



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1309 Vienna, 15 April 2021**

#### **EU Statement in response to the address of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, H. E. Mr Lasha Darsalia**

The European Union warmly welcomes the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, H.E. Mr Lasha Darsalia, to this Permanent Council and thanks him for his interesting address.

Your Excellency, let me start by reiterating our unwavering support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. Georgia is an important partner for the EU, with which we have an ambitious Association Agreement.

Regretfully, the Russian military presence in Georgia continues together with increased military exercises and infrastructure reinforcements as well as continuous illegal acts aimed at integrating the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Russia's regulatory and security space. These steps run contrary to the principles of international law and commitments undertaken by Russia, including in the EU-mediated 2008 ceasefire agreement and its implementing measures, and must be reversed.

The EU reiterates its strong support for the Geneva International Discussions (GID) and welcomes that the 52nd round took place as an in-person meeting in Geneva despite the context of the continued Covid-19 restrictions. This showed a strong commitment to the process. The GID remains the key international platform for facilitating a peaceful resolution of the conflict and we will continue to be actively

involved in it. We will also continue our engagement in the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) and through the work of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), which remains – 12 years after the end of the Russia-Georgia war – the only international presence on the ground.

We also reiterate our strong support for the GID Co-Chairs, and warmly welcome the appointment of Ambassador Annika Söder, who assumed her duties in the beginning of this year.

As the security situation on the ground, and in the wider region, remains tense, we would welcome to see progress in the GID discussions on core security issues, such as the international security arrangements and the non-use of force (NUF), and encourage GID participants to step up their efforts in this regard. In addition, we deem it essential to hold result-oriented discussions on how to improve human security in and around the conflict-affected areas.

The ongoing violations of the freedom of movement, including through the actively pursued so-called “borderization” process, severely impact the security, safety and well-being of the local population. In addition, socio-economic hardships, stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic and the closure of Administrative Boundary Lines (ABL) for over a year, are contributing to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the conflict-affected areas. While we acknowledge a series of efforts on the Abkhaz ABL to mitigate the closure, we regret the absence of similar efforts on the South Ossetian ABL. The restrictions of movements also lead to human tragedies, as on 7 April, when four residents of Gali district drowned in the Enguri River when trying to cross from the Abkhazia region of Georgia into the Tbilisi-Administered territory. It is vital that the civilians are ensured unhindered passage across both ABLs and that cooperation is further developed across the Enguri River, in particular to better address current public health concerns. We welcome in this respect the intention by the Georgian government to provide the Covid-19 vaccine for the residents of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Another source of concern is the practice of detaining Georgian citizens near the ABLs, as was the case for Mr. Z. Gakheladze in July 2020, or during the incident of 7 March 2021. The latter – fortunately – did not trigger a more serious escalation in the situation,

including thanks to the prompt involvement of EUMM and the responsible approach taken by the Georgian side. We reiterate our call to release without further delay all illegally detained Georgian citizens, and to conduct thorough investigations into the fatalities of the Georgian citizens Mr. Tatunashvili, Mr. Otkhozoria, Mr. Kvaratskhelia, Mr. Basharauli and others, while in arbitrary detention in Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and to bring those responsible to justice.

We regret that the GID discussion regarding IDPs and refugees was again disrupted due to a walkout of Russian, Abkhaz and South Ossetian participants. We call on all GID participants to engage in discussions on these important matters.

The EU welcomes the continuous efforts undertaken at the Ergneti IPRM meeting in order to ease tensions, and we call for the immediate and unconditional resumption of the Gali IPRM in accordance with the established practices. Sincere and result-oriented dialogue is needed in order to build trust and confidence and to significantly contribute to a future durable and sustainable solution of the conflict between Russia and Georgia.

We are pleased that the GID Co-Chairs continue to promote greater participation of women in the GID and the IPRMs, as it is essential that the voices of women are heard in the GID.

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. The EU 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 European Union reminds the Russian Federation of its responsibilities in line with the landmark judgement of 21 January 2021 of the ECHR in the case Georgia vs Russia.

The European Union looks forward to the next round of the Geneva International Discussions scheduled for 29-30 June 2021.

Let me use this opportunity to again thank you Mr Deputy Minister for your address and to express our best wishes to your country and its people.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\* and ALBANIA\*, and the EFTA country ICELAND, member 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.