



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No 1095 Vienna, 7 April 2016

EU Statement on 35th round of the Geneva International Discussions

We reiterate our view that the Geneva International Discussions continue to be a very important forum to address and resolve the challenges stemming from the conflict in Georgia, with the participation of all stakeholders.

We strongly welcome the important agreement reached by the participants of the 35th round of the Geneva International Discussions on the resumption of the work of the Gali Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), which is a major step to increase confidence, predictability and transparency on the ground.

The European Union notes that debates have continued on a possible joint statement on non-use of force. This is essential to help build confidence and should be complemented by mechanisms to improve security and transparency on the ground. With the view of the continuing Russian military and security related presence and infrastructure reinforcements in the Georgian breakaway regions, in violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and OSCE commitments, we continue to believe that a clear non-use of force commitment by Russia is necessary to enhance security, help build confidence and provide space for further political dialogue.

The European Union expresses concern about the restrictions to the freedom of movement between the breakaway regions and the rest of Georgia. Continued deployment by the Russian Federation of so-called border signs, fences and other obstacles at different locations along and beyond the Administrative Boundary Lines, divides communities and has a negative impact on the daily life of the local population, in particular by limiting access to arable lands and religious sites. The European Union recalls that provocative steps, such as the erection of barriers or illegal border signs, must be avoided, as must action that is detrimental to ongoing

efforts to stabilise the situation. We call on the Russian Federation to reverse these moves.

In the humanitarian area, we welcome the simultaneous release of detainees on March 10 by Tbilisi, Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, the resumption of the work of the ICRC-led tripartite mechanism on missing persons in Ergneti on February 5, as well as the activities of the OSCE-commissioned expert regarding the fate of missing persons in the context of the 2008 conflict, which found support in both Tbilisi and Tskhinvali. The release of detainees was an important humanitarian gesture, which could create positive momentum in addressing key humanitarian issues. In this respect, we underline that refugees and IDPs are a core issue in the Geneva International Discussions and we therefore regret the lack of substantive discussions on this matter in the latest Geneva round.

The European Union remains worried about the recently adopted so-called laws on entry to and exit from the breakaway regions and the impact on foreign residents. Implementation of the laws could have negative implications for the basic rights, including freedom of movement, particularly of ethnic Georgians living in the Gali region. Also, the introduction of Russian as the language of instruction in formerly Georgian-language schools in the Gali district of the breakaway region of Abkhazia could limit the universal right agreed in the UN Charter to education of the child. Improving the human rights situation and addressing concerns in full respect of international law and OSCE commitments is important to improve the conditions of the conflict affected population.

We remain convinced that there is a need for a meaningful cross-dimensional OSCE presence throughout Georgia, in particular for the benefit of the civilian population, including monitoring capacity able to operate unhindered across the Administrative Boundary Lines. We encourage the current German OSCE Chairmanship together with the CPC to continue exploring possibilities to return a meaningful OSCE presence to Georgia, which would considerably strengthen the OSCE's engagement in the Geneva International Discussions and Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms, as well as in implementation of CBMs.

The European Union reiterates its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders. The European Union

calls on Russia to fulfil its obligations under the ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008 and its subsequent implementing measures of 8 September 2008. The European Union also calls for EUMM access to the breakaway regions.

The European Union looks forward to the next round of the Geneva International Discussions scheduled for 14-15 June 2016.

The Candidate Countries TURKEY, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE and the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.