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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANDREY RUDENKO,  
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE  
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1072<sup>nd</sup> MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

22 October 2015

**In response to the statement by the Co-Chairmen of the Geneva  
International Discussions on security and stability in the Trans-Caucasus**

Mr. Chairperson,

We are pleased to welcome to the Permanent Council the Co-Chairmen of the Geneva International Discussions on stability and security in the Trans-Caucasus from the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union, and thank them for their interesting report.

The Geneva Discussions remain the most important international format for ensuring predictability in the development of the situation in the region and for maintaining Georgia's direct dialogue with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The meetings in Geneva make a direct contribution to maintaining peace in the region, gradually restoring trust and moving from threats to a search for ways of peaceful coexistence and ultimately good-neighbourliness between the three States.

We are convinced that legally binding bilateral agreements on the non-use of force between Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia should be a guarantee for strengthening stability and security in the region. The elaboration of such agreements is also the main goal of the negotiations in Geneva. We should like mention the constructive contribution by the Co-Chairmen of the Geneva International Discussions in the search for acceptable options for the parties to reach agreement on a joint statement by all the participants in this format as a follow-up to the unilateral statements by Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia on the non-use of force. Unfortunately, it has not as yet been possible to arrive at such a decision. The position taken by the Georgian delegation, which is essentially blocking progress on this key issue by attempting to force unjustified obligations on Russia, remains the only obstacle.

Nevertheless, during the seven years of co-operation within the Geneva International Discussions it has proved possible to stabilize the situation on the borders. The participants in the latest round of talks on 6 and 7 October noted that this was a long-term trend. They confirm the positive developments and objective statistical data on cross-border movements – from June to September alone, over 60,000 people and around 15,600 vehicles crossed the

South Ossetian-Georgian border, while 375,000 people and 15,500 vehicles crossed the Abkhazian-Georgian border. No serious incidents were recorded in this connection.

The exacerbation of the situation on Georgia's border with South Ossetia discussed in the OSCE this summer was linked to deliberate damage caused by Georgian radicals to border signs located on South Ossetian territory. It is now clear that all the kerfuffle regarding this matter was choreographed provocation, which certain colleagues in this room also gave in to. Misunderstandings of this kind can be avoided if Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia reach agreement on the demarcation and delimitation of their borders. Sukhum and Tskhinval are ready for such work.

The regular work of the Joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) established in 2009 near the border between South Ossetia and Georgia and effective co-operation by the parties using the hotlines help to reduce tension in the region. Co-operation in the search for missing persons, the exchange of detainees on both sides of the border and the settlement of border incidents for preference through administrative means are dealt with through these channels. We hope that it will prove possible to reach a compromise solution to resolve the long-standing problem of the IPRM's resumption of operations in the Abkhazian border town of Gali.

The intensifying military co-operation between Georgia and NATO has the potential to seriously destabilize security in the region. During the recent round of Geneva International Discussions, the delegations of Abkhazia, Russia and South Ossetia once again expressed their growing concern at the start of the practical implementation of the so-called Substantial NATO-Georgia Package and the opening near Tbilisi in late August 2015 of the NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Centre, where there are plans to hold joint exercises and training sessions to improve the interoperability and cohesion of NATO Member States units and Georgian armed forces and also partners of the Alliance, including working on more rapid deployment of troops and military equipment from Europe. It was also noted that this contravenes Tbilisi's commitments regarding military restraint adopted in accordance with the agreements of 12 August 2008.

At Sukhum's initiative, discussion continued on problems connected with visa discrimination against citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by a number of European Union countries and the United States of America. The blatant use of double standards by Western States was highlighted in this connection: persons holding a Georgian passport are issued visas without hindrance, while residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are refused entry under spurious pretexts, which means they cannot convey their point of view on the development of the situation in the region.

There is a special working group in Geneva for the joint resolution of humanitarian problems. A number of specific projects for assisting the local population in resolving the most diverse issues have already been elaborated in that group. On 6 and 7 October, particular attention was paid in that group to the problem of ensuring freedom of movement for citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia who have Abkhazian, South Ossetian or Russian passports. Co-operation between Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia in protecting memorials and the environment was discussed.

In conclusion, I should like to thank Ambassadors Antti Turunen, Angelo Gnaedinger and Herbert Salber for their contribution to the work of the Geneva International Discussions,

which continues to play a constructive role in strengthening security, stability and confidence in the Trans-Caucasus. Russia remains in favour of preserving this unique and useful platform for direct dialogue and co-operation as a means of resolving the situation regarding Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia.

We should like to make the following comments about some of the stock phrases that we have once again heard from the European Union.

None of these unfounded claims have anything directly to do with dialogue in the Geneva International Discussions. We have repeatedly set out our position regarding the conclusion of the Treaty on Alliance and Strategic Partnership with Abkhazia and the Treaty on Alliance and Integration with South Ossetia. We believe it is unnecessary to repeat this.

The border authorities of Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia co-operate in strict accordance with these bilateral agreements. Border crossing and the State border regime itself are the exclusive prerogative of the authorities of Tskhinval and Sukhum in accordance with their legitimate right to strengthen their security. The steps taken by their authorities to install border fences along segments of the border are intended primarily to reduce the number of incidents involving accidental violation of the border by local inhabitants from both sides.

We have also reiterated on numerous occasions our readiness to give constructive consideration to the question of an OSCE presence in Georgia. It goes without saying that the mandate of such a mission would not extend to the neighbouring independent States of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are not yet OSCE participating States. On the question of establishing OSCE field presences in those States, we should first turn directly to Sukhum and Tskhinval.

Thank you for your attention.