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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1198th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

18 October 2018

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The latest, already the 45th, round of the Geneva International Discussions evoked conflicting feelings. On the one hand, through concerted efforts it has been possible for ten years now to preserve and maintain the viability of this unique and irreplaceable dialogue mechanism, which has convincingly demonstrated its relevance. A decade of relative stability and the absence of military clashes in the Trans-Caucasus is the best evidence of that.

On the other hand, in all these years we have had an agenda that is far from being ideal and goes round in endless circles, and discussions that have been low on effectiveness and not so much aimed at reaching difficult compromises as providing an opportunity for accusing and getting at those sitting on the opposite side of the table as much as possible. Equally, the persistent inclination by some delegations to promote themselves has been an abiding sickness over the years. The work of the humanitarian group has also been seriously stalled for all these years.

The inconsistency of the position of our Georgian colleagues remains puzzling. On the one hand, we cannot but welcome the package of measures devised by them to restore trust and improve contacts in general, especially trade and economic ones, with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, if co-operation is to be achieved with the authorities in Sukhum and Tskhinval, these stated good intentions need to be backed up by efforts on a daily basis rather than being used just for propaganda purposes. We cannot but note that the representatives of the Georgian Government have once again failed to take advantage of the opportunity to set out their “peace initiatives” directly to the representatives of the neighbouring republics.

It should also be pointed out that the latest wave of “anti-occupation” rhetoric flooding Tbilisi during the presidential election campaign clearly did nothing to make the Georgian negotiators more flexible and further exacerbated the already difficult atmosphere on the eve of the 45th round of discussions. The endless confrontational statements by Georgian delegations from all possible international platforms, and more recently the equally

destructive tactic of sanctions lists, which has already resulted in the blocking, not for the first time, of the two Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms – the Georgian-Abkhazian mechanism in Gal and the Georgian-South Ossetian one in Ergneti – have unfortunately become traditional aspects of this atmosphere. We urge the Co-Chairs to attempt to find a compromise solution so that the meetings can be resumed. The Geneva International Discussions confirm the interest of all participants in their uninterrupted work.

Unfortunately, it has once again proved impossible to conclude legally binding agreements on the non-use of force between Georgia on the one side and Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the other. Georgia continues to burden the idea of an oral statement to that effect by the participants in the discussion with demands for the inclusion of “international security mechanisms”. The reference by way of explanation to point 5 of the conflict settlement principles elaborated by the Presidents of France and Russia has no basis. It is clear from the French documents from that period finalizing the details of the agreement of 12 August that they referred to the replacement of temporary security measures by Russian forces in the regions of Georgia adjacent to Abkhazia and South Ossetia by permanent international observers from the European Union in these regions. This took place a long time ago. Moreover, the basic elements of the regional security system have already been defined, in the form of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms operating on the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian borders, the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia, and the Border Service authorities of the Russian Federal Security Service in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. On the whole, this structure seems to be working: in spite of isolated incidents, the situation at the borders of the three States is stable, and the threat of armed escalation is minimal. During the 45th round of discussions, this was confirmed both by the Russian delegation and by international observers.

At the same time, the question of the non-use of force in the Trans-Caucasus remains critical and is directly linked with the irresponsible stepping-up of NATO activity in Georgia. There is a steady increase in the operational exercises by the Georgian army according to NATO standards, more and more large-scale joint military exercises are taking place, including drills for the transfer of heavy weaponry from Europe, the number of NATO installations is growing, and the supply of arms to Georgia continues. We are justified in asking why this is happening and what the Georgian Government is planning. A new attack on their neighbours?

Another cause of concern to the authorities in Sukhum and Tskhinval are the activities of the Lugar biology laboratory in Georgia. There are well-founded suspicions in the republics that its work is linked to the African swine fever epidemics (2015 in Abkhazia, 2018 in South Ossetia), the death of a huge number of cattle (2018) and also the mass poisoning of people in Tkvarchel, Abkhazia, in 2013. It is not possible for Abkhazians and South Ossetians to ascertain whether or not this is the case, and they have no opportunity to visit this closed military facility.

The contrast in Geneva between the unsubstantiated claims by the Georgian representatives regarding the “occupied territories and the suffering of the population” and the reality of the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia was glaring. The facts presented by the participants in the discussions regarding the development of the socio-economic sphere in the two republics, the building of new infrastructure objects, and the opening of new kindergartens, schools and hospitals give the lie to the false stereotypes imposed by the authorities in Tbilisi. It is quite clear that the misuse by Georgia of its pseudo-monopoly of

the “truth” still prevents the international community from forming an objective picture of the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We are convinced that the removal of artificial obstacles to the participation by representatives of the authorities in Tskhinval and Sukhum in the discussion of humanitarian problems on international platforms, including the OSCE, would ultimately speed up the final settlement of outstanding differences in the Trans-Caucasus.

We believe that, in spite of all the problems and differences, the task faced together by the participants in the Geneva International Discussions is to systematically improve the effectiveness of the talks, which in the long run would make it possible to achieve more tangible practical results. This is the attitude shared by the three Co-Chairs, not only Mr. Toivo Klaar, but also Ms. Ayşe Cihan Sultanoglu and Mr. Rudolf Michalka, who have just been appointed. We very much welcome the sincere determination of the distinguished Co-Chairs to work constructively and are willing to assist them in every possible way.

Thank you for your attention.