

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1106th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

23 June 2016

On the consultations on security and stability in the Trans-Caucasus

Mr. Chairperson,

We should like to comment on the latest round of international discussions on the Trans-Caucasus, which took place in Geneva on 14 and 15 June.

The general atmosphere at the meeting was seriously overshadowed by the adoption at the United Nations General Assembly on 7 June of the draft resolution by Georgia on refugees and displaced persons, which was formulated in a highly politicized manner that did not correspond to the facts. Moreover, the authorities of the United States of America once again refused to issue entry visas to representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to enable them to present their point of view to the United Nations Member States regarding the humanitarian situation in the region. Such a step is not conducive to objective and constructive work either in Geneva or in New York. In that connection, the delegations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were obliged to refuse to discuss this subject until Georgia stops submitting documents like this that are not in keeping with the aim of alleviating the situation of refugees. We believe that the reaction of the representatives of Sukhum and Tskhinval is natural and call on Georgia to refrain from deliberately politicizing the refugee problem.

Discussion of other issues in Geneva took place in a businesslike atmosphere. Most of the participants concurred that in spite of isolated incidents the situation in the region as a whole remains stable and predictable. Freedom of movement of inhabitants in the border regions of the three States is duly guaranteed, as confirmed by the statistics: in the second quarter, 54,000 people crossed the border between Georgia and South Ossetia, and more than 260,000 the border between Georgia and Abkhazia. The regular contact between the parties by hotline makes it possible to find practical solutions to the problems arising and improves transparency.

Mention should be made of the positive development in the work of the Joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) in the border regions of Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia, particularly the resumption of the IPRM's work in the Abkhazian town of Gali after a break of several years.

Discussion continued in a positive vein on practical issues such as the transfer of archives, preservation of cultural heritage sites, the search for missing persons and co-operation on environmental issues.

Unfortunately, once again no progress was made in a vital item on the agenda of the Geneva International Discussions, namely agreement on legally binding guarantees of the non-use of force by Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia. The refusal by the Georgia delegation to make a joint statement on the non-use of force in the region is compounded by the bellicose tones of some Georgian politicians and the increase in NATO activity in Georgia, notably the activity connected with the training drill for the transfer of NATO troops and materiel to the region from Europe. In these circumstances we consider the concern expressed by Sukhum and Tskhinval at the Georgian Government's behaviour to be completely legitimate.

As for the politicized "subjects" raised once again by colleagues concerning the tragic death of a citizen of Georgia near the Georgia-Abkhazia border on 19 May 2016 and the erection of border posts, we believe that all necessary explanations in this regard have been provided directly by representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Sukhum has launched a criminal investigation into the incident at the border with Georgia on the basis of which a decision will be made whether to prosecute the Abkhazian border guard. We should like to emphasize that the border posts on the border with South Ossetia giving rise to concern in Tbilisi are placed strictly on South Ossetian territory confirmed by topographical maps and that the need for their replacement was due to Georgia's provocative practice of deliberately damaging them. Clearly, this work poses no threat whatsoever to the local population.

Thank you for your attention.