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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1161st MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

19 October 2017

**On the latest round of the International Discussions on
Security and Stability in the Trans-Caucasus**

Mr. Chairperson,

We are disappointed that it has proved impossible once again to reach a compromise on the wording of the joint statement on the non-use of force in the Trans-Caucasus. The Georgian representatives' dogmatic adherence to the phrase "international security measures", which is unacceptable to the other participants, continues to prevent this document from being adopted. We trust that the work will be completed during the round of talks planned for December. The principle of the non-use of force needs to be formalized to ensure the lasting security of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as noted in the Medvedev-Sarkozy agreements of 12 August 2008, and therefore remains a key task for the Geneva meetings.

The ever increasing NATO military activity on Georgian territory threatens the regional security of the South Caucasus. Such actions on the part of the Georgian Government and members of the Alliance are contrary to the objectives of the Geneva Discussions and devalue the work of that format. A record number of military personnel and heavy equipment were involved in the Noble Partner and Agile Spirit NATO exercises this year. Envoys of certain NATO countries present during the exercises emphasized the anti-Russian focus of the manoeuvres and their importance for Georgia from the point of view of the future "de-occupation" of the South Caucasus. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly resolution adopted in Bucharest on 9 October was consonant with this provocative approach. Encouraging the remilitarization of Georgia and indulging the revanchist sentiments that persist there is extremely dangerous. We once again urge countries to disregard their political preconceptions and carefully analyse the events that preceded the tragedy of August 2008, taking as a basis the report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia under the aegis of the European Union (the Tagliavini Commission, as it is called).

At present, the situation on the State borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Georgia remains stable and predictable. The existing checkpoints function properly and the number of incidents remains about average. The monthly meetings in the format of the

Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) in Gal and Ergneti along with regular contacts among the parties via the hotlines make an important contribution to maintaining a normal atmosphere on the borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Georgia.

The statistics provided in Geneva regarding border traffic fully corroborate the calm situation at the borders. Between June and September, over 450,000 people and more than 13,000 vehicles crossed the Abkhaz-Georgian border. The closure of two checkpoints did not have an impact on the cross-border movements. Furthermore, the Abkhazian Government has taken proactive measures to make it easier to access the checkpoints by means of public transport, and a bus service has been established in the border villages in the Gal district of Abkhazia. This has been confirmed in documents of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

This summer, 55,000 people and 14,000 vehicles crossed the South Ossetian border with Georgia. The local population is better informed about the features of the border regime. The South Ossetian Government's decision to unilaterally demarcate the State border, in the light of the Georgian Government's refusal to do so, is entirely justified. The erection of new border fences opposite the villages of Khurcha and Shamgona in the Zugdidi district is not a political issue. The decision has to do with the frequent cases of uncontrolled migration of cattle across the Abkhaz-Georgian border, which is especially dangerous in the light of the outbreaks of infectious diseases recorded in Georgia. At the same time, there are still factors giving rise to tension, such as the provocative rallies organized by Georgia and visits by foreign political figures to the State border, which has been inspected in recent months by high-ranking representatives of Lithuania, Ukraine, the Czech Republic and the United States of America. Such propaganda measures risk seriously aggravating the situation, the responsibility for which rests with the Georgian Government.

In principle, we consider it wrong to attempt to present the legitimate efforts of the authorities of any country to regulate a border crossing regime as a "violation of freedom of movement". This is especially evident against the backdrop of the obstacles imposed by Georgia and its allies to international travel by residents of Abkhazia.

Discussion continues in Geneva on ways to address humanitarian issues, including preserving cultural heritage, environmental security, searching for missing persons, education and water projects. The representatives of Abkhazia have called for a substantive discussion of cross-border problems as they affect agriculture and pointed to the need for urgent measures to combat insect pests, the spread of which seriously threatens the agrarian sector of the countries of the region.

Georgia's representatives in Geneva have been able to obtain direct replies from the representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to questions of interest to them. In that connection, we will confine ourselves merely to brief explanations regarding the politicized stories about the alleged compulsory "Russification" of preschool and primary education in the Leningori district of South Ossetia. The recent demolition of two kindergartens and schools in the Georgian-populated Ksani gorge was due to the fact that the Georgian authorities have not refurbished these buildings since the 1980s. I might add that these schools were attended not only by Georgian children but also by Ossetians and Russians (10 out of the 23 pupils were children of Russian border guards).

All told, there are nine Georgian schools (with a total of 121 pupils) in South Ossetia. There are serious problems owing to the fact that of the 112 teachers at these schools 76 are Georgian citizens, and most of them do not have the Russian language necessary for teaching and, what is more, have not been tested in years. Nevertheless, the current education reform is not aimed at reducing the scale of education in the Georgian language nor will it do so. A similar situation exists with the Georgian schools in the Gal district of Abkhazia.

Thank you for your attention.