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Statement

Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Foreign Ministers held at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, on 19 August 2008

The North Atlantic Council met in special Ministerial session on 19 August 2008, expressed its grave concern over the situation in Georgia and discussed its wider implications for Euro-Atlantic stability and security. A peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict in Georgia must be based on full respect for the principles of Georgia's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity recognised by international law and UN Security Council resolutions. We deplore all loss of life, civilian casualties, and damage to civilian infrastructure that has resulted from the conflict. We are assisting humanitarian relief efforts. We met with the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Alexander Stubb, to discuss the key issues which he believed needed to be addressed.

We welcome the agreement reached and signed by Georgia and Russia, through the diplomatic efforts of the European Union, the OSCE and the US, to end the hostilities and to bring about a political solution to the conflict. We stand fully behind these efforts. We stress the urgency of swift, complete, and good faith implementation of the agreement, including a new international mechanism to monitor respect for these engagements. Military action must cease definitively and military forces must return to their positions held prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Fully international discussions must begin on the modalities for security and stability in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Economic activity in Georgia, including international aviation and shipping, must not be hindered.

We are gravely concerned by the humanitarian situation. Allied governments are working together, and in concert with international organisations and others in the international community, to ensure that the civilian populations affected by the conflict have the assistance they need to meet immediate and ongoing humanitarian needs. We call on all parties, in accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law, to ensure access for international humanitarian relief efforts to all affected populations.

We have also agreed today to support Georgia, upon its request, in a number of areas. In addition, we have agreed to task the North Atlantic Council in Permanent Session to develop with Georgia rapidly the modalities for a NATO-Georgia Commission. This Commission will supervise the process set in hand at Bucharest, including the measures of support agreed at today's meeting. These measures are intended to assist Georgia, a valued and long-standing Partner of NATO, to assess the damage caused by the military action and to help restore critical services necessary for normal public life and economic activity. Georgia's recovery, security and stability are important to the Alliance. NATO will continue to cooperate with Georgia in the framework of the Partnership for Peace and Georgia's Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO, and will review any additional Georgian requests for assistance. We also welcomed the fact that a number of our governments have indicated that they will actively support measures to help the economic reconstruction of Georgia.

The conflict between Georgia and Russia has compromised regional stability and security. We deeply deplore the use of force in the conflict between Georgia and Russia. We reiterate that there is

no military solution to the unresolved conflicts. We remind all parties that peaceful conflict resolution is a key principle of the Partnership for Peace Framework Document.

We remain concerned by Russia's actions during this crisis and remind Russia of its responsibility for maintaining security and order in the areas where it exercises control, especially in light of continuing reports of Russia's deliberate destruction of civilian infrastructure. Russian military action has been disproportionate and inconsistent with its peacekeeping role, as well as incompatible with the principles of peaceful conflict resolution set out in the Helsinki Final Act, the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the Rome Declaration. We call on Russia to take immediate action to withdraw its troops from the areas it is supposed to leave under the six-principle agreement signed by President Saakashvili and President Medvedev¹. The Alliance is considering seriously the implications of Russia's actions for the NATO-Russia relationship. In 2002, we established the NATO-Russia Council, a framework for discussions with Russia, including on issues that divide the Alliance and Russia. We have determined that we cannot continue with business as usual. We call on Moscow to demonstrate – both in word and deed – its continued commitment to the principles upon which we agreed to base our relationship.

We reaffirmed our commitment to the decisions taken by Heads of State and Government at the Bucharest Summit in April 2008, including those regarding Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, and we will continue our intensive engagement with Georgia to address in December the questions pertaining to its Membership Action Plan application, taking into account developments until that time.

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1. As complemented by President Sarkozy's letter dated 16 August 2008 and subsequent correspondence on this issue.