



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Morel

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 6, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes you, Ambassador Morel, to the OSCE in your dual role as EU Special Representative for Central Asia and for the crisis in Georgia.

We commend your efforts – and those of OSCE Special Envoy Talvitie and UN Special Representative Verbeke – to coordinate international talks on security and stability arrangements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, in keeping with the August 12 and September 8 agreements. We hope these talks will resume on November 18 and, over time, provide a way to resolve these separatist conflicts peacefully and in accord with Georgia's territorial integrity.

In the immediate term, we hope the talks can help the parties find solutions to the pressing issues of: 1) securing unfettered access to South Ossetia and Abkhazia for EU and OSCE monitors, for international organizations providing humanitarian assistance, and for human rights groups; 2) establishing an incident response mechanism to deal with prior and ongoing violence and other human rights abuses; and 3) launching a process for the safe, voluntary return of internally displaced persons once security is restored to the zones of conflict.

We urge all parties to demonstrate creativity and flexibility in agreeing on arrangements for the talks, and we call on all parties to adopt a practical approach to resolving outstanding technical issues. We welcome your creative and constructive approach, which allows for the parties to the conflict to come to the table.

In more general terms, we once again urge Russia to implement in their entirety all commitments in the August 12 cease-fire agreement and its clarifying documents, as well as the September 8 agreement. Russia is responsible for safeguarding the human rights and physical security of populations in the areas it occupies. We remain disturbed by Russia's continuing inability to fulfill this responsibility. The reports of ongoing abuses underscore the crucial need for EU and OSCE monitors to have full and unimpeded access to the South Ossetian and Abkhazian regions of Georgia. We will continue to demand this access, and to support Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. In this regard, we note that OSCE monitors' access to South Ossetia was specifically included in the September 8 agreement between Presidents Sarkozy and Medvedev.

Turning to Central Asia, we would like to take this opportunity, Ambassador Morel, to praise your leadership of the EU's engagement. The EU Strategy for Central Asia provides an appropriate framework to deepen Europe's involvement in the region based on partnership and cooperation.

In the first year of the Strategy's implementation, we have witnessed a more robust political dialogue and an increase in practical assistance to the countries of this region. We welcome the EU's increased focus on addressing outstanding security issues in the region, including tightening border control, reducing trafficking, and increasing cross-border dialogue on matters of mutual concern. We hope the EU will continue to give attention to human rights issues and press for real progress in its relationships with the Central Asian nations.

The United States notes that the EU's approach is inclusive and treats as equal partners the OSCE, the UN, and other parties. The United States has participated in several events in which the EU has pursued its work on Central Asia in close partnership with the OSCE, such as the joint conference on border management held last month in Dushanbe. This partnership is essential to implementing a comprehensive strategy on the ground, where the OSCE maintains a strong presence through its field missions.

There is also great value in our bilateral cooperation. Your outreach to the United States is greatly appreciated in Washington, in Brussels, in Vienna, and in our Embassies abroad. U. S. Embassies in Central Asia work closely with EU officials on a range of critical issues, including border management, democracy promotion, and social assistance. This cooperation helps avoid duplication and creates complementary programs. Coordination between the United States and the EU is especially strong on border security assistance projects in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan.

We welcome efforts to work together in new areas, including on regional efforts to enhance customs control and water management. There is also the potential for greater cooperation on judicial training and regional law reform projects in Uzbekistan and elsewhere.

Ambassador Morel, thank you again for sharing your insights on Georgia and Central Asia. We look forward to our continued close cooperation and hope to see you here again soon.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.