their withdrawal from there. So I think it is part of that game but, you know, with all my lessons learned that, you know, when it comes to Russians, you should expect something – I mean, maybe which is the worst possible option. I still don't think that there may be a second major offensive against Georgia. I think it is just to delay the process related to buffer zones – so-called buffer zones.

MR. FLANAGAN: Time for a few more questions. If not, I might just ask to follow on that, Mr. Chairman. Beyond potential military provocations, what about continuing political provocations and the way in which the Russian Federation government has refused to deal with

President Saakashvili. What kind of – and if you can say, or perhaps if the ambassador wanted to say a word on this – what kind of channels, if any, do you have for communications with the Russian government? It seems to be that from looking on the outside, it looks like it is sort of Russians making provocative statements in public, and then you are left to deal with the various Russian military offices on the ground in parts of Georgia.

I wondered what do you see. And also, do you see any other further actions to further cause instability within the Georgian political system?

MR. BAKRADZE: Well, that is actually the third basket of my discussion – what to do, and that was about political situation and political objectives. And that includes assistance in international integration, which is NATO, and that includes internal reforms and internal agenda. Let me turn specifically to your question. I mean, what we witnessed was the open recognition from the high-ranking Russian officials that their objective in Georgia is change of democratically elected government. And I mean, again, these are not my words. I hope you remember discussion in U.N. Security Council when U.S. ambassador quoted for Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov when he formally told to Secretary Rice that Russian objective is to remove Saakashvili from power.

And this is, again, a very fundamental question whether any government is allowed to use force to remove democratically elected leader of the neighboring country. And what we are hearing today – the rhetoric, which we are hearing from Russian leadership, unfortunately – I mean, I really cannot comment because, I mean, I want to remain within the limits of responsibility and within the limits of politeness unlike, unfortunately, my Russian colleagues. So I will not comment on the things like calling president of the neighboring country political corpse, which I think goes beyond any limit of any politeness or political sense of responsibility.

But still, no personal comments unlike others. But what it means – it means that Russians are not ready and do not want to find any negotiable solution with Georgians. And what it means is that the only way to find any negotiable solution is with the engagement of international community. What it means is that it makes this process which I described of conflict resolution, international genuine framework for conflict resolution – it makes this process essential because without this kind of process, there will be no bilateral Georgian-Russian dialogue because very openly, our Russian colleagues said that they will not talk to government of Georgia.

And this is the government which this country has. This is the president which was elected six months ago by people of Georgia. I represent the parliament, which was elected three months ago by people of Georgia. And we are not going to resign only because Mr. Lavrov or somebody else doesn't like us. I mean, that does not happen. So they have to accept the fact that we exist. Unfortunately, they refuse. But what happens is that, I mean, we have to negotiate through this international mechanism. Again, despite everything what happened in Georgia, we are ready to negotiate. We are ready to be open. And we are ready to think about future partnership with Russia, but not partnership not based on military occupations, partnership not based on the recognition of our territories.

We have a lot of common interests – stability in Northern Caucasus. That is very dangerous region for Russia. I mean, you are certainly following what is happening there last days. And there is the new wave of instability and low-intensity violence in Northern Caucasus. We are interested to have stability in Northern Caucasus. We offered Russia many times to cooperate in this issue. Unfortunately, no positive response. We are very much interested in having access to Russian market, having Russians coming to Georgia, I mean, as tourists or another way. Unfortunately, no response. Unfortunately, all that is very much overshadowed by this Cold War style zero-sum thinking that if Georgians are asking for something, if Georgians think that something is good for them, it should be bad for us. Unfortunately, still this zero-sum mentality in Moscow, which does not allow us to cooperate with them.

Let's see how things develop. I hope that with the international mediation, with European Union, with United States onboard, we will be still able to reach some agreement with Russia because Russia will have to negotiate. It has no other way. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are internationally recognized parts of Georgia. And having military troops there without consent of Georgian government is an act of occupation. And clearly whether Russians want to negotiate or not, they will have to negotiate because they have forced illegally on the territory of neighboring country without and against the consent of that country.

So they will have to negotiate this issue whether they want or not. And I wish they made less arrogant statements today because it will make for them easier to negotiate tomorrow. And the more statements they make today, the more difficult it will be for them to negotiate tomorrow. But they will have to because there is no other way I believe.

MR. FLANAGAN: Thank you. I think that is coda for this discussion and, indeed, I hope you will join me, first of all, in thanking the chairman for joining us today, but also to wish him and his fellow countrymen the best as they continue their struggle to regain their sovereignty and to continue the path that they were on, as he described so eloquently, to development of integration into the international economy, the Euro-Atlantic community. And we – I think – we hope that some of these proposals that you have outlined can go forward and that Georgia can return to the path that it was on before the events of August 7th of this year. So thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. BAKRADZE: Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

(END)