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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1210th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

20 December 2018

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The results of the most recent consultations on 11 and 12 December in Geneva within the international discussions on the Trans-Caucasus with the participation on an equal basis of the delegations of Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia are encouraging. Thanks to the collective efforts of the Co-Chairs and participants in the discussions, it has been possible to resume the work at the Georgian-South Ossetian border of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism, which met in Ergneti on 18 December. We hope that the goodwill shown by the representatives of the authorities in Tskhinval will be reciprocated by Georgia, on which the prospects for work together in a depoliticized atmosphere depend. We expect the Co-Chairs to demonstrate a balanced approach to the drafting of an agenda for these meetings. This will also largely determine the shape of the future mechanism of this nature in Gal on the Georgian-Abkhazian border.

During the consultations in Geneva, all of the participants in the discussions with the exception of Georgia agreed that the situation on the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Georgia was generally stable. According to the checkpoint statistics, there have been no serious problems with freedom of movement, and the number of incidents is not above average. In October and November more than 30,000 people and around 9,000 vehicles crossed the Georgian-South Ossetian border in both directions, and 190,000 people and 7,000 vehicles crossed the Georgian-Abkhazian border. The hotline was used over 2,000 times in 2018, making it possible to prevent dangerous incidents in the border area. The structures at the border of South Ossetia and Georgia have additionally strengthened the border regime, reducing accidental violations to a minimum.

Discussion of the issue of the non-use of force and the possibility of the adoption by the participants of a declaration to that effect once again revealed fundamental differences. We continue to believe that legally binding agreements in this regard still need to be reached. The main challenge to regional security is the military activity of the United States of America and NATO on Georgian territory, including the plans by the authorities in

Washington and Tbilisi to modernize the military airfield in Vaziani and the next large-scale multinational exercises in 2019. We are still hearing propaganda statements by the NATO Secretary General and the US Secretary of State in support of Georgia's membership of NATO. It was these provocative and irresponsible promises that pushed the Georgian Government into its criminal military adventure in August 2008.

The US Army Medical Research and Materiel Command is installed "under the roof" of the R. Lugar Center for Public Health Research. The sketchy report published by anonymous international experts on a visit to the laboratory does not allay our concerns in this regard, particularly in connection with compliance with the Biological Weapons Convention. "Voluntary" visits are not an adequate substitute for full verification.

It is quite obvious that as long as Georgia does not cease to cultivate outside interests in the region, it is hardly likely to improve relations with its neighbours.

The work of the working group on humanitarian issues was disrupted when, contrary to the opinion of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian delegations, it was decided to start discussion of a memorandum drafted by the Co-Chairs on possible approaches to dealing with the problem of refugees. The representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia systematically refuse to discuss this topic in Geneva because of its regular inclusion by Georgia on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly, to which – as we all know – representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia do not have access, despite their repeated appeals. We understand this attitude. There should be no discrimination.

In general, we are convinced that the key to improving the effectiveness of the work of the Geneva International Discussions is still through professional and respectful direct dialogue by the Georgian delegation with its neighbours from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Unfortunately, the Georgian representatives have so far provided no grounds to hope for progress in this regard. As the latest round of negotiations in Geneva and the attempts to agree on a statement in support of this format at the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Milan demonstrated, the new Georgian delegation has not yet shown itself capable of going beyond the usual propaganda clichés. This approach undermines the mediation efforts of the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions.

Thank you for your attention.