



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council N°1091 Vienna, 3 March 2016

EU Statement on the human rights situation in the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia

The European Union is deeply worried about the human rights situation in the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Recent adoption of so-called laws on entry to and exit from breakaway regions and on citizenship could have negative implications for the human rights, including freedom of movement, particularly of ethnic Georgians living in the Gali region. The European Union notes also with concern the changes to the language of instruction from Georgian to Russian in 11 formerly Georgian-language schools in the Gali district of the breakaway region of Abkhazia.

We wish to underline that the issue of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons and their safe, dignified and voluntary return is at the core of the mandate of the Geneva International Discussions. We reiterate our commitment to help improve the situation of Internally Displaced Persons and refugees from the conflicts and their unconditional right to a voluntary, safe and dignified return. The European Union expresses concern about the restrictions to the freedom of movement between the breakaway regions and the rest of Georgia. Continued deployment by the Russian Federation of so-called border signs, fences and other obstacles are in breach of international law and have a negative impact on the daily lives of the population, which is a source of tension. We call on Russia to reverse these moves.

The European Union expresses its concern about the continuous limitation of impartial information about the human rights situation in the breakaway regions. An objective and de-politicised assessment, including follow-up to the 2008 ODIHR/HCNM report on the human rights situation remains essential. Promoting human rights is essential to improving living conditions for the conflict-affected

population. We therefore call for substantive discussions involving all stakeholders on practical steps to take in this direction.

We remain convinced, that there is an urgent need for a meaningful cross-dimensional OSCE presence throughout Georgia, in particular for the benefit of the civilian population and including robust monitoring capacity able to operate unhindered across the Administrative Boundary Lines. We encourage the OSCE Chairmanship to continue exploring possibilities to return a meaningful OSCE presence to Georgia.

We reiterate our firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders and reiterate our concern about the continuing Russian military and security related presence and infrastructure reinforcements in the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. The EU and its Member States call on Russia to fulfil its obligations under the ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008 and its subsequent implementing measures of 8 September 2008, including providing EUMM access to the breakaway regions.

The Candidate Countries MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country ICELAND, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, and the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA align themselves with this statement.

* MONTENEGRO and ALBANIA continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.