



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to OSCE Head of Mission in Georgia, Roy Reeve, and EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, Heikki Talvitie

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission, Paul W. Jones
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 21, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States would like to join the other delegations in extending a warm welcome back to the Permanent Council for Ambassadors Reeve and Talvitie.

As Ambassador Reeve has so accurately noted, events in Georgia occur "rapidly and unpredictably." This has certainly been the case over the six months since Ambassador Reeve's last report to the Permanent Council.

The United States commends Ambassador Reeve and his staff for continuing their high standard of performance in all three dimensions.

I must disagree with the assertion by my distinguished Russian colleague that Ambassador Reeve has exceeded his mandate. The truth is that not only has he not exceeded his mandate, but unfortunately, and through no fault of their own, Ambassador Reeve and his staff are encountering obstacles to the effective fulfillment of the Mission's mandate. We have never seen indication that Ambassador Reeve and his staff have been anything but objective in carrying out their mandate or in reporting on developments.

Six Mission military monitors for all of South Ossetia are far too few. We urge the Permanent Council to give positive and prompt consideration to increasing that number.

The United States also urges the Russian Federation to reconsider its position that the Border Monitoring Operation, or BMO, should close at the end of this year. It is clear from the high number of unauthorized border crossings observed by BMO personnel this year that there is a need for the operation to continue. The BMO may also have served as a deterrent, stopping even more unauthorized crossings.

Ambassador Reeve has outlined, and indeed has already implemented, measures in which the BMO can be made more efficient. We may also be able to improve the lines of communication so that both Georgian and Russian border enforcement personnel can respond in a timely fashion to illegal crossings.

While the Permanent Council never envisioned an indefinite mandate for the BMO, the United States believes that it is too soon to terminate this operation. Particularly after the terrible tragedy of Beslan, it is vital that the border be as secure as possible. We agree with the Georgian government that the BMO contributes to this goal.

The OSCE Mission in Georgia has also been actively engaged in the area of its mandate dealing with promoting negotiations aimed at reaching a peaceful political settlement in the South Ossetia conflict. We commend Ambassador Reeve for his tireless efforts toward this end.

Ambassador Reeve has reported that that two civilian casualties have resulted from land mines that were deployed, but not marked. We commend the declared intention of the new commander of the Russian Federation Peacekeeping Force to try to clear landmines that have been laid, and urge all sides to cooperate in that effort.

We regret the shooting deaths of two peacekeepers in South Ossetia on October 12. Fruitless violence like this points to the need for continued high-level political engagement.

In this vein, the United States was pleased to hear from Ambassador Reeves that the long-awaited meeting between Georgian Prime Minister Zhvania, and South Ossetian leader Kokoity will take place by November 10. We call on both sides to make every effort to end the delays and to ensure that such a meeting results in an agreed next step toward a settlement process.

Ambassador Reeve has noted that an agreement was reached in Moscow to hold a high-level meeting of the JCC parties at the invitation of the Chairman-in-Office. This would be a logical follow-up to the Zhvania-Kokoity meeting. The United States appreciates the readiness of the CiO to host a high-level meeting of the parties and would welcome the opportunity, together with the EU, to participate.

With so many urgent and pressing issues facing the OSCE Mission, it would be easy to overlook some of the Mission's other important achievements. Fortunately, the Mission staff is aware that its work requires not just being *reactive*, but also being *proactive*, and taking initiatives with a long-term view.

Ambassador Reeve is to be commended for reacting quickly to events in Ajara and establishing projects in the area of democratic institution building. But equally important is his continued focus on the long term throughout the various crises his Mission has had to confront. For instance, the Mission's support to the regional offices of the Ombudsman is a crucial program that will yield its results over the long term with greater respect for human rights throughout Georgia.

Another such far-sighted program is the Young Entrepreneurs Scheme. The future of Georgia's economic growth a decade from now may lie in the hands of those young people starting businesses today.

The Mission's attention to anti-trafficking is another area of great importance to the United States. The efforts of the informal working group chaired by the Mission to develop a National Action Plan against trafficking are significant. We call on the Georgian government to adopt the Plan as soon as it is ready, and look forward to the fulfillment of Ambassador Reeve's expectation that the Plan will be approved by Presidential decree by the end of the year.

Nor should we overlook the Mission's ongoing efforts in the areas of counter-terrorism and weapons destruction and recycling. In the former area, the Mission's practical assistance to Georgian authorities in spotting false documents and improving airport security and border controls is very valuable. In the latter area, the Mission is engaged on reducing weapons stockpiles, and the United States will, of course, remain a contributor to this effort.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Talvitie for keeping the OSCE informed of his activities. The United States greatly values your observations and insights, based on your long experience and your wide web of contacts throughout the Caucasus. The UN's engagement in the region is highly significant, and we look forward to continuing to work with you.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the United States feels strongly that Ambassador Reeve and his staff are doing a tremendous job in Georgia, despite numerous crises and obstacles. Let's give Ambassador Reeve the human and financial resources he needs to effectively fulfill his mandate and continue to assist Georgia in becoming a stable, democratic and prosperous state.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.