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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1202nd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

15 November 2018

**In response to the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions on
the Trans-Caucasus**

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome the distinguished Ambassadors Ayşe Cihan Sultanoğlu, Rudolf Michalka and Toivo Klaar, Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions on Security and Stability in the Trans-Caucasus from the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union, to this meeting of the Permanent Council. We wish the new Co-Chairs success in their multifaceted work. For our part, we confirm our willingness to co-operate closely in the interests of helping to normalize the relations between Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Georgia as rapidly as possible.

The negative dynamic in the dialogue between the three countries that has prevailed this year raises concerns about the continuation of the positive results achieved at the Geneva International Discussions over the past ten years. We should not underestimate the fact that it has been possible as a result of the joint efforts within this framework to maintain relative stability in the Trans-Caucasus and prevent military clashes in the region. Russia strongly advocates the continuation of negotiations in the Geneva format, which is unique and the only option under the present circumstances.

We share the determination of the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions to improve their effectiveness. It is important to focus the dialogue between the representatives of the authorities in Sukhum, Tskhinval and Tbilisi on seeking compromise solutions to really critical problems for the three countries and to foster greater trust between them. We are willing to consider possible ideas by the Co-Chairs for promoting professional and highly constructive dialogue in Geneva. It is quite evident that the continued attempts to use the Geneva platform merely for propaganda purposes and unilateral accusatory attacks will result in a further deterioration of the negotiating format. This is hardly in our common interests.

It is of prime importance to strengthen the principle of the non-use of force by Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the one hand and Georgia on the other, as provided for in the

agreements between Dmitry Medvedev and Nicolas Sarkozy of 12 August 2008. Unfortunately, it has not been possible this year to arrive at a compromise on this question, to a large extent on account of the dogmatic attachment by the Georgian Government to the wording “international security measures”. We are counting on the Co-Chairs to persuade the Georgian Government to take a more pragmatic approach to agreement on an oral statement on the non-use of force by the participants in the Geneva International Discussions. We are confident that this will rapidly have an impact as well on the quality of further talks on other agenda items.

We agree on the need to resume regular meetings in the framework of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRM) in Gal and Ergneti. Their establishment in itself is the most important achievement of the Geneva International Discussions and has undoubtedly had a positive influence on the situation at the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Georgia. We trust that the Georgian Government will also be willing to resume the work of the Mechanisms and will refrain from confrontational attacks and the destructive tactic of sanctions lists. We look forward to compromise proposals by the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions on a way out of this difficult situation. In that connection, we regard the continued functioning of the hotlines even under the current difficult conditions as a positive fact.

The dialogue in the second Working Group of the Geneva International Discussions needs to be kept up. A large number of agreements on aspects of transborder co-operation of relevance to the Trans-Caucasian participants in the Discussions have been reached there, particularly on the return of archives, safeguarding cultural heritage, environmental security, land utilization, education, the shared use of water resources, and combating insect pests. We await the conclusion of the work by experts clarifying the fate of missing persons from South Ossetia. We believe that substantive discussion could also be held on the question of displaced persons. The only obstacle to this is the continuing propaganda activities by representatives of Georgia on international platforms closed to Abkhazians and South Ossetians.

In conclusion, we should like to confirm that Russia is in favour of continuing the productive and regular joint work in the Geneva format. At the same time, the progress of the negotiations clearly depends on the sincere determination of all participants to discuss the problems in a depoliticized atmosphere. We hope that the next round of the Geneva International Discussions on 11 and 12 December will produce constructive results.

Thank you for your attention.