

Joint statement of the Group of Friends of Georgia

This statement is delivered on behalf of Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

We reaffirm our full support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

Thirteen years since the Russian military invasion of Georgia, we remain deeply concerned over the continued occupation of parts of the territory of Georgia and underline the need for the peaceful resolution of the conflict based on full respect for the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and international law.

We welcome Georgia's compliance with the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement. We call upon the Russian Federation to fulfill immediately its clear obligation under the ceasefire agreement to withdraw its forces to pre-conflict positions, as well as its commitments to allow unfettered access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and not to impede creation of international security arrangements on the ground. We call upon Russia to reverse its recognition of the so-called independence of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions.

We reiterate our deep concern over Russia's military exercises and ongoing military presence in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions.

We condemn Russia's steps to unilaterally establish the Georgia-Russia state border on segments of the occupied territories and incorporate a part of Aibgha village of Georgia into Krasnodar Krai. We urge Russia to reverse this process. We are also concerned with ongoing work in implementation of the "programme" on creation of a common socio-economic space between the Russian Federation and the Abkhazia region of Georgia as another step toward de facto annexation.

We note the January 2021 judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case concerning the armed conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation in August 2008 and its consequences. This includes the Court's findings that Russia has exercised effective control over the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia following the 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement, including through its military presence. The Court also ruled that Russia, in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights, tortured Georgian Prisoners of War; arbitrarily detained and killed Georgian civilians, and was responsible for their inhuman and degrading treatment; prevented the return of ethnic Georgians to their homes; and failed to conduct investigations into human rights violations. We call on Russia to fully comply with the European Court of Human Rights' judgment, including by

allowing internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return to their homes in safety and dignity.

We are concerned over the ethnic discrimination against Georgians residing in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, and over human rights abuses, including severe violations of rights related to freedom of movement, residence and property, and destruction of the houses of internally displaced persons (IDPs). We call on those in effective control to enable full and unhindered access by international human rights organisations to the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

We are concerned by the intensified provocations by the Russian Federation and the regimes in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali, which continued unabated amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. We are particularly concerned over the ongoing installation of barbed wire fences and other artificial barriers along the administrative boundary lines (ABLs) of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, and by the lengthy closure of so-called ABL crossing points. These actions have destabilized the situation on the ground and severely impacted the security, safety, well-being, and humanitarian conditions of civilians in conflict-affected areas, particularly in Akahalgori and Gali districts. The tragic deaths of civilians due to the closures of the so-called crossing points is an illustration of the grave consequences of the continuing restrictions on the freedom of movement for the local population.

We remain deeply concerned by ongoing arbitrary detentions around the ABLs. We note the recent release of Zaza Gakheladze as a positive development and call for the immediate and unconditional release of those remaining under arbitrary detention.

We condemn the killing of Georgian citizens Archil Tatunashvili, Giga Otkhozoria, and Davit Basharuli, and urge the Russian Federation to remove any obstacles to bringing the perpetrators to justice. In this context, we reiterate our support for Georgia's preventive steps aimed at eradicating impunity and note the Otkhozoria-Tatunashvili List adopted by the government of Georgia.

We take positive note of the establishment of a humanitarian corridor across the ABL in Abkhazia region, which has saved lives during the COVID-19 pandemic. We also take positive note of the recent reopening of the so-called "crossing point" at the Enguri bridge. We urge full resumption of all ABL crossings in both the Abkhazia and the South Ossetia regions, and hope this step will help ease the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.

We support the Geneva International Discussions (GID) as an important format to address the security, human rights, and humanitarian challenges stemming from the unresolved Russia-Georgia conflict. We underline the necessity of progress on the core issues of the discussions, including on the non-use of force, establishing international security arrangements in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and ensuring the safe, dignified, and voluntary return of IDPs and refugees in accordance with international law.

We express our support for the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms

(IPRMs) in Ergneti and Gali and emphasize the important role they can have in preventing the escalation of the conflict and in helping protect the safety and security of people on the ground. We express our great concern over the lengthy suspension of the Gali IPRM and urge its resumption without further delay or pre-conditions, in line with the ground rules.

We reaffirm our unwavering support for the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) and call upon the Russian Federation to allow the EUMM to implement its mandate in full, including by enabling the EUMM's access on both sides of the ABLs.

We welcome the decision of the government of Georgia to launch a multi-stakeholder process of developing a comprehensive "State Strategy for de-occupation and peaceful conflict resolution", as well as the launch of the strategic review of the reconciliation and engagement policy. We support the Georgian government's "A Step to a Better Future" peace initiative, aimed at improving the humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of people residing in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and at fostering confidence building among divided communities.

We encourage the OSCE's engagement in the process of finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Georgia. We regret the closure of the OSCE mission to Georgia in 2009 and encourage the OSCE participating States to decide on the reopening of the OSCE cross-dimensional mission in Georgia, including a monitoring capacity able to operate unhindered across the ABLs. The re-opening of the mission would strengthen considerably the OSCE's engagement in the GID and IPRMs, and in implementation of confidence-building measures. The Group of Friends of Georgia will continue to raise awareness of the conflict and of developments on the ground, hold Russia accountable for its obligations and commitments, and advocate for the conflict's peaceful resolution.

Statement on the One Year Anniversary of the Fraudulent Presidential Election in Belarus

Thank you madam Chair.

The UK would like to add its voice in marking the one year anniversary of the deeply flawed and fraudulent presidential election in Belarus. The UK has on a number of occasions in this Permanent Council condemned the appalling crackdown on human rights which has taken place in Belarus over this time. No sector of society has been safe; Professor Benedek's Moscow Mechanism report, commissioned in the immediate aftermath of the election, and the further work conducted by the UN have shown the full range of brutality on display.

Recent incidents such as the forced diversion of Ryanair Flight 4978, the sentencing of Victor Babariko and the closed trials of Sergei Tikhanovski and other high profile opposition figures, as well as the ever growing number of political prisoners show how the situation continues to deteriorate. Not satisfied with its attacks on political opposition, free media and peaceful protesters, the Lukashenko regime is now attacking the wider civil space. On 23 July in coordinated action, authorities across Belarus dissolved at least 46 NGOs. These included organisations focused on environmental protection and disability rights.

The Belarusian authorities have had ample time to cease their attacks on the freedoms of the citizens of their country, to release those detained on spurious political charges, and to undertake the fresh elections needed to enable the Belarusian people to choose their own leaders, and their own future, democratically.

As we have seen no such action from the Belarusian authorities, the UK has this week acted alongside international partners to introduce further sanctions on Belarus. Our package of sanctions – focused on economic and aviation sectors – are in direct response to the continued actions of the authorities to undermine democracy and violate the human rights of the Belarusian people.

In addition, we also want to raise our concerns regarding the regime's instrumentalisation of migrants and refugees for political purposes. We are aware of a sizeable increase in the number of migrants moving through Belarus' borders and into its neighbours. Particularly Lithuania, which has seen over 2,600 people entering this way in the past month alone and most recently Poland where in the last week over 400 people have tried to enter. Latvia too has seen approximately 350 people attempting to enter from Belarus within the last month. This unconscionable use of migrants to put pressure on Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and other European partners is another example of the Belarusian government's flagrant abuse of international norms. We stand with and support Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and the EU, and urge the Belarusian authorities to cease this activity.

In conclusion, madam chair, we again urge decision-makers in Belarus to reconsider their current course of action, and to seek to proactively address the recommendations made in the Moscow Mechanism report.

Thank you very much.

[Thousands more citizens granted status through Settlement Scheme](#)

News story

The UK government continues to secure the rights of EU citizens through the EU Settlement Scheme as it urges those eligible to apply to make an application.



[Statistics released today](#) (Thursday 12 August) shows a further 144,100 applications were concluded in July. By 31 July 2021, 6,073,600 applications were received to the hugely successful scheme, with 58,200 applications received in the last month.

Preliminary nationality data shows the number of applications made by Polish and Romanian nationals before the 30 June deadline both topped one million while applications from Italian nationals hit more than 545,000.

The Home Office is continuing to encourage those who are eligible to [make a late application to the EU Settlement Scheme](#). Last week the [Home Office announced](#) those who make a late application will be granted temporary protection until their application is concluded.

Minister for Future Borders and Immigration Kevin Foster said:

I'm delighted thousands more EU citizens have had their status secured through our hugely successful EU Settlement Scheme and we continue to work as quickly as possible to conclude all applications received.

EU citizens in the UK can still make a late application to secure their rights and join the millions who have already been granted status under the EUSS.

Following a surge in applications ahead of the 30 June deadline, the government has taken steps to conclude applications as quickly as possible.

The Home Office has increased the number of caseworkers and Settlement Resolution Centre agents to help conclude applications and respond to queries as quickly as possible. Most non-complex applications are still being decided within five working days.

Late applications can still be made where there are reasonable grounds for missing the deadline. The Home Office will take a flexible and pragmatic approach when considering late applications and will continue to look for

reasons to grant status rather than refuse.

The Home Office continues to reach out to and support those who may be eligible to apply. This includes:

- providing up to £22 million in grant funding to a network of 72 organisations across the UK to help the most vulnerable and hard to reach applicants secure their rights
- assisted digital support for those who are not confident with the online application process or do not have the technology to apply online
- the Home Office is also working with the Department for Work and Pensions and HM Revenue and Customs to reach out to people who may not realise that they need to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme.

Published 12 August 2021

[Cracking down on criminals who target self-storage industry](#)

The Intellectual Property Office (IPO), National Trading Standards, London Trading Standards and the Self-Storage Association UK (SSAUK), have teamed up to launch a new code of practice. The initiative's aim is to reduce the appeal of self-storage facilities to criminals who deal in counterfeit and other illicit goods.

[‘The Tick Box: Keep it Real Keep it Legal’](#) code of practice sets out a few simple procedures. The aim is to prevent the fraudulent storage of counterfeit and other illicit or unsafe goods. It also helps self-storage facility owners be sure of who is really using their premises. Counterfeit goods are often seized in self-storage facilities, or on their way to them. This scheme helps self-storage facilities to identify the individuals behind the crimes. It also helps enforcement authorities recover the goods before they enter the marketplace.

The scheme is already yielding results. Targeted enforcement action has disrupted criminal networks. This has resulted in the seizure of thousands of counterfeit items. These are estimated to be worth millions of pounds to criminals.

Storage facilities that participate in the scheme are provided with the ‘Tick

Box' logo. Posters are displayed within the premises. These act as an assurance to legitimate customers and a deterrent to anyone attempting to store counterfeit goods.

Forty-five local and national self-storage providers have already signed up to the first phase of the code of practice. More than 1,200 self-storage facility staff have received additional training under the scheme. The next phase will see the scheme continue to be rolled out across the UK.

Trading Standards will be promoting the scheme to self-storage operators at the European Self-Storage Conference and Trade Show. It is being held in Birmingham on 20 and 21 September 2021.

IPO CEO, Tim Moss said:

Unsafe and illicit goods, such as counterfeits, create real social and environmental harms in our communities and criminals have used self-storage units as part of their activities. Self-storage providers signing up to the code of practice will now have absolute confidence they are doing everything possible to deter criminals who target them in this way, while reassuring legitimate customers that their belongings are in safe hands.

I am delighted that the new code of practice is being co-delivered through an effective partnership between self-storage providers, government and local enforcement, complementing our comprehensive approach to disrupting IP crime.

SSA UK CEO, Rennie Schafer said:

The self-storage industry welcomes the opportunity to work with Trading Standards and local enforcement agencies to identify and deter criminals looking to use the industry for storage of unsafe and illicit goods. Many of these goods can cause real damage to the local communities that the self-storage businesses are part of. As an industry we want to do all we can to eliminate such activity from our stores and the community as a whole.

Lord Toby Harris, Chair, National Trading Standards, said:

Trading Standards officers are finding counterfeit goods in, or on route to, self-storage facilities. By supporting self-storage facilities to prevent the storage of illicit goods on their premises, we can help clamp down on the sale of counterfeit goods that continue to deceive consumers and undermine legitimate businesses. We encourage all responsible self-storage providers to [sign up to the Tick Box scheme](#) – it's free to join and easy to implement and will provide peace of mind to facility owners about

what is being stored on their premises.

Notes to editors

The scheme is already yielding results; in April 2021, three self-storage units were raided and 5000+ illegal and counterfeit items were seized in a joint Trading Standards, Police Intellectual Property Crime Unit (North West) and the Anti-Counterfeiting Group, which represents brands, with participation from the self-storage store.

In April 2021, 22 self-storage units were raided in Southall by Ealing Trading Standards and the Met Police, netting fake goods valued at millions of pounds and offering valuable intelligence about their supply. In June 2021, five more containers were raided in Glasgow, housing thousands of counterfeit goods

Within the initial rollout, there are 343 UK-wide premises signed up, with approximately 1,200 staff, all of whom are receiving training to deliver against the code of practice. The second phase will see the scheme continue to be rolled out across the UK.

The IPO is the official UK government body responsible for intellectual property rights including patents, designs, trade marks and copyright. The IPO, Trading Standards and the SSA partnered to introduce the Tick Box scheme to reduce the appeal of self-storage facilities for counterfeit and illicit goods. The scheme focusses on building stronger relationships between self-storage owners and their local Trading Standards enforcement partners, and aims to combat the social economic and social harms to communities that this type of crime can cause.

[Updated opening hours for the DBS contact centre](#)



Please note, the contact centre will now also be closed on Saturday 21 August.

Due to higher than usual levels of staff absence, the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) contact centre will be closed on Saturday 14 August 2021.

Online services and services across GOV.UK remain unaffected.

You can track your DBS check application online:

- Track your Basic DBS check [here](#)
- Track your Standard or Enhanced DBS check [here](#)

Registered Bodies can also track multiple applications online, [here](#).

If you have a general enquiry, you can still contact DBS via the following:

We are also able to answer general enquiries via social media, however these channels are not monitored over the weekend:

Published 12 August 2021

Last updated 19 August 2021 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 19 August 2021

News story updated to advise that the DBS contact centre will now be closed on Saturday 21 August 2021.

2. 12 August 2021

First published.