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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANVAR AZIMOV,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

28 October 2010

**Regarding the results of the latest round of the Geneva discussions on
the Trans-Caucasus**

Mr. Chairperson,

The latest 13th round of the international discussions on security and stability in the Trans-Caucasus held in Geneva on 14 October confirmed that this forum remains useful and is the only international platform where the representatives of Republic of Abkhazia, Georgia and the Republic of South Ossetia are engaged in dialogue as equals, with the participation of the Russian Federation, the United States of America, the European Union (EU), the United Nations and the OSCE.

It is gratifying to note that during the discussion in the security group the parties unanimously remarked on the improved situation along Georgia's borders with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Thanks to the incident prevention and response mechanisms, there has been a significant reduction in the number of major incidents involving shooting and casualties.

We are endeavouring to ensure that the incident prevention and response mechanisms launched last year function properly near Georgia's borders with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

We are currently working with Tskhinval to restore this mechanism on the Georgian-South Ossetian border. The realistic chances of this happening have increased following the recent report by Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, on the monitoring of the activities of the law enforcement authorities in Georgia with a view to shedding light on the fate of the Ossetians who disappeared in Georgia in 2008.

Another positive point is the fact that it has been possible to reach an agreement within the humanitarian group, albeit not without some difficulty, on a procedure for its work on matters concerning refugees and displaced persons. The stage-by-stage approach agreed upon by the parties with a view to resolving this problem envisages as an initial step the joint establishment of the number and categories of refugees and displaced persons on the territory of Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia. It should be mentioned in this context that the

Abkhaz and South Ossetian sides have expressed a willingness to arrange for refugees to return once the conditions are safe for them to do so, something that was mentioned as one of the primary tasks in the United Nations Secretary-General's report on the humanitarian situation in the Trans-Caucasus.

At the same time, we note with regret that there has still been no progress in the security group on a key question of the Geneva discussions, namely the non-use of force between Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Georgia. The latest round of talks once again demonstrated the unwillingness of the Georgian side to engage in substantive and constructive dialogue on this major problem. Yet again it became clear that Georgia is unwilling to accept any proposals, including those repeatedly put forward by Russia, regarding the guaranteed prohibition of force, whether it be initiatives calling for the conclusion of bilateral agreements with Sukhum and Tskhinval or proposals regarding the adoption of unilateral commitments. I am thinking in particular of our status-neutral initiative regarding unilateral declarations on the non-use of force. In this context we expressed our readiness to act as a guarantor for such commitments.

We should like to take this opportunity to point out a point of principle. Acting in a spirit of goodwill and guided by the interests of strengthening stability in the region, Russia announced in Geneva its decision to remove the Russian checkpoint from the disputed territory near the village of Perevi inside South Ossetia in a few days' time. As you are aware, our border guards were removed on 18 October. The basic parameters for this procedure were discussed beforehand with senior officials from the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia, and the actual withdrawal was carried out in the presence of EU observers. This responsible step was welcomed by the co-chairmen of the Geneva discussions and also by Ms. Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

We would ask that this gesture by Russia not be regarded as someone's victory or defeat, as some hotheads have been hastening to do. We had already attempted a voluntary withdrawal of this checkpoint back in December 2008. Many will probably remember very well what happened that time – Perevi was immediately occupied by special forces from Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs. Now that Russia has received guarantees from the EU mission, this purely technical problem that has been raised repeatedly by our Western partners may be regarded as completely resolved.

We therefore not only trust that there will be a reduction in tension along the border between Georgia and South Ossetia but also that the question of our alleged non-fulfilment of the Medvedev-Sarkozy agreements will at last be closed. I might point out that since last year the territory of the Republic of South Ossetia and Republic of Abkhazia has been reliably protected by Russian border guards in accordance with the bilateral agreements concluded with these new independent States, something that we have informed our OSCE partners about on more than one occasion, at meetings of the Permanent Council and elsewhere.

We should like to stress once again that Russia is counting on understanding and support from its partners for our position, which is dictated solely by a concern for peace and stability in the Caucasus and the interests of the ordinary people of this region. We believe that the responsible international actors must refrain from directly or indirectly encouraging the Georgian leadership, which has no desire to change its previous confrontational approach with respect to its neighbours. The Saakashvili regime is not only the cause of tension and

instability in the Trans-Caucasus but is also actively endeavouring to make the entire international co-operation process a hostage to its malevolent policy. This cannot be allowed to happen.

Thank you for your attention.