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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1247th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

14 November 2019

**In response to the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions
on the Trans-Caucasus**

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome the distinguished Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions on Stability and Security in the Trans-Caucasus from the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union, Ambassadors Cihan Sultanoğlu, Rudolf Michalka and Toivo Klaar.

We are grateful to the speakers for their consistent efforts to promote direct dialogue in Geneva between the representatives of the authorities in Tbilisi, Sukhum and Tskhinval on security problems in the region. There is no doubt that this work is needed. Thanks to the International Discussions on the Trans-Caucasus, it has been possible over the years to safeguard the conditions for peaceful coexistence and to prevent a recurrence of serious military escalation while maintaining relative stability at the borders. It is important to guarantee the pragmatic nature of the discussion of pressing regional problems, preventing attempts to use the Geneva format for unilateral accusatory attacks. Russia is determined to facilitate the continued achievement of concrete results in the negotiations between the representatives of the States in the region and other participants in the discussions.

Developments in the Trans-Caucasus are giving increasing cause for concern. Under the influence of growing internal political problems, Georgia is stepping up its provocative activity on the border with South Ossetia. The placement of a fixed Georgian security force post close to the South Ossetian village of Tsnelis was a serious destabilizing factor. Over the past few days, there have been shooting incidents close to the South Ossetian border from the Georgian side. In that context, we note the prompt intervention of the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the South Caucasus, Rudolf Michalka, with a view to de-escalating the situation in the area of this village. We are willing to work together to overcome this problem threatening to derail the positive developments achieved in the Geneva International Discussions. It is our understanding that the removal of the causes of tension at the border of Georgia and South Ossetia is a goal shared by the participants in these Discussions.

The adoption of the statement on the non-use of force already practically agreed in 2017 by the participants in the Geneva International Discussions as a follow-up to corresponding unilateral statements by the leaders of Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia would help to improve the situation. This priority task is

provided for in the agreements between Dmitry Medvedev and Nicolas Sarkozy of 12 August 2008. Firm guarantees of the non-use of force in the Trans-Caucasus will help to create an atmosphere of trust between the authorities in Tbilisi, Sukhum and Tskhinval that is necessary for continued substantive discussion of the final peaceful political settlement. We trust that the Co-Chairs will succeed in persuading the Georgian Government to take a more pragmatic approach to this issue.

We share the desire to place the meetings of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism in Ergneti and Gal on a regular basis. This format remains an important practical tool for resolving contentious issues in the border region. We hope that the hotlines will be able to continue operation without interruption.

Depoliticized discussion of the problems is the main prerequisite for the effectiveness of dialogue in the Second Working Group of the Geneva International Discussions, notably on the issue of displaced persons, which is of real significance to the States in the region. The only obstacle to substantive discussion of this topic is the continuing propaganda activity by the representatives of Georgia on international platforms, which are closed to representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We urge the Georgian Government to refrain from this destructive course.

We wish success to the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, whose potential is far from being exhausted. For our part, we confirm our willingness to work closely together in the interests of normalizing relations between Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia as rapidly as possible.

Thank you for your attention.