

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council No 1115****Vienna, 13 October**

EU statement on 37th round of the Geneva International Discussions

We reiterate our view that the Geneva International Discussions continue to be a very important forum to address and resolve the challenges stemming from the conflict in Georgia. We are pleased that the latest round allowed for active exchanges on substantive issues of concern including the security and humanitarian situation on the ground.

The European Union notes that debates have continued on a possible joint statement on non-use of force. We welcome the fact that there are some prospects for gradual movement on this issue. With the view of the continuing Russian military and security related presence and infrastructure reinforcements in the Georgian breakaway regions, in violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and OSCE commitments, we continue to believe that a clear non-use of force commitment by Russia is essential.

We welcome the continuing work of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) in Ergneti and Gali, which are co-chaired by the EUMM. Fully functional IPRMs are essential for confidence, predictability and transparency on the ground. Several potentially serious security incidents had occurred since the last round of the Geneva International Discussions (GID), but they have been managed in a satisfactory way by the mechanisms provided through the GID, including the two IPRMs. As regards the fatal shooting incident on 19 May 2016, we call on the de-facto authorities to bring the perpetrator to justice. We encourage

participants to use the Gali IPRM for exchanging information on the investigation, including evidence.

In Working Group 2 on humanitarian issues, the participants engaged in useful exchanges on pressing issues, among others on documentation and crossings as well as language of instruction and missing persons. We recall that addressing refugees and IDPs, including their safe, dignified and voluntary return, is a core task of the Geneva International Discussions. We therefore regret that participants from the breakaway regions of Georgia and from Russian Federation refused to engage on this agenda item. We call upon all participants to engage on all issues under the agenda, regardless of the views expressed in other international fora, and to refrain from walk outs which lead to a premature end of the discussions.

The European Union expresses serious concern about the possible closure of several crossing points between the breakaway region of Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia. Such a step would potentially lead to an increase of incidents, especially detentions, and would further complicate the life of the local population. Deployment by the Russian Federation of so-called border signs, fences and other obstacles at different locations along and beyond the Administrative Boundary Lines, divides communities and negatively affects local populations. Such provocative steps are unacceptable and we renew our call on the Russian Federation to reverse these moves.

The European Union reiterates the need for full respect of the fundamental rights of the ethnic Georgian population residing in the Gali district of the breakaway region of Abkhazia. Clarity and full respect of the fundamental rights are essential. We encourage the participants to continue to work towards increased transparency in this regard.

In this respect, we support ongoing efforts by the Co-Chairs to bring expertise on best practices for promoting mother tongue-based education in a multi-lingual environment.

The European Union reiterates its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. The European Union calls on Russia to fulfil its obligations under the ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008 and its subsequent implementing measures of 8 September 2008. The European Union also calls for EUMM access to the breakaway regions.

The European Union looks forward to the next round of the Geneva International Discussions scheduled for 13-14 December 2016.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.