

PC.DEL/1754/15
21 December 2015

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1083rd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

17 December 2015

**On the latest round of the Geneva International Discussions on security
and stability in the Trans-Caucasus**

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome the holding of the latest round of the Geneva International Discussions on the Trans-Caucasus on 8 and 9 December with the participation of representatives of the Republic of Abkhazia, Georgia, the Russian Federation, the United States of America and the Republic of South Ossetia under the co-chairmanship of the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union. Direct dialogue continued at the meeting among the three Trans-Caucasus countries with the aim of resolving the issues relevant to them. There were positive outcomes.

In the working group on security issues the meeting participants characterized the situation in the region as calm and predictable for the most part. No significant problems were reported in the border areas, including with regard to the crossing of the State borders in the region. The number of people crossing the border over the past year – 1.1 million at the Georgian-Abkhazian border and 162,000 at the Georgian-South Ossetian border – clearly illustrates this positive development. It is reassuring that the provocation involving deliberate damage to signs and fences along the Georgian-South Ossetian border had no significant impact on the trend towards strengthening stability on the borders. The premeditated nature of these actions was documented by representatives of the South Ossetian delegation in Geneva.

The Geneva meeting participants once again gave a positive assessment of the effective work of the joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) on the border between South Ossetia and Georgia near Ergneti and also of the regular contacts between the parties using the hotlines. These measures enable problems that arise on the ground to be solved swiftly, before they become politicized. Against that background, the participants unanimously voiced their support for the speedy resumption of the IPRM in the Abkhazian border town of Gali.

The discussion of the non-use of force by Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia was continued, including work on a draft joint statement by the parties on that topic. It was stressed once again how important the signing of legally binding agreements is for maintaining lasting peace and stability in the region. The Abkhazian and South Ossetian delegations confirmed their willingness to prepare such documents. Once again, however, Georgia blocked progress on this key issue, expecting, without any good reason, some kind of unilateral commitments on the non-use of force from Russia.

Concern was expressed at the meeting regarding Georgia's growing military co-operation with NATO. Tbilisi's accelerated rapprochement with the Alliance undermines multilateral efforts towards the long-term stabilization of the situation in the Trans-Caucasus, including the work of the Geneva International Discussions.

The delegation of the Republic of Abkhazia put forward a draft statement by the participants on removing obstacles to international travel by residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Russian and South Ossetian representatives actively supported the need to develop transparent procedures for ensuring freedom of movement. The special information session on travel documents held on the eve of meeting in Geneva confirms that the EU and United States representatives understand that the restrictions imposed on citizens of the Trans-Caucasus republics are unreasonable.

We note the substantive exchange of views on essential services for the population of Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia in the working group on humanitarian issues. In particular, they discussed co-operation among the Abkhazian, Georgian and South Ossetian authorities on archive transfers, tracing missing persons, public health and environmental issues. School education in the Gali district of Abkhazia was given careful consideration. Unfortunately, owing to the persistent efforts of the Georgian delegation at the end of the day to force a discussion of the problem of refugees, further work was blocked.

In conclusion, we should like once again to stress that the Geneva International Discussions remain the most important international forum for ensuring peace in the region. We trust that dialogue will continue in a constructive vein, which will help to restore confidence in the relations among these three Trans-Caucasus countries.

Thank you for your attention.