



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council N°1083 Vienna, 17 December 2015

EU Statement on the 34th round of the Geneva International Discussions

The resolution of the protracted conflict in Georgia remains a top priority for the European Union. We call on all parties to show the political will necessary to make progress in resolving it in 2016 in line with OSCE principles and commitments, alongside with other protracted conflicts in the OSCE region. We regard conflict resolution as a core task of the OSCE. The status quo is neither acceptable nor sustainable. Therefore, we regret that it was not possible to adopt a Ministerial statement on the conflict in Georgia, also in support of the Geneva International Discussions.

The 34th round of the Geneva International Discussions provided the opportunity to have substantial exchanges of views on the security and humanitarian situation on the ground despite participants' persistent divergent perceptions.

We reiterate our view that the Geneva International Discussions, in their agreed format, continue to be a very important forum to address and resolve the challenges stemming from the conflict in Georgia, and this therefore requires the participation of all stakeholders. We regret that participants from the breakaway regions of Georgia decided to walk out of the second working group of the Geneva Discussions, quickly followed by participants from the Russian Federation. We call upon all participants of the Geneva Discussions to remain committed to the process, so that the next round can take place in a more cooperative atmosphere.

We note that limited progress was made on a possible joint statement on non-use of force. This is essential for achieving progress on international security arrangements

in the region. In this regard, we continue to believe that a clear non-use of force commitment by Russia is necessary.

We welcome the continued constructive cooperation in the Ergneti Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism but regret that no consensus could be found for resuming the activities of the much needed Gali Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism. These two security mechanisms on the ground are crucial tools for increasing transparency and predictability.

The European Union expresses concern about the restrictions to the freedom of movement between the breakaway regions and the rest of Georgia. Continued deployment by the Russian Federation of so-called border signs, fences and other obstacles are in breach of international law and have a negative impact on the daily lives of the population, which is a source of tension. We call on Russia to reverse these moves.

We welcome the constructive discussions on cultural and natural heritage. However, we regret the lack of substantive discussion on refugees and internally displaced persons, due to walk-outs. We underline that the issue of refugees and IDPs is at the core of the mandate of the Geneva International Discussions.

The European Union remains concerned about the recent shift into Russian as the language of instruction in 11 formerly Georgian-language schools in Gali district. We welcome the exchanges held in Working Group 2 on the matter and we call for practical follow-up actions aimed at protection of the universal right to education. Assistance of the High Commissioner on National Minorities should be sought.

At the same time, we are concerned about the continuing Russian military and security related presence and infrastructure reinforcements in the Georgian breakaway regions. The recently signed so-called “agreement” on the creation of the joint group of armed forces between the Russian Federation and the Georgian breakaway region of Abkhazia clearly violates Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, principles of international law, and the international commitments of the

Russian Federation, including the 12 August 2008 Agreement and its Implementing Measures of 8 September 2008, and has no legal standing.

The European Union expresses its concern about the continuous limitation of impartial information about the human rights situation in the breakaway regions. An objective and de-politicized assessment, including follow-up to the 2008 ODIHR/HCNM report on the human rights situation remain essential. Promoting human rights is essential to improving living conditions for the conflict affected population. We therefore call for substantial discussions involving all stakeholders on practical steps to take in this direction.

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 and including robust monitoring capacity able to operate unhindered across the Administrative Boundary Lines. We encourage the current Serbian and incoming German OSCE Chairmanships to continue exploring possibilities to return a meaningful OSCE presence to Georgia.

The European Union reiterates its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders. The European Union calls on Russia to fulfil its obligations under the ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008 and its subsequent implementing measures of 8 September 2008, including providing EUMM access to the breakaway regions.

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, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.