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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANDREY KELIN,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 966th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

10 October 2013

**In response to the address by the
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Maia Panjikidze**

Mr. Chairperson,

We have always supported dynamic, traditionally good-neighbourly relations with Georgia. It is for that reason that we responded positively to the desire of the new government under Bidzina Ivanishvili to begin dialogue on the normalization of these relations. Specific benefits of the informal dialogue launched in December 2012 between Grigory Karasin and Zurab Abashidze are already evident today. Areas have been identified in which normalization is in principle possible at a time when Georgia remains unwilling to review its unilateral decision to sever diplomatic relations with Russia. These areas are trade, transport and humanitarian issues.

Georgian mineral water and agricultural produce are returning to the Russian market. More than 7 million bottles of Georgian wine of some 600 appellations have been delivered to Russia to date. Technical issues are resolved by the relevant specialists as they arise. Reciprocal trade this year stood at around 500 million United States dollars.

Road links have been restored. Consultations have begun on resuming regular air connections. Humanitarian, cultural, sporting and religious ties have been revived, as have business contacts.

We were pleased to learn of Tbilisi's decision to participate in the Sochi Olympics. We trust that, despite some emotional outbursts connected with this decision, Georgia's sportsmen and women will attend the forthcoming global celebration of sport, and the Georgian authorities will not allow any anti-Olympic activities to take place in their country.

The dialogue format is of an independent nature and has no impact on the agenda of the Geneva discussions on security and stability in the Trans-Caucasus. Five years on, these discussions retain their relevance as the most important international forum for Abkhazia and South Ossetia to have a direct, equitable dialogue with Georgia, and a useful platform for the exchange of views in ensuring the predictability of the situation in the region. This predictability can be guaranteed only by concluding legally binding agreements with Georgia

on the non-use of force against Abkhazia and South Ossetia. A joint declaration by all the participants in the Geneva discussions on the non-use of force could be a first step in that direction. The attempts to seek certain commitments from Russia regarding the non-use of force against Georgia make no sense. It should not be forgotten that it was Mikheil Saakashvili who saw to the conflicts in the Caucasus becoming “unfrozen” in August 2008 when he ordered missile attacks on Tskhinval and the Russian peacekeepers. We therefore regard such “demands” as unacceptable. Insisting on the concept of “international security measures”, of which there is no mention in the Medvedev-Sarkozy agreements, is also unacceptable.

As for the subject of refugees discussed in the humanitarian group, as we warned would be the case, the dialogue on this topic has been blocked by the Abkhazians and South Ossetians following Georgia’s submission of draft resolutions on refugees for consideration by the United Nations General Assembly. The Abkhazians and South Ossetians have no opportunity to explain their position in New York. The United States authorities will not issue them entry visas. Given this situation, the delegations of these republics see no sense in substituting the work at the General Assembly for discussions in Geneva.

In the light of the allegations heard today regarding human rights violations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, we would add that representatives of non-governmental organizations from these two republics participated in the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting that has just ended in Warsaw. There was no mention in their statements of anything corroborating these allegations regarding the human rights situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Generally speaking, we are pleased with the fairly stable situation on the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Georgia. This is largely thanks to the practical work of the Joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms. At the same time, we flatly reject the accusations against the Russian border guards in South Ossetia and the assessments of their actions. These accusations and assessments are not in keeping with the new geopolitical realities in the region.

It has been explained on several occasions that questions concerning the crossing of State borders and the border regime fall under the exclusive jurisdiction of the authorities in Tskhinval and Sukhum in accordance with their legitimate right to strengthen their statehood and national sovereignty. The border regime there is an integral part of security. Engineering work to mark the border is being carried out by the South Ossetian border service along some segments of the State border with Georgia, where there is a danger of the local population crossing the border illegally. What is involved here is just a few dozen kilometres of the 391-kilometre-long border between the two countries, and the Georgian authorities are well aware of this. The Russian border guards are carrying out only those tasks that they were asked to carry out by their South Ossetian colleagues on the basis of the 2009 bilateral agreement on joint border protection efforts. The South Ossetian measures to develop the border infrastructure are aimed first and foremost at reducing the number of incidents connected with the unintentional crossing of the border by local inhabitants from both sides. We are not talking about erecting a wall, but simply marking some segments of the border. In some places there are concrete blocks, in other places posts or wire. In this way, a factor giving rise to tension in the border region is being eliminated. It is revealing that since obstacles began to be placed along the border, the number of such incidents has gone down dramatically. Whereas in the past dozens of illegal border crossings were recorded each day

and people had to be detained, from July to September there were only 38 such cases, and what is more the offenders simply received a warning or a symbolic fine of around 50 euros. The fact that there has been a reduction in tension is also confirmed by the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia at the Geneva discussions.

As the representatives of South Ossetia and Abkhazia have underscored, observance of the border regime with neighbouring countries is an indispensable condition for ensuring the security of the local population and stability in the region. In that connection, they reiterated the willingness of the two republics to establish joint commissions with Georgia on the delimitation and demarcation of bilateral borders. We might mention that, as regards the alleged problems concerning the ability to cross the border freely, the figures speak for themselves: in this year alone there have been more than 139,000 pedestrian and 30,000 vehicle crossings of the Georgian-South Ossetian border.

We should like to draw attention once more to the groundlessness of continuing to use the terms "occupation" and "occupied territories". If we take a look in a legal dictionary, we see that this term means the seizure and retention by the armed forces of one State of the territory or part of the territory of another State, the establishment of authority, the promulgation by that authority of laws and so on. Where is all this in Abkhazia and South Ossetia? They have their own armed forces and police, parliaments issue laws. There are small Russian bases there, which have no impact whatsoever on political life. There are United States and NATO bases in other countries. This does not, however, mean that they are occupied countries, does it?

In conclusion, we should like to note once more the calls to restore an OSCE presence in Georgia. As we have already confirmed on many occasions, we shall be willing to consider this matter constructively together with other participating States. It goes without saying that the mandate of such a mission will not be extended to the neighbouring independent States of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are not yet OSCE participating States. As regards the question of establishing OSCE field presences in those States, we should deal directly with Sukhum and Tskhinval.

The only real way of strengthening stability and ensuring the security of the population in the Trans-Caucasus is respectful and constructive dialogue by Tbilisi with Tskhinval, Sukhum and the other neighbours in the region.

Thank you for your attention.