



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1202
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**EU Statement in reply to the Co-Chairs of the Geneva
International Discussions**

The European Union warmly welcomes the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions (GID), the UN Representative Ayşe Cihan Sultanoğlu, the OSCE CiO Special Representative Ambassador Rudolf Michalka and the EU Special Representative Toivo Klaar, and thanks them for their presentations. We commend the efforts of the Co-Chairs in seeking to reinvigorate the GID process and to continue the existing close cooperation between the EU, OSCE and UN. We congratulate Ms. Sultanoğlu and Ambassador Michalka on their recent appointments and thank the former Co-Chairs, Ambassadors Antti Turunen and Günther Bächler, for their dedicated work to strengthen peace and stability in the region. We commend the significantly improved gender balance among the GID Co-Chairs. We would also like to use this opportunity to welcome the newly appointed Georgian Ambassador David Dondua, who has constructively contributed to the GID format throughout the past several years as a leading participant in the GID.

The EU reiterates its unwavering commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Georgia, including through our co-chairmanship of the GID, and through the work of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia and its involvement in the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs). We recognize the major contributions of the GID, IPRMs and EUMM to keeping the security situation on the ground relatively stable and manageable.

However, a decade has already passed since the establishment of

the GID, but unfortunately a solution to the conflict does not seem to be any closer. Serious incidents keep happening on the ground, which contribute to growing confrontation and mistrust. In this context, we recall the fatal cases of Georgian citizens Messrs. Tatumashvili, Otkhozoria and Basharuli and reiterate our call for thorough investigations into these and other cases, the fate of missing persons and for justice to be ensured. It is of utmost importance to avoid impunity. We welcome the continued work of the OSCE-commissioned independent expert Dušan Ignjatović supporting investigation on the cases of missing persons.

We reiterate our deep concern about the absence for several months of IPRM meetings in Gali, and since September in Ergneti. We recall that the IPRM meetings are an indispensable element of the framework for ensuring security and stability on the ground, and we strongly support the calls by the Co-Chairs of the GID to respect the established practice regarding the agenda of the IPRMs and to swiftly resume the regular meetings without any preconditions.

The EU regrets that the discussion in the GID on the non-use of force issue reached an impasse and we encourage further efforts in this regard. We continue to believe that a clear non-use of force statement by the Russian Federation remains essential. Russia continues to violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Georgia through its military presence, infrastructure reinforcements and further build-up in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We are deeply concerned about a worrying increase of Russian military exercises, including recent use of attack helicopters. These continuing trends go counter to Russia's commitment to work toward peace and stability and we call for them to be reversed.

We regret the confrontational atmosphere surrounding discussions on humanitarian issues. We reiterate our deep concern about the ongoing restrictions to freedom of movement, including the

continuing “borderisation process”, illegal detentions and the long-term negative impact of the closures of crossing points on the Abkhaz administrative boundary line. The new fencing work in the area of Atotsi along the South Ossetian administrative boundary line is another example of destructive borderisation activities, which divide Georgia, its communities and have a negative impact on the daily life of the local population. The existing documentation gap affecting ethnic Georgians in the Gali district of Abkhazia as well as further attempts to push mother-tongue education out of Georgian schools continue to infringe on the fundamental rights of local residents. Moreover, the right of citizens living in the Georgian breakaway regions to vote in the recent Georgian elections was restricted. All these provocative steps are unacceptable and we renew our call on the Russian Federation and the de facto authorities to reverse these trends.

On a more positive note, we welcome some constructive steps and initiatives in the humanitarian area, including on people-to-people contacts, missing persons, water and cultural heritage related issues and tackling environmental challenges. However, we regret the lack of substantive discussions on the return of refugees and IDPs. We underline that this issue is a core task and agenda point of the GID. We call upon all participants to engage on all issues and refrain from walkouts, which contradict the commitments to the GID made by the participants concerned.

We agree with the views expressed by the Co-Chairs that a more constructive and result-oriented approach is necessary to reinvigorate the GID. More responsibility and political will from the participants, more dialogue, and more concrete confidence-building initiatives, especially in the area of human security, would bring us closer towards conflict resolution.

Using this opportunity, we would like to ask the Co-Chairs a few questions: 1) What new confidence-building measures would you

consider beneficial in helping to ease the situation of the population on the ground? What contribution could participating States make in this regard? 2) How has the absence of IPRM meetings been felt on the ground? Are the hotlines functioning satisfactorily? 3) Are there any intentions to bring in more actively a gender-related approach, for example by enhancing the role of women in strengthening peace and security on the ground? 4) Also, how do you see the role of youth in this regard, how could their participation in the peace process be further enhanced?

We remain convinced that there is an urgent need for a meaningful cross-dimensional OSCE presence throughout Georgia, in particular for the benefit of the civilian population, including a robust monitoring capacity able to operate unhindered across the administrative boundary lines. A meaningful OSCE presence in Georgia would considerably strengthen the OSCE's engagement in the GID and the IPRMs, as well as in the implementation of confidence-building measures.

The EU reiterates its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. The EU calls on Russia to fulfil its obligations under the ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008 and its subsequent implementing measures of 8 September 2008. We reiterate our call for access for the EUMM to the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as per its mandate, as well as for human rights monitoring mechanisms, humanitarian and other civil society organizations.

In conclusion, we would like to thank the GID Co-Chairs for their comprehensive address and look forward to the next round of the Geneva International Discussions scheduled for 11-12 December 2018.

The Candidate Countries 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.