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

8 July 2010

**In response to the address by the Special Representative of the
European Union for the South Caucasus**

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome Mr. Peter Semneby, the Special Representative of the European Union for the South Caucasus, to this meeting of the Permanent Council. Regular statements to the OSCE participating States by EU envoys dealing with the problems relating to the Trans-Caucasus have become a tradition. We are glad to have such contacts, *inter alia* in the format of the Permanent Council, since they provide an opportunity to focus on particular elements of each other's positions during an interactive exchange of views.

We believe that today's presentation by Mr. Semneby shed additional light on the interest of the European Union in the dynamics of the processes taking place in the South Caucasus. And we understand this interest. We respect the development of the EU's bilateral relations with Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, *inter alia* within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, and needless to say we are carefully following all the nuances and trends in this co-operation.

For Russia, the region of the South Caucasus is of particular importance for a number of reasons, including its geographic proximity and historical, cultural and socio-economic similarities. For several centuries the peoples and nationalities inhabiting the region lived in a single State which bore different names at different times. As you are aware, the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to the formation in the Trans-Caucasus initially of three independent countries that voluntarily decided to secede from the USSR. However, with the formation of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia and Georgia, the process of the self-determination of the peoples of the region had not ended. For example, three autonomous entities – Ajara, Abkhazia and South Ossetia – found themselves on the territory of the Georgian State in the post-Soviet period. The well-known tragic events of August 2008 led to a result with which we are all familiar, namely the final loss by Tbilisi of political control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the legal formalization of the secession of these two republics from Georgia.

We thus regard the so-called “Georgian” conflicts as settled. What we are currently observing in the region is the unresolved nature of bilateral inter-State relations between Georgia and Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia, and Georgia and Russia. What is more, the existing disagreements need to be overcome by means of direct bilateral dialogue, and not through mediators from outside the region, involving them in the settlement of what, we repeat, are bilateral problems.

It is no secret that we are somewhat disappointed at the position taken by our colleagues from the European Union, as set out once again by the Special Representative, namely that Brussels will continue to maintain a “policy of non-recognition” with regard to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which, judging from what Mr. Semneby has said, the European Union regards as “separatist entities”. Statements of this kind cannot but give rise to regret, since they do not help to strengthen stability and a rapprochement of peoples in the region.

It was particularly strange to hear about the “policy of non-recognition” of so-called “separatist entities” from a representative of an international structure that is acting as one of the three co-chairmen of the Geneva discussions on the Trans-Caucasus. As you know, another special representative of the European Union, Mr. Pierre Morel, is participating in the Geneva talks together with Abkhaz and South Ossetian representatives, trying to find solutions to key security problems among other things.

As regards the conflict of August 2008, it is useful once again to remember the report by the Tagliavini commission set up by the Council of the European Union. Quite recently there was a presentation on that document in the OSCE Permanent Council, during which the principal findings were confirmed, including the main finding that the Georgian leadership was the first to resort to force, destroying the process for a peaceful settlement, which led to the well-known consequences for the territorial integrity of that country. This fact to a decisive extent determined the new arrangement in the region.

These circumstances need to be taken into account, *inter alia* when examining the question of the resumption of an OSCE field presence in the region. We believe there is nothing to prevent the return of an OSCE mission to Georgia given the consent of the Georgian authorities and amendments to the previous mandate. I might add that during the Greek Chairmanship of the OSCE there was a possibility to agree on mutually acceptable modalities, but some political linkages once again got in the way. At the end of the day, it is time for our Organization to provide a fundamental assessment of the unlawful actions of Tbilisi against the Russian peacekeepers, who were conscientiously performing their duties on the basis of an international mandate and with the consent of the Georgian side and the peaceful population of South Ossetia.

We should like once again to call attention to the new situation in the Trans-Caucasus region, and to the need to take into account the politico-legal realities that have arisen and become entrenched since the tragic events of two years ago and to develop constructive co-operation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as is already being done within the framework of the Geneva discussions. It is time to take an objective look at the state of affairs in the Trans-Caucasus and to reject political tunnel vision and an outdated perception of reality.

I should like to make one further observation. There are hardly any universal recipes for building democracy, still less any that are applicable to such difficult regions as the South Caucasus. And mentoring of any kind is not the best way of helping in the development of the civil society of sovereign States, which are better informed than outsiders about the needs of their population.

Thank you for your attention.