



STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT SERGEI BAGAPSH IN RESPONSE TO SENATOR LUGAR

U.S. Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN) will reportedly issue a report next week calling for the United States to rearm Georgia. Such a decision would jeopardize the fragile peace we have in this region. I urge him to re-evaluate his stance.

In considering the Senator's recommendation, Americans must not forget Georgian President Saakashvili's history of recklessness and irresponsibility. In August 2008, he broke international laws and launched an attack on civilians in South Ossetia, using munitions supplied by the U.S. and other western nations. Those actions, which led to hundreds of deaths and thousands of displaced refugees, were confirmed by a respected EU commission in October. We have proof that he was prepared to launch a similar attack on our civilians. Claims by President Saakashvili that new weapons and military training will only be used for defensive purposes ring hollow, given his past behavior. We do not trust him, and we caution the United States that it should not, either.

Abkhazia is working to build a democratic nation in which our people can be free and productive. We have just conducted a peaceful presidential election, in which 73% of the eligible voters participated. I am honored to have been re-elected to another term. We are rebuilding our economy and our people are energized by the opportunities they face as an independent state. Abkhazians do not want to live in the past. Granting Georgia additional weapons will take us all back to the Cold War mentality that stifled our region for decades. I ask the United States Congress and President Obama to consider the ramifications of their actions, past and present, and I respectfully challenge Senator Lugar to demonstrate how further militarizing our region will contribute to anything but greater instability and conflict. Unfortunately, the senator did not ask the people of Abkhazia what rearming Georgia would do to our hopes for peace in our region. If he had, he might have reached a different conclusion. --*Sergei Bagapsh, President, The Republic of Abkhazia, December 23, 2009*