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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ANDREY KELIN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1045th MEETING OF
THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

19 March 2015

**In response to the address by the
First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Mr. David Dondua**

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome the First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Mr. David Dondua. We have listened carefully to his statement, which addressed among other things the results of the latest round of the Geneva International Discussions on security and stability in the Trans-Caucasus held on 17 and 18 March.

The issue of ensuring stability and security in the Trans-Caucasus remains, as ever, crucial to the Geneva talks. It is important that these talks make it possible to remove concerns and exchange views on the situation in the region, which will ultimately lead to an improvement in the living conditions of the people living on both sides of the border in this region.

It is true that dialogue was difficult yesterday, but this is understandable given the problems that have accumulated and the mutual mistrust. However, the latest meeting in Geneva once again clearly confirmed how useful this international format is. The Geneva Discussions have become an important platform for direct dialogue on the problems of ensuring security in the region, addressed by representatives of the republics of Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia on an equal basis, along with Russia and the United States of America under the co-chairmanship of the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union.

The Russian Federation has consistently worked on the premise that it will only be possible to ensure security in the Trans-Caucasus to the full on the basis of bilateral agreements on the non-use of force between Georgia, on the one hand, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia, on the other. A similar position is also taken by the representatives of Sukhum and Tskhinval, who have consistently advocated expediting the work on such legally binding documents of this type, especially in view of Georgia's increasing co-operation with NATO.

A joint statement by all the participants in the Geneva Discussions on the non-use of force, something which the Co-Chairmen are urging them to reach agreement on, would be

an important interim step towards the conclusion of fully fledged agreements. It would formalize the positive dynamic provided by the unilateral statements made by the leaders of the three republics – Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia – on refraining from the use of force. We look forward to a continued constructive search for mutually acceptable wording. In this connection, it should be clear to everyone that arguments about the so-called “international security measures” in the region and attempts to raise the issue of some kind of unilateral commitments by Russia regarding the non-use of force against Georgia are unreasonable and futile. We are forced to reiterate: such notions are nonsensical. We were not the ones who started the conflict in August 2008.

As for the calls heard once again to implement the “ceasefire agreement”, I should like to clarify that no such “ceasefire agreement” was adopted or signed after the failure of the Georgian aggression in August 2008. It could not have been, because from the moment he gave the orders to attack the peacekeepers and civilians in Tskhinval Mr. Saakashvili became a figure with whom we could no longer do business. There are only the Medvedev-Sarkozy agreements consisting of the six-principle conflict resolution plan of 12 August and the measures for its implementation of 8 September. One of the principles stipulated that “the armed forces of the Russian Federation must withdraw to the line where they were stationed prior to the beginning of the hostilities.” This was in fact fully implemented by us during the night from 9 to 10 October 2008.

We are, on the whole, satisfied with the levels of stability on the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Georgia, which were also confirmed at the last round. It is clear that the efforts to install border defences have had a positive impact. Local residents who previously only had a vague understanding of their location now know precisely where the dividing line between the territories lies. The number of violations has gone down markedly.

In this context, we take note of the readiness once again expressed by South Ossetia to start joint delimitation and demarcation work with Georgia at Georgia’s convenience. In the absence of legal guarantees regarding the non-use of force, the installation of defences on the borders with Georgia following a decision by the republic’s leadership is vitally important to ensure the security of their peoples and States. We are convinced that South Ossetia and Abkhazia will be willing to enter into constructive discussions with their Georgian counterparts on delimitation issues, whether at the Geneva Discussions or in the format of the joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRM).

It is important that localized problems arising in the border regions are being resolved constructively. This is in many respects attributable to the Ergneti IPRM on the Georgian-South Ossetian border and the hotlines, including those on the Georgian-Abkhazian border. We also hope that the Gali IPRM will resume its work soon.

We have already provided detailed explanations at Permanent Council meetings, including to the First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia regarding the Treaty on Alliance and Strategic Partnership with the Republic of Abkhazia of 24 November 2014. We are not going to repeat them today.

As for the Treaty on Alliance and Integration of 18 March between the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Ossetia, we cannot accept the immoderate concerns expressed by Mr. Dondua and certain delegations in this room, since they are unfounded.

It is necessary to accept the irreversible geopolitical realities in the South Caucasus, which were brought about by the Saakashvili regime's reckless military venture in August 2008. It resulted in the formation of two new independent sovereign States – the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia – and their recognition by the Russian Federation. For almost seven years now our countries have been systematically developing multifaceted inter-State relations. This process does not threaten anyone or require the permission or approval of third countries.

The new Treaty builds on joint efforts to create a legal framework for bilateral inter-State relations, which already comprises some 80 documents. This reflects the policy chosen by the people of Russia and South Ossetia to move to a new level of relations, alliance and partnership. The Treaty provides for the development of bilateral co-operation in practically all areas: in economic, social and humanitarian fields, in countering organized crime and other dangerous types of crime, with the ultimate goal of improving the people's lives and further expanding human contacts. The main aim is to raise the standard of living in South Ossetia so that it would be comparable to the level in the North Caucasus.

In practical terms, the Treaty deals, in particular, with Russia's participation in co-financing co-operation in the field of social security of the South Ossetian population – increasing the average salary of South Ossetian Government employees and the pensions of Russian citizens permanently residing in the republic to a level comparable to that in the North Caucasus Federal District of the Russian Federation. Implementation of the Treaty is backed by serious financial resources: an additional billion roubles will be allocated to South Ossetia for these purposes in 2016. Overall, during the period from 2008 to 2014 the total amount of financial assistance to the South Ossetia came to more than 43 billion roubles.

The easing of regulations governing the crossing of the State border between our two friendly countries, especially in the light of the Treaty on the State Border signed on 18 February 2015, should make the border crossing as comfortable as possible for citizens, businesses, humanitarian contacts, etc. Identification papers and bills of lading will be checked at the border as usual, and talk about “abolition” or “removal” is therefore absolutely groundless. The word “integration” in the Treaty applies merely to customs authorities.

As for the formation of a single defence and security space between Russia and South Ossetia, it does not go beyond the existing legal framework.

The far-fetched campaign in connection with the legal framework of our relations with the two young republics is being used by some to cast a pall on the Geneva Discussions. We call upon all responsible international actors to think seriously about this. We believe it is important to continue the Geneva meetings.

Such a campaign also does nothing to further the pragmatic efforts to improve Russian-Georgian relations. These efforts have already yielded tangible results in those areas where it was possible. This is important for the people of both countries. We sincerely hope that Georgia stands ready to co-operate in the same non-politicized manner. There are no obstacles to the continuation of this work on our part.

Thank you for your attention.