



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N° 1170
Vienna, 21 December 2017**

**EU Statement on the 42nd round of the Geneva
International Discussions**

The European Union reiterates the view that the Geneva International Discussions continue to be a crucial forum to address and resolve the challenges stemming from the conflict in Georgia, with the participation of all stakeholders. We note that this round of the discussions was the last one for the UN Co-Chair Ambassador Antti Turunen, a former distinguished chair of this Council and the longest serving Co-Chair since the beginning of the process, and we thank him for his commitment to peace and stability in Georgia and wish him success in his future endeavours.

The European Union notes that extensive debates have continued on a joint statement on the non-use of force. We welcome the fact that there are prospects for gradual movement on this issue, including the agreement among the participants to continue work toward the finalization of a joint statement. We believe that a non-use of force commitment should be complemented by new international mechanisms in order to improve security and transparency as well as by much needed concrete confidence and security building measures on the ground. At the same time, we continue to believe that a clear non-use of force commitment by Russia is essential to enhance security, help build confidence and provide space for further political dialogue.

The European Union is deeply concerned about the increase of Russian military exercises and further build-up in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which go counter to the commitment taken to work toward peace and stability and violate Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In this regard, we call for more transparency of Russian military exercises on the ground and recall

that the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) hotlines should be used in this respect.

The European Union is also deeply concerned about further steps taken by the Russian Federation to include South Ossetia and Abkhazia into its regulatory and security space. The latest examples include the plan to organise those territories into constituencies for Russian Federal elections, the opening of a Russian Federation customs office in Sukhumi as well as the actions taken by President Putin to incorporate de facto South Ossetian military units into the armed forces of the Russian Federation. Such acts clearly violate Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, principles of international law, and the international commitments taken by the Russian Federation. They also undermine security and stability in the region.

On humanitarian issues, we welcome the recent release of detainees as an important step, which we hope, will lead to further progress in resolving humanitarian cases. However, we are deeply concerned about the continued restrictions to freedom of movement and the effects of closure of crossing points on the Abkhaz administrative boundary line, as well as intensification of the so-called "borderization" process along both administrative boundary lines, including by installation of barbed wire fences and other artificial barriers. The ongoing destruction of war-damaged houses in the South-Ossetian controlled village of Eredvi, which was witnessed by the Co-Chairs during their recent visit, and several other villages in the region, is particularly worrisome. Furthermore, the decision to push Georgian mother-tongue based education out of schools in both breakaway regions are also a cause for concern, as well as enforcement of the new "rules" with regard to the documentation for ethnic Georgians in Gali district, which, despite some mitigation measures, further exacerbate the already inadequate access of local residents to basic rights and services.

The issues of refugees and IDPs and their safe, dignified and voluntary return, are at the core of the mandate of the Geneva International Discussions. In this respect, we regret that participants from the Russian Federation and the breakaway regions of Georgia decided once again to walk out from the discussion on this issue in Working Group II. We call upon all participants to engage on all

issues on the agenda, regardless of the views expressed in other international fora.

We call for further engagement of all concerned sides to continue solving issues related to missing persons. In this regard, we welcome the decision on the continuation in 2018 of the work carried out by the OSCE-commissioned expert Dušan Ignjatović.

The European Union welcomes the continuing work of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) in Ergneti and Gali, to which the EUMM together with the OSCE and UN is making an important contribution. Fully functional IPRMs are essential for confidence, predictability and transparency on the ground, especially when dealing with potentially serious security incidents. In this context, we reiterate our demand for the swift and unconditional prosecution of the perpetrator of the fatal shooting of a Georgian citizen on 18 May 2016 in Kurcha.

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 access to the breakaway regions for the EUMM as well as for humanitarian organizations.

The European Union looks forward to the next round of the Geneva International Discussions scheduled for 27-28 March 2018.

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 country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, 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.