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PC.DEL/599/20  
2 June 2020

ENGLISH  
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1269th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL  
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

28 May 2020

**In response to the statement by the representative of Georgia**

Mr. Chairperson,

Out of respect for our colleagues, we will not start picking holes in the deliberately provocative title of the current issue raised by the Georgian representative for discussion in the Permanent Council. We shall try to disregard the expressly aggressive Russophobic tone of the statement by the representative of Georgia and its highfalutin disdain towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We merely note that confrontational attacks by the Georgian colleagues at the OSCE against Russia and the authorities in Tskhinval and Sukhum, which are not even represented here, are a far cry from the Georgian Government's declarations about its determination to strengthen security and stability in the Trans-Caucasus through the Geneva International Discussions. The line taken by Georgia is clearly undermining dialogue.

It is difficult to call the accusations levelled against Russia anything but absurd. It is sad that a number of colleagues, without bothering to understand the factual background of the issue, have preferred once again to blindly support Georgia's spurious message. We are forced to conclude that these colleagues are not willing to make a balanced assessment of what is happening in the Trans-Caucasus.

Now let us turn to the facts of the matter. What the Georgian Government has been calling "borderization" near the village of Mereti was in fact planned work to clear vegetation from border fences and signs. So as to avoid any conflict situations, the Russian border guards informed the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia of this in advance on the morning of 20 May via the hotline.

We emphasize that the work was carried out according to a planned schedule. Such measures are taken regularly, usually twice a year. The clearing was done from the outer side of the fence, which is located on South Ossetian territory. Where exactly the border runs in this area is well known to the Georgian authorities and has not been challenged so far.

On 21 May, ten vehicles carrying Georgian police officers and others in plain clothes were deployed to the place where the work was being carried out. Some of them tried to prevent the clearing operation at the fence. Moreover, on 22 May, employees of the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs admitted

having violated South Ossetia's border by going ten metres inside South Ossetian territory. This was recorded by video surveillance cameras.

This real picture of events clearly confirms that the Georgian Government is once again trying to shift the responsibility for its own attempt at provocation. They have no qualms about blatantly misrepresenting the facts, suggesting a far-fetched connection between the engineering works at the South Ossetian border and the COVID-19 epidemic.

We leave it up to our colleagues to decide what they make of the comments about the "hybrid warfare tools" used against the Richard Lugar Center, as well as the accusations by the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that public health and national security are being undermined. We have heard nothing new, apart from the usual Russophobic attacks. We are not aware of any comments by Russian officials about the Georgian Government deliberately spreading the coronavirus in the region. If the distinguished representative of Georgia has any such information, we ask her to share it with the Permanent Council.

We consider it inappropriate to comment ourselves on statements made by a representative of South Ossetia. We urge our Georgian colleagues to use the channels available to them for dialogue with the authorities in Tskhinval in order to discuss the controversial nature of the work of the aforementioned Center.

We shall not hide the fact, however, that the military and biological activities of foreign States at the Richard Lugar Center in Georgia in close proximity to Russia's borders raises questions for us too. It is no secret that the laboratory was built by the Department of Defense of the United States of America and is used by the Pentagon to study pathogens of particularly dangerous infectious diseases. Despite our requests, the United States has not provided information on the dual-use work being carried out there – either as a confidence-building measure under the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction, or through bilateral channels.

It has also not been possible to arrange a visit to the Center by the relevant Russian experts through our contacts with the Georgian Government. The Georgian authorities have not responded to our note verbale of July 2019 requesting the necessary clarifications as regards the modalities for a possible visit.

Lastly, we should like to call on the Georgian representatives to abandon their preoccupation with spreading false stories on international platforms, abusing the trust of their Western partners used to taking them at their word. The required dialogue formats, including the hotline, exist for the settlement of disputes arising in the relationship with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Thank you for your attention.