



**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2013
Warsaw, 25 September 2013**

**Statement by Georgia
Working Session 5: Fundamental freedoms II: Freedom of Movement**

Thank you Mr. Moderator,

The right to move freely across and within state borders is one of the fundamental rights that need to be upheld and protected. Let me emphasize in few words the recent developments in Georgia, including the steps that my Government undertakes in this regard:

Needless to reiterate a strategic importance that the perspective of visa free regime for the citizens of Georgia with the EU - one of the most important aspects of the Eastern Partnership – bears for my country. We are actively engaged in the ongoing visa dialogue between the EU and Georgia that was launched in June 4, 2012. We are working on legislative harmonisation based on requirements defined in the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan that was handed over to Georgia in February 2013. Our objective is to conclude the first (legislative) phase of the VLAP and move to the second phase by the EaP Vilnius Summit.

Georgia remains strongly committed to its policy of promoting economic, cultural and human relations. As a concrete manifestation of this policy, so far, Georgia lifted visa requirements for citizens of 118 countries. In the framework of such approach, on 28 February 2012, Georgia unilaterally lifted visa requirements for all citizens of the Russian Federation, yet another proof that Georgia remains in favour of removing barriers for people-to-people contacts.

While we recognize the value of visa free regimes and indeed, continue to make progress in this direction, in the country we still face alarming situation in terms of freedom of movement and facilitating human contacts across the occupation line in Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali. The Government of Georgia is extremely concerned with the imposition of severe restrictions on the freedom of

movement that affects everyday life of people residing within and in the vicinity of the occupied regions, their rights to education, access to healthcare and other social and economic rights. Since January 2013, Russian occupation forces, as well as Sokhumi and Tskhinvali proxy regimes hardened the regulations for crossing the occupation line; Only holders of the so called “Abkhaz” passports or foreign passports are allowed to cross the occupation line. Both in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia, the practice of illegal detentions under charges of illegal crossing of the so-called “state border” continues to persist. Unfortunately, neither vulnerable individuals seeking urgent medical assistance, nor minor children are safeguarded from the additional impediments imposed on the freedom of movement. Four persons died en route to hospital, after they were refused passage through administrative boundary line with Abkhazia region by the Russian troops.

Now I would like to refer to the statements made by my Abkhaz and Ossetian Compatriots. To my regret, I have to admit, that you are isolated, but the only factor, that isolates you from the rest of Georgia, as well as the international community is the illegal Russian military presence, as well as ditches and barbed-wire fences created by them.

By bringing to your attention these unfortunate developments that take place in my country, we are proposing to draw a clear distinction between politics and the fundamental rights and freedom of people to move freely, and establish and strengthen human contacts. Our position is clear: human rights, humanitarian needs cannot and should not be exploited and instrumentalized for political purposes.

The right to move freely and establish human contacts are not privileges – they represent inalienable rights that we all need to respect and safeguard. As the situation in Georgia demonstrates, in the era of global communication and openness, challenges still exist that we all need to address through accomplishing the OSCE commitments in good faith, and enhancing our cooperation.

Thank you for your attention.