



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N°1161
Vienna, 19 October 2017**

**EU Statement on 41st 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 welcome the willingness of participants to continue the discussions concerning a joint statement on the non-use of force and encourage them to reach an agreement on this statement in the near future. This 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. With the view of the continuing Russian military and security related presence and infrastructure reinforcements in the Georgian breakaway regions, in violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and OSCE commitments, we continue to believe that a clear non-use of force commitment by Russia is essential.

The European Union is deeply concerned about the increase of Russian military exercises and further build-up in the breakaway regions as well as continued "borderization", including the building of physical barriers along the both Administrative Boundary Lines, which are worrisome and go counter to the commitment taken to work toward peace and stability. With this regard, we call for more transparency of Russian military exercises on the ground and remind of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) hotline in this respect.

We are also deeply concerned about the continued closures of crossing points on the Abkhaz Administrative Boundary Line, ongoing attempts to push mother-tongue based education out of schools in both breakaway regions, ongoing destruction of war-damaged houses in the South-Ossetian controlled village of Eredvi, as well as reports of the previous destruction of several other villages in the region, and the existing documentation gap affecting ethnic Georgians in the Gali district of Abkhazia. These unacceptable acts infringe the fundamental rights and OSCE commitments.

We attach high importance to efforts in resolving cases of missing persons and call for the engagement of all concerned sides to solve this as well as other related humanitarian issues.

We remain convinced that the issues of refugees and IDPs and their safe, dignified and voluntary return, continues to constitute a key agenda item in the Geneva International Discussions. In this respect, we regret that participants from Russian Federation and the breakaway regions of Georgia decided to walk out from the discussion in the 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 welcome the willingness of participants to further cooperate on environmental issues and to coordinate urgent action to tackle agricultural pests.

The European Union positively notes that regular meetings of the fully functional Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) take place, which are essential for stability and exchange on the ground. We therefore welcome the work conducted as part of the Ergneti and the Gali IPRMs, to which the EUMM together with the OSCE and UN is making an important contribution.

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 EUMM access to the breakaway regions.

The European Union looks forward to the next round of the Geneva International Discussions scheduled for 12-13 December 2017.

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 and the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.