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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1225th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

11 April 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson,

The most recent consultations in the framework of the international discussions on the Trans-Caucasus, which took place on 2 and 3 April in Geneva, did not make any serious progress in normalizing relations between Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Georgia.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to break the stalemate and to agree on a statement on the non-use of force in the Trans-Caucasus, which is a key aim of the Geneva consultations. We are convinced that such guarantees remain indispensable for creating an atmosphere of trust in the region and, as a result, ensuring its stability and security. The threats to its maintenance are not diminishing – far from it. NATO's military utilization of the territory of Georgia is becoming increasingly provocative. Apart from the regular exercises of the Member States and NATO partners to mark the Alliance's 70th anniversary, the military bloc has set out to expand its naval presence in the Black Sea, with Georgia assuming a role as one of the key springboards in the Trans-Caucasus.

By contrast, the situation on the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Georgia appears for the most part under control. The Ergneti Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) plays a positive role, and the hotline is working well. The provocation by Georgian activists in South Ossetia on 15 March was thwarted in this way. We are looking forward to the speedy resumption of the IPRM's work in Gal.

The fencing and signs at Georgia's borders with Abkhazia and South Ossetia clearly have a positive influence on the situation in the region. Where transborder traffic is regulated, the number of attempts at illegal crossing has been reduced to a minimum. The existing checkpoints are working properly and do not restrict freedom of movement. Between January and March, over 11,000 people crossed the border between South Ossetia and Georgia in both directions. From December 2018 until March this year, 305,000 people and almost 10,000 vehicles crossed the border between Georgia and Abkhazia. In fact, there were temporary restrictions at checkpoints on the two borders only to prevent the spread of an epidemic from Georgia. As you are aware, when the incidence of swine flu in the neighbouring country passed its peak, the authorities in Sukhum and Tskinval decided to resume normal border crossings.

The suicide in Abkhazia on 10 March of Irakli Kvaratskhelia was discussed in Geneva. We should like to take this opportunity once again of expressing our condolences to his family and friends. The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation is conducting a preliminary inquiry. Our delegation shared the contents of the material available at the time of the meeting. We have heard that investigations into the tragic incident are being conducted in Abkhazia and Georgia. The technical meeting of the IPRM in Gal on 25 April will be devoted to this issue.

We feel that there is an evident lack of pragmatism in the discussion of purely practical humanitarian issues, in particular the search for missing persons and the return of cultural objects. In the absence of representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia's propaganda activities on international platforms regarding the refugee problem make it impossible to discuss this issue objectively in Geneva. Appeals to the Georgian authorities to put an end to visa restrictions for inhabitants of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which run directly counter to the declarations by Georgia regarding its "peace-loving policy" towards its neighbours, fall on deaf ears.

In conclusion, we should like to thank the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, Rudolf Michalka, Cihan Sultanoğlu and Toivo Klaar, for their efforts to organize and conduct the meeting. Despite the modest results of this round of discussions in Geneva, their utility is beyond doubt. The very existence for the past ten years of this format has made it possible to maintain peace in the Trans-Caucasus and calm and stability on Georgia's borders with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Thank you for your attention.