



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1247 Vienna, 14 November 2019

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 (GID), the UN Representative Cihan Sultanoğlu, the OSCE CiO Special Representative Ambassador Rudolf Michalka and the EU Special Representative Toivo Klaar, and thanks them for their presentations. We commend the efforts of the Co-Chairs in seeking to reinvigorate the GID process and to continue the existing close cooperation between the EU, OSCE and UN.

The EU reiterates its unwavering commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Georgia, including through our co-chairmanship of the GID and through the work of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) and its involvement in the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs).

Eleven years after the establishment of the GID, unfortunately the solution to the conflict does not seem to be any closer. We share the concerns expressed by the GID Co-Chairs on the increasingly worrying situation on the ground, which has been impacted by the closure of crossing points as well as increased tensions along the South Ossetian administrative boundary line (ABL) in the Chorchana-Tsnelisi area, with acute consequences for the local population.

We recognize the major contributions of the GID, IPRMs and EUMM to keeping the security situation on the ground manageable. Thanks to the considerable conflict management efforts by the GID Co-Chairs, and the EUMM, the dialogue could

continue further. We welcome the continuous efforts undertaken in the Ergneti IPRM, which help to ease tensions. While we acknowledge the importance of direct interaction between the sides in the format of technical meetings, we are convinced that efforts should be pursued for a swift and unconditional resumption of regular IPRM meetings in Ergneti. At the same time, we regret that the activities of the Gali IPRM have been stalled for more than one year and urge the resumption of its work without preconditions and further delay.

We stress that the EUMM remains the only international presence on the ground, which tirelessly contributes to stabilisation, normalisation and confidence building between the conflict parties. In this context, we express our deep concern about the incident on 24 October, when a group of unarmed civilian EUMM monitors were held by armed South Ossetian security actors, while conducting a patrol in the Chorchana-Tsnelisi area. This is unacceptable. Any attempts, both in action and through statements, to prevent the EUMM's work are deplorable and must stop. Furthermore, we recall that the EUMM mandate covers the whole territory of Georgia, including its regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

We regret that the GID discussions on its core issues – security and stability, and humanitarian issues – remain challenging. We continue to believe that a clear non-use of force statement by the Russian Federation remains essential.

We reiterate our concern about the continuing Russian illegal military presence in violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, increased military exercises, infrastructure reinforcements and "borderization" activities in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We condemn the implementation of the so-called treaties and deriving agreements. The latest example is the establishment of stamping of entry/exit visas on passports of all foreigners by the de facto Abkhaz authorities. These trends run contrary to the principles of international law and commitments undertaken by Russia to work toward peace and stability, and we call for them to be reversed.

We regret the confrontational atmosphere surrounding discussions on humanitarian issues. Continuing restrictions to freedom of movement on the conflict-affected population, including through the intensified “borderization” process, closures of crossing points and arbitrary detentions, are dividing the Georgian communities and building up hardship, frustration and fears among the local population. We urge the Russian Federation to fully assume its responsibility as a party to the conflict in Georgia and eliminate all restrictions to the freedom of movement. Crossing points closed since early September along the South Ossetian ABL must be reopened immediately. Tragic cases like the recent one, when Ms. Margo Martiashvili, a Georgian woman from Akhalkalaki district, lost her life because she could not access prompt medical help due to a closed crossing point, are deplorable and must not be repeated. We also urge Russia and de facto authorities to finally solve the issue of the existing documentation gap in Abkhazia and to stop pushing mother-tongue education out of Georgian schools, as these continue to infringe on the fundamental rights of local residents.

We regret the death of Georgian citizen Mr. Kvaratskhelia in the custody of Russian Federation border guards in Abkhazia last March, which contributed to growing confrontation and mistrust. We also recall the fatal cases of Georgian citizens Messrs. Tatumashvili, Otkhoshvilia and Basharuli and reiterate our call for thorough investigations into these and other cases, and for justice to be ensured and avoid impunity.

On a more positive note, we welcome some constructive steps and initiatives in the humanitarian area, including on people-to-people contacts, missing persons, women engagement, water and cultural heritage related issues and tackling environmental challenges. However, we regret the lack of substantive discussions on the return of refugees and IDPs. We underline that this issue is a core task and agenda point of the GID. We call upon all participants to engage on all issues and refrain from walkouts, which contradict the commitments to the GID.

We agree with the views expressed by the Co-Chairs that more responsibility and political will, a more constructive and result-oriented approach, including more concrete confidence-building initiatives, especially in the area of human security are necessary to reinvigorate the GID.

We take the opportunity to ask the Co-Chairs a few questions: 1) Would you please share some examples of the concrete possible confidence-building measures that might help to regulate the current security crises on the ground? How we as participating States could contribute? 2) What further steps are foreseen in seeking for more active inclusion of women into the GID process? 3) Any ideas on how the engagement of youth into the peace process could be further enhanced?

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 in Georgia would considerably strengthen the OSCE's engagement in the GID and the IPRMs, as well as in the implementation of confidence-building measures.

The EU reiterates its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. The EU calls on Russia to fulfil its obligations under the EU-mediated ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008 and its subsequent implementing measures of 8 September 2008. We reiterate our call 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.

In conclusion, we would like to thank the GID Co-Chairs for their comprehensive address and look forward to the 50th round of the Geneva International Discussions scheduled for 10-11 December 2019.

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 UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, GEORGIA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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