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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**RIGHT OF REPLY BY
MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1387th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

2 September 2022

In response to the statement by the representative of Georgia

Mr. Chairperson,

On 8 August, the 14th anniversary of the start of the military aggression by the Saakashvili regime against the people of South Ossetia and Russian peacekeepers, we honoured the memory of the victims of that brutal and unprovoked attack and of those who laid down their lives to save the South Ossetians from even more extensive and horrifying crimes. What happened was that during the night of 7 to 8 August 2008, in violation of international agreements on a peaceful settlement of the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict, the Georgian armed forces subjected the sleeping city of Tskhinval and other population centres to massive artillery shelling. The Russian peacekeepers' camp was stormed at the same time.

The fact of the completely unprovoked aggression by Georgia was set in writing in a report, published on 30 September 2009, by the independent international mission that was established under the auspices of the European Union and headed by the respected Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini. It is stated clearly there that "open hostilities began with a large-scale Georgian military operation against the town of Tskhinvali and the surrounding areas, launched in the night of 7 to 8 August 2008. Operations started with a massive Georgian artillery attack."

Here is another quotation from that document: "The shelling of Tskhinvali by the Georgian armed forces during the night of 7 to 8 August 2008 marked the beginning of the large-scale armed conflict."

That is how the so-called "operation to restore constitutional order" began. Units of the Georgian army and special forces of the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs attempted to impose "order" among the civilian population by using Grad multiple-launch rocket systems and tanks.

And make no mistake about it: the Georgian aggression of August 2008 was carefully planned. In terms of rate of growth in military expenditure, Georgia was ranked first in the world by 2008, when such spending accounted for 8 per cent of its annual gross domestic product, and in 2007 the personnel strength of the Georgian army increased by 30 per cent. The fact that the Georgian Government had been deliberately preparing for a military invasion of South Ossetia is confirmed by a spot report (dated 7 August 2008) of the OSCE Mission to Georgia that was published here in Vienna on 8 August 2008, in which reference was

made to “significant movements of troops and equipment on the Georgian side towards Gori from the east and west”.

According to the available data, 162 inhabitants of South Ossetia lost their lives and 255 were injured as a result of that criminal decision by the Saakashvili regime. Ten peacekeepers heroically sacrificed their lives; dozens were wounded.

To forestall idle reflections on the alleged illegality of Russian peacekeepers being present in South Ossetia in August 2008, we suggest turning to the aforementioned report by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission. I quote: “There is also no evidence to support any claims that Russian peacekeeping units in South Ossetia were in flagrant breach of their obligation under relevant international agreements ... Consequently, the use of force by Georgia against Russian peacekeeping forces in Tskhinvali in the night of 7/8 August 2008 was contrary to international law.”

Russia gave an appropriate response to the criminal adventure of the authorities in Tbilisi at the time by compelling the aggressor to sue for peace and then recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia as sovereign and independent States, thereby safeguarding their security. I must emphasize that both steps were undertaken on an absolutely lawful basis.

The movement of Russian troops into South Ossetia and then Georgia was in exercise of the right to self-defence – a right enshrined, in particular, in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations – following the large-scale attack by Georgia on the Russian armed forces’ peacekeeping units deployed to South Ossetia in accordance with the Dagomys Agreement of 1992. The United Nations Security Council was informed by the Russian Federation about its exercise of the right to self-defence.

The Georgian Government’s attack on South Ossetia and its preparation of a similar scenario with regard to Abkhazia compelled them both to safeguard their security and right to exist through self-determination as independent States. On 26 August 2008, guided by fundamental international legal instruments, Russia recognized the independence of the two Trans-Caucasus republics.

Mr. Chairperson,

It is important to also point out that one further consequence of the Georgian aggression having been repulsed was the launching of the negotiation format known as the Geneva International Discussions on Security and Stability in the Trans-Caucasus, through which direct dialogue between the Republic of South Ossetia and the Republic of Abkhazia on the one hand, and Georgia on the other, was kept up until recently. There have admittedly been few results, but at least it is possible to maintain a certain level of stability and security in the region.

Yet, the latest round of negotiations – the 56th – has already been postponed twice this year. This means that the negotiation format has been “sagging” for eight months now. The Geneva Discussions have, in effect, been frozen as a result of the efforts of certain participants who are guided by their selfish political interests to the detriment of regional stability and common sense. And this is not the only such instance in which agreed mechanisms for conflict resolution in the OSCE’s area of responsibility are being held to ransom by the striving of a number of “players” to punish Russia at all costs for its refusal to compromise on its fundamental interests.

The illegitimate tools embraced by Western countries for exerting pressure on our country – namely, the transport- and visa-related obstacles faced by members of the Russian delegation – raise the question of the need to relocate the regular meetings under the Geneva format to another place that is genuinely neutral

and acceptable to all the participants. We stress that all responsibility for the disruption of the negotiation process and its consequences rests completely with the instigators of these destructive actions and those who are pandering to them.

Thank you for your attention.