

Istanbul Summit -1999

OSCE MINISTERIAL

15. Reaffirming our strong support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, we stress the need for solving the conflicts with regard to the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Georgia, particularly by defining the political status of these regions within Georgia. Respect for human rights and development of joint democratic institutions as well as the prompt, safe and unconditional return of refugees and internally displaced persons will contribute to peaceful settlement of these conflicts. We underscore the importance of taking concrete steps in this direction. We welcome progress reached at this Summit Meeting in the Georgian-Russian negotiations on the reduction of Russian military equipment in Georgia.

16. With regard to the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia, some progress has been made towards solving the conflict. We emphasize the importance of maintaining and intensifying the dialogue which is now under way. In light of further progress, we believe that an early meeting in Vienna, with participation of experts from this region, should be used to take decisive steps towards a solution. The establishment by the parties concerned of a legal framework for refugee and internally displaced persons housing and property restitution will facilitate the early return of refugees and internally displaced persons to the region. We also urge the early signing of the Georgian-Russian economic rehabilitation agreement and encourage further international economic assistance.

17. We continue to support the leading role of the United Nations in Abkhazia, Georgia. We emphasize the importance of breaking the current deadlock with regard to finding a peaceful solution to the conflict. In this respect we - and in particular those of us who belong to the Friends of the United Nations Secretary-General - are ready to work with the United Nations to prepare and submit a draft document addressing the distribution of constitutional competencies between the central authorities of Georgia and authorities of Abkhazia, Georgia. We reiterate our strong condemnation as formulated in the Budapest and Lisbon Summit Documents, of the "ethnic cleansing" resulting in mass destruction and forcible expulsion of predominantly Georgian population in Abkhazia, Georgia, and of the violent acts in May 1998 in the Gali region. In light of the precarious situation of the returnees, we recommend that a fact-finding mission with the participation of the OSCE and the United Nations be dispatched early next year to the Gali region to assess, *inter alia*, reported cases of continued "ethnic cleansing". Such a mission would provide a basis for increased international support for the unconditional and safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons and contribute to the general stability in the area. We consider the so-called presidential elections and referendum in Abkhazia, Georgia, this year as unacceptable and illegitimate.