



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council N°1162
Vienna, 2 November 2017**

**EU Statement in reply to the Co-Chairs of the Geneva
International Discussions**

The European Union warmly welcomes the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, Ambassadors Günther Bächler, Antti Turunen and Toivo Klaar, and thanks them for their presentations. We would like to use this opportunity to thank the former European Union Special Representative Herbert Salber for his active engagement, and welcome the new Special Representative-designate Toivo Klaar in his new capacity. The EU reiterates its strong support for conflict resolution in Georgia, including through our co-chairmanship of the Geneva International Discussions, and the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia.

We commend the efforts of the co-chairs throughout the year to reinvigorate the Geneva International Discussions and its Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs), which bring together all relevant stakeholders. We are pleased that the latest 41st round of the Geneva International Discussions allowed for active exchanges on substantive issues of concern including the security and humanitarian situation on the ground, despite persisting divergences of views between participants.

We welcome the relatively stable security situation on the ground maintained since the last round of the Geneva International Discussions, but note with concern tensions in the context of the military exercises held in the region. In this regard, we recall that the meetings of fully functioning Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRM) in Ergneti and Gali, as well as their associated hotlines, are an effective tool to prevent or defuse any rising

tensions. In this context, we call for more transparency of Russian military exercises on the ground.

The European Union is encouraged that the debates on a joint statement on the non-use of force are continuing. We reiterate our view that achieving solution on the non-use of force is essential for reaching progress on international security arrangements in the region. Russia continues to violate Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity through its military and security related presence and infrastructure in the Georgian breakaway regions and we continue to believe that a clear non-use of force commitment by Russia is essential. Agreeing on a statement in the frame of the Geneva Discussions should open the floor for discussions on how to ensure its implementation.

We express concern about the restrictions on the freedom of movement between the breakaway regions and the rest of Georgia. Continued “borderization” efforts by building of physical barriers along both Administrative Boundary Lines as well as the closures of crossing points on the Abkhaz Administrative Boundary Line divide communities and have a negative impact on the daily life of the local population. Such provocative steps are unacceptable and we renew our call on the Russian Federation and the de facto authorities to reverse these moves. We also reiterate our demand for the swift and unconditional prosecution of the perpetrator of the fatal shooting of a Georgian citizen on 19 May 2016 in Khurcha.

The European Union reiterates its concerns about the persistent uncertainty regarding the status and associated rights of the ethnic Georgian population residing in the Gali district of the breakaway region of Abkhazia and calls for measures to mitigate and correct the existing documentation gap. We also note with concern the continuing push for the Russian language of instruction in Georgian-language schools in both breakaway regions, where neither pupils nor teachers are competent in the Russian language, and call upon the de facto authorities to protect the universal right to education of the child.

In the humanitarian area, we welcome the positive steps undertaken throughout the year in particular on addressing the cases of missing persons, continuing constructive discussions on cultural heritage, cooperation over archive and agricultural issues as well as on tackling common environmental threats, including the recent epidemic of pests. However, we regret the lack of substantive discussion on the returns of refugees and IDPs. We underline that the issue of refugees and IDPs and their safe, dignified and voluntary return is a core task of the Geneva International Discussions. We call upon all participants to engage on all issues under the agenda and to refrain from walkouts, which lead to a premature end of the discussions and contradict the commitments to the Geneva International Discussions made by the participants concerned.

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, including a robust monitoring capacity able to operate unhindered across the Administrative Boundary Lines. A meaningful OSCE presence throughout Georgia would considerably strengthen the OSCE's engagement in the Geneva International Discussions and the IPRMs, as well as in the implementation of confidence building measures.

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. We also call for unhindered access to the breakaway regions for EUMM as well as for humanitarian organizations.

In conclusion, we would like to thank the Geneva Co-Chairs for their comprehensive address and look 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

LIECHTENSTEIN, 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.