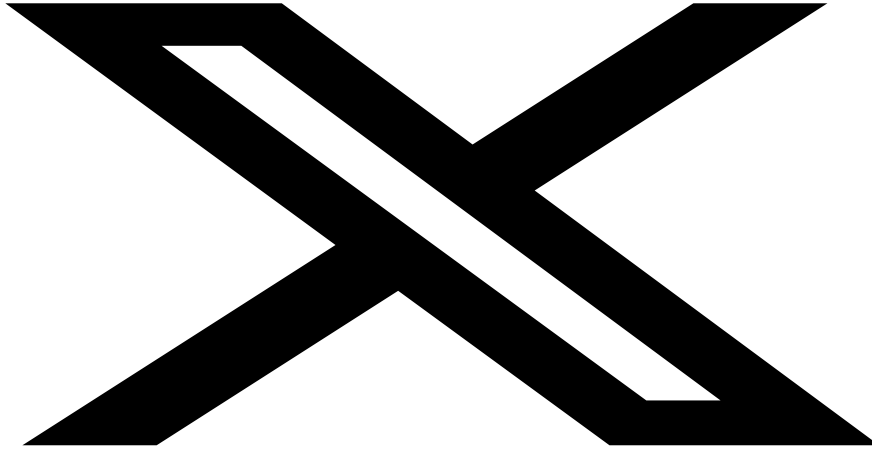


6 Western Countries Urge Russia to Withdraw from Georgia



The United States and five European countries have issued a joint statement regarding 11th anniversary of the Georgian-Russian August with an appeal to Moscow to implement agreements reached in 2008 to withdraw its military forces to positions held before hostilities began.

The ambassadors of Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, Poland, Britain and the United States issued a statement after the meeting of the UN Security Council on Thursday, supporting Georgia's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

"We firmly support Georgia's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. Russia's recognition of the so-called independence of South-Ossetia and Abkhazia and the deepening of its security relationship with both de facto authorities demonstrate a lack of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbors and for the rules-based international order. We are extremely concerned about the intensification of the so-called borderisation process.

These acts prolong the conflict while destabilizing Georgia and the region as a whole. Today we call again on the Russian Federation to fully implement her obligations under the Agreements of 12 August and 8 September 2008. The Six-Point Agreement of 12 August includes commitments to ensure that armed forces

withdraw to positions held before hostilities began and to establish an international security mechanism.

We reiterate our support for the respect and protection of the human rights of IDPs and refugees in particular with regard to their voluntary, safe, dignified and unhindered return to their homes in accordance with international law. The topic of refugees and IDPs is at the core of the mandate of the Geneva International Discussions. Despite the initial promise of progress towards reconciliation, we regret the lack of commitment and progress achieved in this format, and further call on the authorities exercising effective control over the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to facilitate access to these regions for the relevant humanitarian and human rights actors.

We remain steadfast in our support for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Georgia and encourage all parties to redouble their efforts within the Geneva International Discussions.

After the brief war that began Aug. 7, 2008, Russia recognized the independence of two of Georgia's breakaway republics, South Ossetia and Abkhazia," the statement reads.

By Ana Dumbadze

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