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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1095th MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

7 April 2016

**On the Geneva International Discussions on Security and Stability  
in the Trans-Caucasus**

Mr. Chairperson,

On 22 and 23 March 2016, the latest round of international discussions on the Trans-Caucasus in Geneva was attended by representatives of the Republic of Abkhazia, Georgia, the Russian Federation, the United States of America and the Republic of South Ossetia and was co-chaired by the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union (EU). The head of the Russian delegation was the State Secretary and Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Grigory Karasin. The meeting was by and large conducted in a constructive working environment.

All participants took note of the continuing stability and absence of serious incidents at Georgia's borders with Abkhazia and with South Ossetia. The most significant outcome of the Geneva meeting was an agreement by Abkhazia and Georgia to resume the operation of the joint incident prevention and response mechanism (IPRM) in the border town of Gali (Republic of Abkhazia), which had been interrupted in April 2012. We are confident that the effective use of this mechanism, combined with a similar format deployed on the border between the Republic of South Ossetia and Georgia and the continued use of hotlines in border areas, will help to enhance security in the region, enabling incidents to be settled efficiently without excessive politicization and allowing the resolution of problems regarding local-level co-operation.

Crossings at State borders have remained normal both for the local population, including schoolchildren, and for tourists. Between December 2015 and March 2016, 45,000 people crossed Georgia's border with South Ossetia, while over 320,000 people did so at its border with Abkhazia. One sign of the developing collaboration between Sukhum, Tbilisi and Tskhinval was the tripartite exchange of prisoners on 10 March 2016, including three people serving life sentences.

Nevertheless, Tskhinval representatives were compelled once again to draw attention to persistent provocations on the Georgian-South Ossetian border in the form of tampering

with warning signs and border fences, and the unsanctioned entry into South Ossetian territory of Georgian citizens and EU Mission observers.

While discussing the non-use of force in the region, most participants, including the co-chairs, supported the adoption in Geneva of a brief joint declaration on the issue as a first step towards legally binding agreements between Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia. Unfortunately, the Georgian representatives again avoided entering into any such agreement.

The representatives of Abkhazia, Russia and South Ossetia expressed their concern at the growing military co-operation between Georgia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Given that the Georgian Government continues to stake claims to both independent republics, the ratcheting up of the Georgian army's offensive capabilities and the growth in the number of Georgia-NATO joint military exercises are understandably a cause for concern in Sukhum and Tskhinval and are frustrating multilateral efforts to stabilize the situation in the Trans-Caucasus.

Due note was taken of the positive trend for the parties to carry out joint projects in environmental protection, the transfer of archives and irrigation, as well as of the ongoing dialogue on the search for missing persons and the reburial of Georgian nationals who had lost their lives during the recent conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia.

There was a substantive exchange of views in the group on humanitarian issues. In a direct dialogue with the Georgian representatives, the representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia provided the necessary explanations on all matters which had been troubling the Georgian Government, including those which had been raised by Georgia recently within the OSCE. It was, in turn, pointed out to Georgia that it was counter-productive to attempt to put forward a politicized resolution on refugees in the United Nations General Assembly each year, not least as there were still unjustified obstacles to the representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia taking part in the thematic discussion. It was confirmed that Sukhum and Tskhinval are prepared to consider the topic in detail through regular meetings in Geneva.

Thank you for your attention.