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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1275th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

16 July 2020

In response to Georgia

Mr. Chairperson,

Once again, we note with regret Georgia's persistent desire to politicize dialogue at the OSCE. We witnessed this destructive line just recently when representatives of Georgia blocked the joint initiative by several States for an OSCE Permanent Council declaration on combating COVID-19. Without bothering to find arguments, the Georgian colleagues rejected it merely because of Russian co-authorship.

Today we have heard the latest bogus news about Russia. Once again, the accusations of "illegal detention" of Georgian citizens, "occupation of Georgian territory" and "failure to comply with the 2008 agreements between Dmitry Medvedev and Nicolas Sarkozy" sound hackneyed and detached from reality. The baselessness of these claims is evident.

Let us make it clear. The sovereignty of the two young republics – Abkhazia and South Ossetia – is a fait accompli. Their independence is a direct consequence of the aggression of the then Saakashvili regime in the Trans-Caucasus in August 2008, which was confirmed by the conclusions of the Commission headed by Heidi Tagliavini under the auspices of the European Union. Russia withdrew its armed units from the territory of Georgia, which back in that tragic year was witnessed by the Council of the European Union and the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb. Russia's co-operation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia on security and border protection is developing strictly on the agreed legal basis.

We are as concerned as our Georgian colleagues about the recent increase in incidents of illegal crossing of the Russian, Abkhazian and South Ossetian borders from Georgia. Here are just a few recent episodes.

On 6 June near the Abkhazian village of Alakumkhara, a group of Russian border guards detained three citizens of Georgia, Mate and Mikho Lamandziya and Budkhuaza Kverkiya, who had illegally crossed the border and penetrated 80 metres into the territory of the Republic of Abkhazia. They were handed over to the Abkhazian authorities.

On 13 June, the Georgian citizen David Bardoshvili was detained by a border unit on the territory of the Tsunta district of the Republic of Dagestan in the Russian Federation 600 metres into Russian territory from the State border. He was without documents and dressed in camouflage fatigues, armed with a Vepr hunting rifle and 28 rounds of ammunition and carrying binoculars.

On 9 July, the Georgian citizen Georgi Beroshvili was also detained on the territory of the Republic of Dagestan, nine kilometres from the State border.

On 11 July, Russian border guards detained the Georgian citizen Zaza Gakheladze near the settlement of Akhmadz in the Leningori district of the Republic of South Ossetia. The intruder was armed with a five-round 12-gauge hunting rifle and in response to the legitimate demands of the border guards he opened fire in their direction and tried to flee. He was slightly wounded during the arrest and was given first aid at the scene. He was later taken to the hospital in Leningori and from there to Tskhinval. We would point out that in his deposition he admitted having deliberately and knowingly crossed the South Ossetian border.

In spite of the relative seriousness and sometimes provocative nature of such violations, Russia is inclined to resolve such issues as far as possible in a non-politicized and flexible manner.

We call on the Georgian authorities to put an end to provocative actions and statements and to use all available dialogue formats with Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, including regional incident prevention and response mechanisms, the Geneva International Discussions on Security and Stability in the Trans-Caucasus and the informal negotiations between Grigory Karasin and Zurab Abashidze, to resolve existing problems in a mutually beneficial and constructive manner. There is also a need for more energetic outreach by the Georgian authorities to their own population in order to prevent new cases of illegal border crossing.

The arrests of Georgian citizens while illegally crossing the borders with Abkhazia and South Ossetia are a direct consequence of unceasing attempts to enter the territory of these republics without authorization. More broadly, they are the result of Georgia's long refusal to negotiate with the authorities in Sukhum and Tskhinval on the drawing of the borders. Their delimitation and demarcation would ensure that such incidents do not recur. We trust that Georgia will respond to the corresponding proposals by its neighbours.

In general, we believe that it is in the common interest to resume joint work in the framework of the Geneva International Discussions as soon as the health and epidemiological situation permits, the borders open and international air traffic resumes. We hope that this will make it possible to return to the solution of urgent problems of de-escalation of the situation along the border between South Ossetia and Georgia, to agree on a statement on the non-use of force in the region and to find a constructive resolution to the humanitarian problems that have accumulated. Attempts by Georgia and a number of its backers to use international platforms to stir up anti-Russian hysteria do not help this work.

Thank you for your attention.