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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1102nd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

2 June 2016

**In response to the address by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia,
Mr. Mikheil Janelidze**

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome the distinguished Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Mikheil Janelidze, to this meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council. We have listened attentively to his statement, which contained, among other things, the assessment by the Georgian Government of the current situation in the Trans-Caucasus and the role of the Geneva International Discussions in fostering security and stability in the region.

For over seven years now, the Geneva Discussions have been an extremely important international forum for safeguarding stability in region and promoting dialogue between Abkhazia and South Ossetia and Georgia. In our view, the main purpose of this platform is to make progress in this dialogue with a view to ensuring the security and stability of the region. The regular meetings in Geneva make it possible to effectively alleviate concerns and to exchange opinions on the situation in the region, which will ultimately help to improve the living conditions of the population on both sides of the border. We hope that progress will be made in the next round of talks in Geneva scheduled for 14 and 15 June.

There have been positive results in the field. This applies in particular to the border between Georgia and South Ossetia, where the Joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) is operating successfully. In the March round of talks in Geneva, agreement was reached in principle on reviving a similar mechanism in Gali on the border between Georgia and Abkhazia, which has been suspended for four years. The first meeting of the Gali IPRM took place at the end of May in a constructive working atmosphere, in spite of the fact that the immediate reason for convening it was a tragic incident at the border. We hope that the IPRM in Gali will continue to operate on a regular basis. We urge Georgia to refrain from provocation regarding Abkhazia in the international arena, which undermines the positive results of the Geneva Discussions.

Guarantees regarding the non-use of force remain a vital factor in the negotiations. Both Russia and representatives of Sukhum and Tskhinval continue to maintain that security

in the Trans-Caucasus can be fully guaranteed only by way of legally binding bilateral agreements on the non-use of force concluded between Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the one hand and Georgia on the other. This is all the more crucial given the continued claims by the Georgian Government to the territory of both independent republics and the increased co-operation between Georgia and NATO, aimed in particular at strengthening the offensive potential of the Georgian army, which gives rise to justified concern in Sukhum and Tskhinval and undermines multilateral efforts to stabilize the situation in the Trans-Caucasus.

We note positive progress in the Geneva Discussions on other vitally important questions. The parties are carrying out joint projects on environmental protection, the transfer of archives and irrigation, and dialogue is continuing regarding the search for missing persons and the reinterment of Georgian citizens killed during the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. A substantive exchange of opinions has been inaugurated in the working group on humanitarian issues, including the questions raised by the Georgian representatives in the OSCE regarding the prevention of illegal border crossing and teaching in the Georgian language in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Unfortunately, the effectiveness of the Geneva Discussions is compromised by the highly politicized draft resolution on refugees and internally displaced persons submitted to the United Nations General Assembly every year by Georgia. Representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are deprived of an opportunity to state their position to members of the General Assembly because the authorities of the United States of America systematically refuse to issue entry visas to them. As a result, Sukhum and Tskhinval are compelled to refuse to indulge in what is effectively a futile discussion of this subject in Geneva.

It is meaningless to demand any unilateral commitments to the non-use of force by Russia against Georgia. We didn't start the war. If anything, it is Mr. Saakashvili whom demands should be made of. The regular calls for us to comply with some kind of "ceasefire agreement" are equally absurd. The only things that exist are the six-point plan for settling the conflict agreed by Mr. Medvedev and Mr. Sarkozy of 12 August 2008 and the measures for its implementation of 8 September of that year. One of the provisions of this plan was that Russian military forces should withdraw to the lines held prior to the outbreak of hostilities. We complied in full with this requirement during the night of 9 to 10 October 2008.

Regarding the attempts to deliberately distort the facts in connection with the various bilateral links that Russia has with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, we are forced once again to note that the co-operation between our countries is in full compliance with international law, guided by the interests of our peoples. The agreements mentioned by the distinguished Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia and some of our colleagues do not affect the interests of other countries, in particular the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia or the legal rights of Georgia's citizens. Russia intends to intensify its relations with the two Trans-Caucasian republics on a wide range of issues on an equal basis.

It is our firm belief that the acceptance by Georgia of the new reality in the region would significantly facilitate progress towards an improvement in the situation in the Trans-Caucasus and provide a dependable guarantee of peace and well-being for the people living there.

We welcome the holding of the 25th annual session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Tbilisi from 1 to 5 July 2016. We are hoping for a depoliticized and constructive

debate aimed at moving towards a unifying and not a divisive agenda. Inter-parliamentary co-operation is important in the search for consolidated responses to common threats and challenges.

The Russian-Georgian dialogue over the past three years shows that disagreement on questions of principle is not an obstacle to our work together to improve relations on specific issues. Russia continues to be inclined to develop good-neighbourly relations with Georgia and the Georgian people. Our country is not putting up any obstacles, and the degree of normalization depends exclusively on the political will and realism of the Georgian Government. We hope that relations with Russia will not be used as a “bargaining chip” in the campaign for the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Georgia.

Thank you for your attention.