

PC.DEL/895/18

5 July 2018

ENGLISH

Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1191st MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 July 2018

**On the results of the latest round of the Geneva International Discussions
on the Trans-Caucasus**

Mr. Chairperson,

We are disappointed by the results of the latest round of consultations at the Geneva International Discussions on the Trans-Caucasus on 19 and 20 June. They were affected by the internal political problems in Georgia, among other things. The Georgian representatives showed not the slightest desire to engage in dialogue with Sukhum and Tskhinval to resolve issues of crucial importance for the peoples of these three Trans-Caucasus States. They did not even take the opportunity to present to the Abkhazians and South Ossetians the widely publicized initiative “Step to a Better Future”.

Instead, they again offered absurd arguments about a “Russian occupation” of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and made politicized attempts to take advantage of the tragic deaths of the Georgian citizens Archil Tatunashvili, Giga Otkhozoria and Davit Basharuli. Georgia’s latest confrontational initiative to introduce a “Tatunashvili-Otkhozoria sanctions list” is deeply regrettable. The response from Abkhazia and South Ossetia was entirely to be expected. All that the Georgian representatives achieved was to disrupt the meeting of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism in Gal on 26 June.

Propaganda actions in international forums have a destructive effect on the talks. The highly politicized resolution on refugees sponsored by Georgia in the United Nations General Assembly for the eleventh time in a row, in the absence of representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, predictably put an end to substantive discussions in the humanitarian group.

Such an unfavourable situation worked against any constructive discussion on a draft joint statement by the participants in the discussions on the non-use of force. The Georgian delegation insisted on continuing work on the unacceptable proposal by the United States of America, which effectively leaves the Abkhazians and South Ossetians outside the framework of this document. This is taking place against a backdrop of increasing NATO activity in the region, which is a serious threat to security. In April we marked ten years since the NATO Summit decision to give Georgia Membership Action Plan status. This decision

spurred Georgia to attempt to use force to resolve the long-standing conflict with the Abkhazians and South Ossetians. Neither during the events of August 2008 nor later did anyone in the OSCE feel the need to challenge the question of the unwarranted artillery shelling of Tskhinval confirmed by the International Fact-Finding Mission headed by Heidi Tagliavini. The accusations against us of “aggression against Georgia” sound all the more cynical as a result.

The murder of Russian peacekeepers and the killing of civilians in South Ossetia in August 2008 changed the political landscape in the region forever. The sooner Georgia accepts this new reality, the easier it will be to build an atmosphere of security and co-operation in the Trans-Caucasus.

We cannot accept criticism of us for developing inter-State relations with sovereign Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Our multifaceted ties with these two Trans-Caucasus republics in no way affect the sovereignty of Georgia within its new borders. We fulfilled our obligations to Georgia ahead of time in October 2008 under the agreements reached by Dmitry Medvedev and Nicolas Sarkozy. The Russian forces temporarily located in areas of Georgia neighbouring Abkhazia and South Ossetia were replaced by permanent monitors from the European Union. Russia has no other commitments in this area.

All the necessary conditions exist in the region for post-conflict normalization of relations between Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The situation in the border areas is stable and under control. Border crossing statistics for Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Georgia show that there is no problem with freedom of movement. There are regular consultations in the Geneva International Discussions format. The decrease in practical results from the meetings of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms can be completely reversed. Georgia needs only to renew efforts to strengthen stability in a professional manner and respect the State borders and government bodies of the two republics. The hotlines continue to operate.

We hope that the next round of the Geneva International Discussions will be more productive. The only way to ensure fruitful work in this format is for the Georgian negotiators to engage in direct and respectful dialogue with the representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and to renounce confrontational propaganda actions in other international bodies.

We should like to take this opportunity through the Italian Chairmanship and our Swiss colleagues to convey our thanks for the work together to distinguished Ambassador Günther Bächler, for whom this latest round of the Geneva International Discussions was his last in his current capacity. We highly appreciate the efforts he has made. Mr. Bächler, together with the two outgoing Co-Chairs at the Geneva International Discussions, the United Nations Representative Antti Turunen and the European Union Special Representative Herbert Salber, did their utmost a year ago to reach an agreement on the non-use of force in the region. Unfortunately, the Georgian representatives' deliberate action undid these efforts.

Thank you for your attention.