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**STATEMENT BY MR. DMITRY BALAKIN,  
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE  
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1162<sup>nd</sup> MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

2 November 2017

**In response to the address by the Co-Chairs of the  
Geneva International Discussions**

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome the distinguished Ambassadors Antti Turunen, Günther Bächler and Toivo Klaar, from the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union, Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions on Stability and Security in the Trans-Caucasus, to this meeting of the Permanent Council.

In spite of the continuing differences in the positions of the participants, we regard the general balance of the meetings in Geneva to be positive. Direct dialogue on a basis of equality between representatives of Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia helps to increase trust between the nations, and proactive decisions are being made on the most difficult problems of mutual relations between the three States. The efforts of the Co-Chairs ensure that the negotiations are professional and, where possible, constructive. We consider it important that this process is not interrupted and that it is brought to a logical conclusion.

As a priority, there is a need to consolidate the principle of the non-use of force in the Trans-Caucasus, as provided for in the agreements between Dmitry Medvedev and Nicolas Sarkozy of 12 August 2008. This year the Co-Chairs have brought about a serious rapprochement in the positions of the participants in the Geneva International Discussions with regard to the text of a suitable joint statement. If it were not for the dogmatic insistence by the Government of Georgia on the term “international security measures”, this page could have been turned a long time ago and the discussions moved further along.

We are counting on the Co-Chairs to persuade the Georgian Government to adopt a more constructive approach. We believe it important to emphasize once again that the guarantees of lasting security for Abkhazia and South Ossetia are particularly urgent in view of the increasing military activities of the members of NATO and the North Atlantic alliance on the territory of Georgia. Just over nine years ago, this policy already led to tragedy in South Ossetia. Lessons have also been learned from this in neighbouring Abkhazia.

We agree with the opinion that the regular meetings in Gal and Ergneti within the framework of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms and the consistent work of the hotlines make a positive contribution to ensuring predictability in the region. It should not be forgotten that the introduction of these mechanisms in itself is a highly important achievement of the Geneva International Discussions. Their beneficial influence on the situation in the border regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Georgia is obvious.

The members of the security group report that the situation at the borders of the three Trans-Caucasus republics is normal and without serious incidents. We provided statistics at the OSCE Permanent Council meeting on 19 October of movements across the borders between Abkhazia and Georgia and South Ossetia and Georgia. We believe that these figures are the best demonstration of the absence of significant problems regarding legal and orderly border crossings. Co-operation by the Georgian authorities with the authorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in demarcating and delimiting the borders would help to further strengthen security in the border regions.

Dialogue in the second working group is productive on the whole. Progress has been made in discussion of joint efforts to clarify the fate of missing persons, the return of archives, safeguarding the cultural heritage, environmental security, land use, education, water projects and combating insect pests. It is completely evident that productive work in these areas is contingent on a true determination by the participants to discuss problems in a depoliticized atmosphere.

Objective discussion on the important question for the region of displaced persons remains stalled. The main reason for this is the continuing attempts by Georgia to spin the subject of refugees for strictly propaganda purposes, making use of international platforms to which representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been denied access to date. We therefore find it quite justified that they should refrain from going through the motions of discussing matters in Geneva until the Georgian authorities show a genuine interest in solving the problem.

In conclusion, we should like once again to confirm that Russia remains in favour of maintaining this unique platform for direct dialogue and co-operation in Geneva for resolving the situation and establishing relations between Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia. We thank the distinguished Ambassadors Turunen and Bächler for their contributions to the work in this format and wish the distinguished Mr. Klaar every success in his complex task.

Thank you for your attention.