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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1244th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

17 October 2019

**On the results of the latest round of the Geneva International Discussions on the
Trans-Caucasus**

Mr. Chairperson,

It is clear that the picture presented by our colleagues from the European Union on the results of the latest round of the Geneva International Discussions on Security and Stability in the Trans-Caucasus, which took place on 8 and 9 October, requires clarification. We are ready to share our assessments of the results of the negotiations.

Without a doubt, the discussions in Geneva turned out to be difficult. The atmosphere on the eve of the meeting was unsettled amid a surge of tension on the border of Georgia and South Ossetia. As is often the case, the reason was the Georgian Government's decision to establish at the end of August a Georgian police checkpoint in the immediate vicinity of the South Ossetian village of Tsnelis. This provocative step forced the authorities of South Ossetia to take retaliatory measures, including the construction of its own checkpoint and the temporary closure of the border with Georgia.

It is encouraging that, on the whole, even in such adverse conditions, the relatively restrained nature of the dialogue was maintained. This was the result of a series of thematic technical meetings within the framework of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism on the Georgian-South Ossetian border. We are grateful to the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the South Caucasus, Rudolf Michalka, for his active personal contribution to de-escalation. It seems that the negotiators in Geneva eventually managed to chart a way out of the impasse by taking small reciprocal steps. We hope that the Georgian Government will not oppose this.

In principle, the developments confirmed the urgent need for delimitation of the border with Georgia under agreed conditions. This will prevent the recurrence of tension in the border area.

The events around the village of Tsnelis again confirmed the importance of the Geneva platform for facilitating direct dialogue between Georgia and neighbouring Abkhazia and South Ossetia. There is no alternative in the current conditions. Within its framework, 11 years of a peaceful negotiation process have been ensured without direct confrontation and while maintaining relative stability on the borders of the Transcaucasian States.

We regret to note that the most recent round of discussions missed another opportunity to make progress in drafting a document on the non-use of force in the region. The adoption of such an instrument remains crucial for managing relations between the three Transcaucasian countries. Especially against the backdrop of NATO's ongoing provocative military manoeuvres, the influx of weapons into Georgia, and also the country being drawn into the North Atlantic Alliance, which is fraught with unpredictable consequences.

With the exception of the tension in the vicinity of the village of Tsnelis, the situation on the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Georgia remains generally stable. In most cases, potentially serious issues can be quickly resolved through the operational hotlines. The Abkhaz authorities informed us about the removal of temporary restrictions on crossing the border with Georgia, introduced earlier for security reasons.

The pragmatic dialogue on a wide range of issues of significance to the region's population convinces us of the possibility of considering in a similar manner truly sensitive humanitarian issues, including the refugee problem. The authorities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are ready for such a discussion. We expect Georgia to refrain from any attempt to politicize the issue on international platforms.

We hope that at the milestone 50th round of the Geneva Discussions in December, progress will be achieved on key items on the negotiation agenda. This would be a significant reward for the Co-Chairs of the discussions in view of their tireless efforts to strengthen security and stability in the Trans-Caucasus.

Thank you for your attention.