



Security Council

Fifty-ninth year

Provisional

4958th meeting

Thursday, 29 April 2004, 10.20 a.m.
New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Pleuger	(Germany)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria	Mr. Baali
	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	Benin	Mr. Adechi
	Brazil	Mr. Valle
	Chile	Mr. Muñoz
	China	Mr. Zhang Yishan
	France	Mr. Duclos
	Pakistan	Mr. Khalid
	Philippines	Mr. Baja
	Romania	Mr. Motoc
	Russian Federation	Mr. Konuzin
	Spain	Mr. Arias
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Thomson
	United States of America	Mr. Holliday

Agenda

The situation in Georgia

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia
(S/2004/315)

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04-32985 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Georgia

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia (S/2004/315)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Georgia, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the representative of Georgia to participate in the discussion without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

Mr. Zurab Zhvania, Prime Minister of Georgia, was escorted to a seat at the Council table.

The President: On behalf of the Council, I extend a warm welcome to the Prime Minister of Georgia.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by His Excellency Mr. Zurab Zhvania, Prime Minister of Georgia.

I now invite the Prime Minister of Georgia to make his statement.

Mr. Zhvania (Georgia): Allow me to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, and the other members of the Security Council for the opportunity to address the Council to share with members the latest developments in Georgia and to discuss some of the most difficult issues facing my nation, particularly in Abkhazia, Georgia.

First of all, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his latest report on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia (S/2004/315). Special thanks go also to Mrs. Heidi Tagliavini, Special Representative of

the Secretary-General, and to the entire staff of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) for their tireless efforts to move the peace process forward. I would also like to express our gratitude to the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General for all its efforts to bring us closer to a resolution of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia.

Only a few short months ago, unprecedented and remarkable events took place in Georgia. The free will of the people brought back to the nation hope for a better future. A new President and a new Parliament were elected in elections that were considered to be the fairest and the freest held since our independence. The new Government is committed to the most serious of reforms. The entire country is moving towards a modern and democratic way of life.

I would like to highlight some of the changes and achievements that have taken place in Georgia under the new leadership, particularly as they relate to the peace process in Abkhazia. Above all, I would like to restate that Georgia is committed to the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Abkhazia. Let me underline that there is not a single member of the new Government that advocates violence. The President and my fellow members of the Government have been making a concerted effort to rid the ranks of those people. Let me reiterate: the path of violence is unacceptable to the current leadership of Georgia. Only through peaceful, negotiated means can we envision resolution of the conflict.

We have begun to achieve considerable success in realistically fighting corruption and organized crime in our country, a task that some time ago seemed unachievable. We have taken the fight to the criminals all across Georgia, but I would like particularly to highlight the actions taken in closer proximity to Abkhazia.

We have disarmed and neutralized illegal armed formations, which had no connection to either the Government or internally displaced persons. We have detained several criminal groupings that operated in western Georgia, particularly in the regions of Samegrelo and Svaneti — areas adjacent to Abkhazia: groups that were involved in the kidnapping and abduction of human beings and connected with the kidnapping of UNOMIG personnel. We have demonstrated that the Government of Georgia is fighting criminals and illegal armed groups not just

with words, but with actions. We are committed to bringing this fight to a successful end, and we are sure that we will do so in the near future.

We regret that the investigation into the shooting down of the UNOMIG helicopter is being carried out only partially. Despite our and UNOMIG's countless requests and despite the fact that the Russian Federation is providing us with video material, the Abkhaz leadership refuses to allow the investigation to be carried out in the territory controlled by them; it seems they have something to conceal.

Let me restate that we have begun a relentless fight against anyone who chooses a criminal path. In that context, I cannot but commend and support the decision to introduce the civilian police component to the Gali region. We consider that a wise decision and a very positive trend. However, I also must note that the Abkhaz authorities continue to obstruct the full formation and deployment of the units, which continues to create very significant problems for the population in the Gali district. The Security Council must strengthen its call on the separatists to comply with this decision.

I believe it is also time to consider strengthening UNOMIG's self-protective capacity. That initiative was introduced in the past but, unfortunately, it has never materialized.

All of the aforementioned is a testament to our commitment to the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Taking the path of peace is our most serious commitment. We accept our responsibilities with a renewed sense of commitment and purpose. We seek better understanding with the Abkhaz people. We encourage people-to-people contacts between the two sides on all levels: between civil groups, non-governmental organizations, young people, elderly people, and so forth. We want to restore the bridge with the Abkhaz people, which means restoring many small human bridges between the two sides in the conflict.

To illustrate that point, I want to recall how emotional I was to see a delegation of school children from Abkhazia just three weeks ago in Tbilisi — and images of them — on Georgian television, planting trees with the President of Georgia in one of the central parks in Tbilisi. It was indeed a touching moment for the entire population of Georgia. We believe that those trees will weave new branches of friendship and greater confidence between the conflicting sides.

We are carefully watching and actively participating in the Geneva process, and we place much hope in its successful development. We value that format and believe it can be of great benefit. At the same time, improved bilateral relations with the Russian Federation, with the participation of the Abkhaz side, can bring us real progress. In that regard, the third meeting, held in Geneva in February, was an important step forward. Unfortunately, the Abkhaz side refused to participate in the meeting. We believe that decision was most alarming and unacceptable to all the parties involved in resolving the conflict. We believe it is high time for the Security Council and the entire international community to pay more attention to the unconstructive position of the separatists and to draw the appropriate conclusions.

Here, I have to turn to the problem of the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, which was the subject of thorough discussion at the third Geneva meeting. We welcome the advancement of this problem to the front line of the peace process. This most painful problem is not just about isolated principles or concepts, but rather about the fate of the hundreds of thousands of men, women and children who fell victim to the ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the separatist regime years ago, people who, for more than a decade, have been deprived of their most basic human rights: to live in their own homes, to speak and to raise their children in their native language, and to pursue happiness in secure and dignified conditions. As we continue to deliberate on the fate of those people, they continue to vanish and to fall victim to the injustice of the few. That cannot go on forever.

Two days ago another meeting on this issue was held in Moscow and, unfortunately, was also unsuccessful. Once again, despite the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the active participation of the Russian side, the unconstructive position of the Abkhaz side made it impossible to adopt a document on mechanisms of the return of internally displaced persons: the so-called letter of intent. I call again on the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Group of Friends and the Russian Federation, as facilitator, to increase their efforts tenfold to reach a just solution, to give these people the right to return home and to live in a dignified, secure environment.

I would like to make special mention of new relations with the Russian Federation. Members are well aware that that relationship during past years was not always paved with roses. For years, the relationship between us was strained, above all by the stalemate over the Abkhazia issue.

Today the situation is qualitatively different. Georgia has new leadership, which has taken unprecedented steps to improve relations between our two States. President Saakashvili's first order of business was to visit Moscow and meet with President Putin. At that meeting, the President of Georgia extended the hand of friendship to the President of the Russian Federation, and that handshake was truly accepted by President Putin.

I would like to state that in a number of areas the results were instantaneous; the destructive rhetoric in the mass media was halted. Georgia is no longer viewed as a State with an enemy posture. Furthermore, Georgian and Russian border guards have reached an agreement on joint patrolling of the common border. Many such examples can be found. Similar processes remain ahead with regard to the conflict in Abkhazia. In that connection, we still have serious problems and the key to their solution lies in the good will of all of us and of the Russian authorities.

The most important issue in this regard is the problem of the political status of Abkhazia, Georgia. Three years have elapsed since the Group of Friends agreed on and supported the Boden document on the distribution of constitutional competencies between Tbilisi and Sukhumi. The Russian Federation, as the special facilitator, has been trying to transmit the paper to the Abkhaz side, but to little avail. We still hope that, with the increased and more persistent involvement of our Russian colleagues, we will be able to begin meaningful deliberations on the political status of Abkhazia based on the aforementioned document.

President Putin's election to a second term was very important for us and we are sure that we are indeed entering a new phase in our bilateral relations.

Both countries now realize how many common interests and concerns they have in our region, and I am sure that both will benefit greatly from this new dialogue.

We hope that this new dialogue with the Russian Federation will facilitate our efforts to reach a fair, just and comprehensive resolution of the Abkhazia conflict. The problem of separatism is as painful for Georgia as it is for the Russian Federation. Separatism, ethnic cleansing and terrorism are evils that all of us, collectively, have to combat.

Let me, in closing, reiterate that Georgia has a new leadership whose main goal is to restore the territorial integrity of the State and to achieve that goal only through peaceful means. We are ready to buttress our statements with actions. We have already done so. We have taken substantial steps to improve bilateral relations with the Russian Federation. We assume our responsibilities with a new sense of purpose and determination, including our relationship with international organizations and particularly the United Nations. We welcome all attempts aimed at improving relations with the Abkhaz side, but, at the same time, we cannot allow the separatists to continue to hold the peace process hostage.

At this time in our history, we look to the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to respond to the new realities in my country and to reinvigorate their efforts to reach a comprehensive, peaceful resolution to the conflict.

The President: I thank the Prime Minister of Georgia for his important statement. I would like to take this opportunity to express, on behalf of the Security Council, our appreciation to the Prime Minister of Georgia for taking the time to come and brief the Council.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I should now like to invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussions on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.