

Stake out de Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Géorgie

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Good afternoon, a few points on Georgia. I think the context of our discussions here has dramatically changed.

In fact, the whole context of the Georgian situation has been dramatically affected by Russia's decision today to recognise the two separatist entities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. And this is obviously a very far-reaching decision and one that will have wide ranging implications, I think even beyond Georgia's situation. This implication will be considered in detail by our leaders, and particularly at the meeting of the European Summit on the first of September.

But just to limit myself to the work that we have been doing here at the United Nations: we have been working very intensively over the last days to try to achieve a resolution that would set the ground for a peaceful settlement, based on the six-point plan and on the annexed clarification to it, and this has been a very serious and good faith negotiating effort. Our impression is that we have been making a good deal of progress towards achieving that kind of consensus.

But obviously, it is known to everybody that one of the main, if not the main stumbling block was the issue of territorial integrity. I think we were ready to address this issue and explore ways of reaffirming our position, but in a way that would potentially have secured consensus at the Security Council.

However, today's decision by Russia makes it much more complicated to continue this discussion. I've heard the ambassador of Georgia, I talked to the ambassador of Georgia and obviously the importance of territorial integrity is even higher today because the stakes for Georgia are even higher today. And we can understand this position, we have to factor it in. Obviously the move by Russia certainly has implications for Russia's position on this issue and therefore it is obviously much more delicate and complicated. We deplore that. As you know, France has been involved throughout very actively on this process and we still think that a consensus resolution would be very useful and beneficial to security and stability in Georgia and in the region. But now we have to assess the implications of a Russian move.

I think one thing is important though. I would like to stress that, the six-point and the attached clarification, have been agreed by the parties. They have been signed by Russia, by Georgia, by the Abkhaz side and South Ossetian side and these agreements have to be respected. They are very important, particularly as far as preserving security and stability and preventing the resumption of hostilities on the ground. And therefore we would insist that these commitments be met and be respected by all.

I think the second point which has to be emphasized is the humanitarian aspect. We are obviously very concerned about this issue. One of the six points in the plan regards free access of humanitarian assistance. It is very important that this commitment be respected too and we have also very alarming reports at actions that are quite akin or similar to ethnic

cleansing, particularly against Georgian villages in South Ossetia. Those reports are obviously of paramount concern to us and we think that we need explanation and clarification on what is exactly happening.

So basically, this is where we stand today. We were obviously ready to continue being of help. But as I said the backdrop is significantly changed. The situation has evolved and it is definitely for our governments, our leaders to assess all the implications of this move by Russia today.

The Russian Ambassador said Georgian actions in South Ossetia pretty much "dashed" all previous resolutions regarding territorial integrity. Would it be useful for you to reiterate those previous resolutions ?

For us the situation is very simple : these resolutions have been reaffirming the principle of territorial integrity of Georgia, and there is no way you can "dash" or "cancel" or whatever "terminate" a resolution of the Security Council by force. The only body that is able to change a resolution of the Security Council is the Security Council itself. We stick to the position of the Council, which is that territorial integrity of Georgia must be fully respected.

Russia says France recognized the independence of Kosovo. I wonder if you could just say how these two entities are different in kind ?

We have always said on and on that Kosovo was a specific case and indeed we were certainly regarding Kosovo, we were not confronting a situation whereby a state changes the frontiers or the borders of its neighbour through a military intervention. In Kosovo, we have a UN administration put in place by the Security Council for ten years, we have had a peace process, we have had a plan devised by Mr. Ahtisaari, so lots of ways, lots of arguments which clearly point to the specificity of the Kosovo case, and certainly one that is absolutely not applicable to other situation, and particularly of that of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Inaudible

Definitely this is an issue. We think that it is important to retain, one way or another, an international presence in Georgia, because situation there is still very volatile. The Secretary-General, as well as the EU and the OSCE have shown that they are ready and determined to get involved but how and under which modalities is something that remains to be seen, but as far as the UNOMIG is concerned, we have a deadline, which is 15 of October, when the mandate of that operation expires, so we have to address this pretty soon.

A comment about the report of ethnic cleansing in Georgian villages : is this something you intend to raise at the Council, and might you do it today, and also what was you reaction to the Russian draft press statement on Afghanistan ?

Well, on the first question : we have reacted through Minister Kouchner, and I think a lot of others have expressed concerns. We will definitely pursue this very seriously. Now, I can not tell you exactly how and under which modalities, but this is really alarming and we have to have all the elements. This is really what is taking place, it is a further term for the worst and reminding past events that are really not to be repeated, so definitely we will be pursuing that very seriously.

And as far as the initiative by Russia on Afghanistan, well, we have issued statements, France and the European Union regretting and deploring what has happened. But let us not forget what the international community is doing in Afghanistan. We are essentially trying to help the Afghans rebuild their state, their nation. There has been a lot of progress made. And in fact, if we only have to pick up one example, it would be the reopening of thousands of schools and millions of kids that are allowed to go to school again. This is obviously a challenge and an effort that has to be pursued over the long term. But I think that picking up in a selective way an event, be it tragic and deplorable, doesn't do justice to what the international community does in Afghanistan. Thank you./.