



Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of South Africa

PRESS-RELEASE

Grigory Karasin Interview to ITAR-TASS in the Run-Up to the Anniversary of the August Tragedy in South Ossetia

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Question: How do you assess the security situation in the Transcaucasian region at the moment?

Answer: The situation there is worrisome in the long term. However, we note the relative stability on the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Georgia. The Russian border guards and troops, stationed there at the request of the Abkhaz and South Ossetians, ultimately remain the main factor of tranquility. Part of the credit also goes to the Geneva Discussions and, particularly, the practical operation of the incident prevention and response mechanisms (IPRM)

Although tense situations arise from time to time, they are local in nature. Fortunately, new casualties have successfully been prevented in the recent period. However, as IPRM meetings indicate, problematic issues still abound. Georgian special services act more and more aggressively, now directly in the Gali district of Abkhazia, sending saboteurs there, abducting people, and putting pressure on Abkhazian border-area residents as they enter Georgia. Even EU observers in Georgia note the provocative nature of the Georgian side's actions in the border zones.

Question: The Geneva Discussions have been going on for a long time now – in particular, the problem of providing Abkhazia and South Ossetia with written assurances from Georgia that it will not attack them is being discussed. Do you think it possible for a settlement of this problem to be achieved in the foreseeable future?

Answer: Since the start of the international discussions in Geneva, organized on the basis of the accord between Presidents Dmitry Medvedev of Russia and Nicolas Sarkozy of France, sixteen rounds have been held. So far it is these meetings that have helped to curb the exorbitant propensity of Tbilisi to clamorous accusations and demands for an immediate return of the lost peoples and territories. The results of this work may be evaluated from different points of view. However, it is indisputable that the Geneva meetings have now been jointly attended by the representatives of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Georgia for almost three years – that is, those countries for whom, in fact, these discussions were convened – as well as by Russia, US, EU, UN and OSCE. So far this is the only international platform, where the parties directly

convey to the participants their vision of the situation in the region and its prospects. To ignore the opinion of Sukhum and Tskhinval would be not only shortsighted but also counterproductive. Without their direct involvement it is impossible to ensure peace and security in Transcaucasia, including for Georgia.

Some negotiating experience has been amassed as a result of the joint work in Geneva: there gradually emerges more constructivism, more desire to achieve concrete results in the area of security. Increasingly, emotions take a back seat to the specific proposals to enhance stability on the borders, restore confidence, and solve humanitarian problems. It is clear that these positive shifts require much effort and time, but there is no reasonable alternative.

As is known, at the end of last year, the presidents of Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia made important unilateral statements about the non-use of force. This offers a good basis for further work in Geneva. A logical extension would be to sign non-use of force agreements between these three states. Unfortunately, Tbilisi persists in ignoring the proposals of Tskhinval and Sukhum to conclude such accords on a bilateral basis. Instead, Georgia is routinely trying to switch the point of focus onto Russia and demanding that we take some sort of obligation not to use force. This is a substitution of concepts; Russia did not attack anyone in the region in August 2008.

At the same time, in the spirit of goodwill, we, for our part, are ready to make our contribution to the question of non-use of force in the form of assumption of international guarantees for the non-use of force obligations of Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia in conjunction with our partners in Geneva, the United States and the European Union.

Question: Three years after the tragedy, how do you assess the possibility of normalization of Russian-Georgian relations? Is there any likelihood that in the near future the parties will try to restore diplomatic ties?

Answer: Our relations after Georgia's aggression continue to undergo severe tests. There is a growing anti-Russian hysteria in Tbilisi. The authorities are zealously developing in Georgian society, an "enemy image" of Russia. Their harsh attempts to eradicate all that for ages united Russians and Georgians are hitting many thousands of our citizens, cutting the spiritual, cultural, and just family and kinship chords.

Tbilisi rulers are persistently trying to make the international community and their own people believe that Georgia is inundated with Russian spies and saboteurs with whom the "capable" local security forces are fighting indefatigably. The fabricated spy scandals seem clumsy and already evoke skepticism among many. Frankly, it's embarrassing to comment on the recent espionage charge leveled at Georgian photographers, including a personal photographer of Mikheil Saakashvili.

It is obvious that the Tbilisi authorities are trying to divert the attention of the Georgian people from the country's accumulated problems and to shift responsibility for them onto the "machinations" of external forces. The verbal imitation of readiness

to normalize relations with Moscow deceives few people: there is no real striving towards this. It would be contrary to the strategic line of Mikheil Saakashvili.

In such a situation to make any predictions about the time of normalization of Georgian-Russian relations would be devoting oneself to devising hare-brained schemes.