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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1181st MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

12 April 2018

**In response to the address by the
Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia, H.E. David Dondua**

Mr. Chairperson,

We welcome the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Mr. David Dondua.

We should like to start by expressing our condolences to the Georgian people following the deaths of miners in an accident at the Mindeli coal mine in Tkibuli on 5 April. We wish the injured a swift recovery.

Mr. Chairperson,

We think it useful to discuss prospects for post-conflict settlement in the Trans-Caucasus, including the results of the last round of the Geneva International Discussions on security and stability in the region (27 and 28 March). As a party to those talks, we are ready to set out our assessment on the understanding that we cannot form a full picture of the situation without the lawful representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia being present here in this room.

It must be said that we do not always succeed in having a substantive and mutually respectful (as is the custom in the Caucasus) discussion in Geneva. The Georgian representatives are increasingly inclined to take a hard and sometimes even aggressive line. It seems that the highly charged atmosphere in international affairs in general today is having its effect. And yet, let us not forget the words of a Georgian proverb: "A kind word can open iron gates."

Despite the encouraging statement by Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili on 9 March about a desire for progress at the talks in Geneva, we see how the Georgian representatives are trying to politicize contacts with their own neighbours. You realize, after all, that constantly harping on about isolated incidents and spreading the legally incorrect allegation of a "Russian occupation", which is insulting for the other participants in the Geneva International Discussions, does not inject anything positive into relations in this part

of the Caucasus. Meanwhile, the Georgian authorities avoid engagement with Sukhum and Tsinkhval on matters of substance and attempt to blame Russia for their own inability to settle relations with the neighbouring republics.

At the latest Geneva talks, for example, Georgia attempted to centre the discussion on the case of Archil Tatumashvili. Blame was laid for this Georgian citizen's death not only on South Ossetia but on Russia too. The arguments advanced by Murat Dzhioyev, head of the South Ossetian delegation, were ignored, as was the fact that the circumstances of Archil Tatumashvili's death were explained in detail during a meeting of the Ergneti Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) on 1 March, which Georgia prevented from going ahead. We would not like to think that the Georgian Government is deliberately using this issue for political aims and has little interest in establishing the circumstances of what took place. We recall that the victim's body, his personal effects, and the results of the forensic examination were handed over to the Georgian authorities. South Ossetia is ready to co-operate on this matter, but without politicization and assigning labels.

In this situation, no progress has been made on finalizing a draft joint statement by the parties to the talks on non-use of force. Furthermore, at the last round of talks, the representatives of the United States of America introduced completely unacceptable wording reviving the old arguments about the nature of the events of August 2008 and thus putting the talks back by ten years.

We think it important to stress once again that, following the failure of Georgia's aggression in August 2008 (the fact of which was confirmed by the report of the independent international fact-finding mission headed by Heidi Tagliavini), no "ceasefire agreement" was signed or adopted. This was not possible after Mikheil Saakashvili gave the order to attack Russian peacekeepers and the civilian population of Tskhinval. There was only the 12 August 2008 agreement between Dmitry Medvedev and Nicolas Sarkozy, which included a six-point plan for settling the conflict, and the 8 September 2008 measures for implementing the plan. Point 5 of the agreement called for the Russian armed forces to be withdrawn to the line preceding the start of military hostilities. This Russia did in full by 8 October 2008. Russian forces temporarily deployed in areas of Georgia neighbouring Abkhazia and South Ossetia were replaced by permanent observers from the European Union. We had no other obligations in this area.

Despite the heated debate in Geneva, the situation on the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Georgia remains stable and under control. The number of incidents does not exceed average figures. Where fences and information boards have been erected accidental violations have dropped to minimum, and accordingly, so have detentions. There is no problem with freedom of movement and this is confirmed by the figures on people crossing the State border between Georgia and Abkhazia. During the period from December 2017 to February 2018, 320,000 people and more than 10,000 vehicles crossed the border. This was an increase of 20 per cent compared to 2016, and the number of detentions dropped fourfold. The South Ossetian-Georgian border was crossed by 53,000 people and 15,000 vehicles.

At the same time, there are negative signals too. Along with the clearly biased line the EU representatives have taken of late at meetings of the IPRM, we have also seen an increase in cases of EU Monitoring Mission patrols violating the borders of South Ossetia (five times in three months), and Abkhazia (once). We appeal to the EU Mission to avoid incidents,

respect the borders of these Caucasus republics, and take a balanced approach at the talks. The improper behaviour of one of the former Mission heads, Andrzej Tishkevich, already led to a lengthy suspension of the Gali IPRM's work.

Increasing military co-operation between Georgia and NATO is also not conducive to restoring stability and security in the Trans-Caucasus. Pumping the Caucasus region full of weapons will not bring any good.

In this context, the doubts cast on Russia's legal ties with the young Trans-Caucasus republics are all the more groundless. As sovereign States, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have the right to choose their own alliances, and recalling the Georgian Government's aggression in 2008, they have every reason to worry about their own security.

Discussions in the humanitarian group are not progressing smoothly either. Here, the annual propagandistic resolution on refugees, passed at Georgia's initiative every year in the United Nations General Assembly, and the UN Human Rights Council's resolutions on co-operation with Georgia, are having their effect. Such steps undermine the spirit of dialogue in Geneva. We hope that the Georgian delegation will wake up to the need to find real solutions to humanitarian issues and not use them to propagandize its own demands regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

We hope that Georgia's representatives will take a more consistent line regarding their neighbours. So far, we see a clear contrast between the Georgian Government's declarative peace plans and its real actions with regard to Sukhum and Tskhinval. Georgia rejects a genuinely engaged dialogue with Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Geneva, encourages other countries to join a visa blockade of people from these two republics, is disrupting their cultural and humanitarian activities abroad, and is putting together some kind of sanctions lists. It is only natural that this kind of counter-productive policy helps to increase the distrust of Georgia's neighbours.

Thank you for your attention.