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PC.DEL/943/19
22 July 2019

ENGLISH only



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No. 1236
Vienna, 18 July 2019**

**EU Statement in Reply to the Address of Mr. Lasha
Darsalia, Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia**

The European Union warmly welcomes Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia Mr. Lasha Darsalia to the Permanent Council. We thank you for your comprehensive and timely address.

The European Union stands in solidarity by a democratic, stable and prosperous Georgia, including with a vibrant civil society. We look forward to strengthening further cooperation with Georgia to advance political association and economic integration and to deliver on the joint commitments under the Association Agreement. In this context, we commend the 16th Batumi International Conference, held last week and dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative, which was addressed by the President of the European Council Donald Tusk.

The European Union closely follows the situation in Georgia that has been recently unfolding and welcomes Georgia's commitment to conduct a fair, transparent and conclusive investigation into the events of the night of 20 June, including on a possible disproportionate use of force. We reiterate that demonstrations must remain peaceful and urge everyone to act within the framework of the Constitution at all times. As committed friends and partners of Georgia, we call on all sides to act in the

country's best interest. In this context, we deplore Russia's recent decision to ban flights to Georgia as of 8 July, which is unjustified and disproportionate.

We regret that organisers were unable to hold a first public Pride "March of Dignity" in Georgia as originally envisaged due to concerns that their safety could not be guaranteed. The European Union will continue to support the Government of Georgia's commitment to uphold the rights of all its citizens, including the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

The European Union welcomes the ongoing process to address shortcomings from previous elections, as reported by the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and others, as well as the recent government's proposal to hold elections in 2020 under a fully proportionate system. This is a real chance to enhance the plurality of Georgia's democratic landscape, and we encourage all stakeholders to use this opportunity to work in good faith.

We also support the peace initiative "A Step to a Better Future", launched by the Georgian government last year, which can benefit the citizens living on both sides of the Administrative Boundary Lines by facilitating trade, education and mobility. In this regard, the European Union remains convinced of the urgent need for a cross-dimensional OSCE presence throughout Georgia, which could contribute to further development of a prosperous and democratic Georgia.

The European Union's commitment to peaceful conflict resolution in Georgia remains as strong as ever. We remain engaged through the EU Special Representative and its co-chairmanship of the Geneva International Discussions (GID), and through the work of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia. The EUMM remains the only international presence on the ground, contributing to stabilization, normalization and confidence building between the conflict parties.

We reiterate our strong support to the GID and fully functioning Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs), which provide a forum for dialogue and are vitally important to address and resolve the challenges stemming from the conflict in

Georgia. We welcome the ongoing work in the Ergneti IPRM, and urge the resumption of the activities of the Gali IPRM without preconditions and further delay.

The European Union notes that the discussions at the latest 48th GID round, held on 2-3 July, addressed a number of recent developments, challenging the security situation on the ground. One of those pressing issues was the restrictions imposed on the two crossing points at the Abkhaz Administrative Boundary Line as of 27 June, which severely affected freedom of movement and caused further difficulties for the conflict affected population. We call for the full lifting of those restrictions to avoid further humanitarian hardship.

It is troubling that the human rights and humanitarian situation in the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia continues to deteriorate. The unresolved issues of documentation, affecting ethnic Georgians in the Gali district of Abkhazia, pushing mother-tongue education out of Georgian schools, continuing arbitrary detentions, and obstacles to the rights of displaced persons require further efforts. We renew our call on the Russian Federation and the de-facto authorities to reverse these trends. We are deeply concerned about the recent death of Georgian citizen Mr. Kvaratskhelia in the custody of Russian Federation Border Guards in the Gali district and call on the Russian Federation to ensure that there is swift investigation and full transparency on the circumstances of this tragic incident. The European Union is also concerned about the impunity surrounding fatal incidents of Georgian citizens Messrs. Tatumashvili in 2018 and Otkhozoria in 2016, and we reiterate our call for a thorough investigation into these cases, as well as into the case of Mr. Basharuli in 2014, to ensure justice and accountability.

On a positive note, we welcome further exchange on the topic of women, peace and security. We believe that inclusive and meaningful participation of women is vital in all phases of peace building processes, and we strongly encourage further steps towards this direction. Also, the EU positively notes a discussion on the issue of missing persons, activities of the OSCE-commissioned expert Dušan Ignjatović with this regard, and call for serious progress on this important issue.

The European Union regrets the lack of progress on the non-use of force issue. We encourage further efforts in this direction and continue to believe that a clear non-use of force statement by Russia is essential. We are concerned that Russia continues to violate Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity through its military presence, increasing military exercises, infrastructure reinforcements, “borderization” and further build-up in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These continuing trends go counter to Russia’s commitment to work toward peace and stability and we call for them to be reversed.

We reiterate our 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 for the EUMM to the whole territory of Georgia, including the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as per its mandate, as well as for human rights monitoring mechanisms, humanitarian and other civil society organizations.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA align themselves with this statement.

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