

**Statement
by Amb. Altai Efendiev,
Secretary General of the Organization for Democracy & Economic
Development – GUAM
during UNAOC Group of Friends Ministerial Meeting**

27 September 2019, New York

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Participants,

First and foremost, I would like to express our gratitude to the Governments of Spain and Turkey for their continuous support of the UNAOC, as well as our appreciation of the leadership of the UNAOC in steering the organization towards the implementation of its mandate and objectives.

We commend in this regard efforts of the High Representative (HR), H.E. M.A. Moratinos, to make the UNAOC relevant to ever evolving challenges, including through initiating open debates and exchange of views and ideas.

We also believe that such debates and exchange of ideas should be honest and realistic and should help us to find right answers and develop practical solutions to the problems and challenges we confront.

In this regard, and using this opportunity, I want to thank the UNAOC HR for the organization of such debates yesterday, 26/09/2019, as well as all the speakers for their frank statements. It was truly a good precursor of today's meeting that provoked me to rewrite my statement of today.

The main Question that I took from yesterday, - is whether the UNAOC as a platform for dialogue, in its current shape, is able to fulfill its important mission? I must admit that I share certain skepticism voiced yesterday, while remaining, to the extent, a cautious optimist.

To justify this standpoint, let me share with you some views from the perspective of the region and the countries, namely, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, united under the umbrella of the Organization for Democracy & Economic Development – GUAM (further GUAM), which I'm representing here.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished participants,

I represent the region, which has rich history, unique and diverse cultural heritage, where peoples of different origins and beliefs for centuries lived in peace and harmony.

Historically many trade routes, including the Silk Road, crisscrossed the area. The region was integral part of a bigger world, where goods, ideas and peoples travelled freely, mutually enriching each other and leaving tangible and intangible imprints, many of which are in the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Nowadays, GUAM member states (MS), as independent countries, are aiming at restoring their historical role and place in connecting continents and peoples, thus further contributing to the promotion of dialogue and better understanding among nations and peoples.

And you all are well aware of the efforts that our MS are investing in the promotion of better understanding through hosting regularly global events of inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue.

In stark contrast to our vision and aspirations, unfortunately, each of GUAM MS suffers from foreign aggression and/or direct involvement, resulted in occupation and gross violation of their territorial integrity, in flagrant infringement of international law. Acts of aggression and occupation caused thousands of deaths, hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced, bringing divisions and sufferings to the peoples.

It is widely acknowledged that the region hosts most protracted and dangerous military conflicts in Europe that pose serious threat to European and wider international peace, security and stability. However, decades of international mediation, so far, have no results and there are no promising perspectives to their resolution. Quiet opposite, the region is being used as a testing ground for all kinds of manipulations, utilizing elements of hybrid warfare, aiming amongst other, at bringing more divisions along ethnic and religious lines.

I will not speak of the conflicts in all our GUAM MS, as I'm sure, you all are well aware of them. However, what I want to emphasize here is that all the above-mentioned problems that our countries currently experience are not originated from within their territories but imposed and sponsored from outside. And they are not of cultural, ethnic, or religious origin, but of political nature, and are being used for political reasons and purpose. Sadly, as was also expressed yesterday by the esteemed speakers, this thesis is applicable to many crisis situations in other parts of the world.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, situations as described, require specific approaches and solutions. This puts the whole issue of the role of the UNAOC into broader perspective: whether our efforts within the UNAOC are sufficient and will bring results, if the UN as a system failed to deliver on the Resolutions of its Supreme Body.

Mr. Chairman,

As rightly described by the acknowledged expert, we are living in times when a world is in disarray. Moreover, current developments elsewhere across the globe, show that the world is further drifting towards greater uncertainty and unpredictability. And, as we are observing, the system of international relations in its current shape is not able and capable of responding adequately to all the challenges that we are facing.

Nevertheless, against this gloomy background, it seems, that, at least for the time being, there is an initiative that deserves our attention, support and engagement as it might help us all in breaking through the mentioned dangerous trends.

I'm referring here to the Belt & Road Initiative of the People's Republic of China. It looks that it is the only adequate, responsible, comprehensive and inclusive response to the problems and arising challenges.

As reflected in the official statements and documents, this initiative is aimed at promoting cooperation, development, integration, fighting poverty and isolation through the development of connectivity infrastructure. It encompasses also cultural and humanitarian dimensions.

To my mind, this is truly a civilizational approach and, I believe, that should be embraced and supported. We should seek for synergies wherever it is possible, and in this particular case, where we can try and test our common vision for the better inclusive world.

Mr. Chairman,

The resurrection of the historic Silk Road is the irreversible process, as convincingly described and justified in a fascinating book under the title "The Silk Roads: A New History of the World." And it is a matter of how we all be engaged and benefit from it.

Now, how GUAM, as a regional platform and main stakeholder, can contribute to that goal. To visualize the picture, I would like to use a slide/map, which is more eloquent and self-explanatory than many words (attached).

As you can notice, the region is emerging as an important and integral part of wider international connectivity architecture in energy and transport, connecting Europe with Asia. Currently, we are implementing our two flagship initiatives of developing GUAM Transport Corridor and the implementation of the Agreement on the Establishment of the Free Trade Area among GUAM MS and promoting our region as the area of free trade and transit, peace, development and stability.

In parallel we are also covering a wide spectrum of areas of cooperation, including tourism, culture, education, youth and sports, which are the main focus areas of the

UNAOC. Development of GUAM Cultural corridor was also among main ideas of the founding fathers of the organization.

The advantage of GUAM is that it is the only full-fledged international organization in this area with developed instruments and mechanisms of cooperation, where member states are strategic partners with converging long-term interests and objectives.

Therefore, we are keen and willing to develop cooperation with all the interested parties who share same goals and principles. As a partner of the UNAOC, we are inviting all interested parties for cooperation, proposing to use GUAM regional platform for testing your good ideas and proposals, aimed at promoting peace, security, cooperation and sustainable development.

In conclusion, I would like to wish you, Mr. High Representative, every success in all your endeavors towards the implementation of your Plan of Action for 2019-2023 and assure you that GUAM will be your reliable partner in achieving your goals.

At the same time, bearing in mind above-said, I also believe that the UNAOC, as a global platform with very important mission, should aim at forging broader and inclusive alliances, inviting and engaging all important and interested countries, including global players, as well as international organizations. We would like to wish you every success in your efforts to that end as well.

Thank you for kind attention!