EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1323
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EU Statement on the 53rd round of Geneva International Discussions

1. Madam Chair, the European Union welcomes the holding of the 53rd round of Geneva International Discussions (GID) on 29-30 June. The fact that GID in person meetings have resumed on a regular basis is an encouraging sign that international efforts to resolve the conflict in Georgia are finally back on track despite the challenges posed by COVID19 pandemic. We wish to thank the GID Co-Chairs for their tireless efforts in this regard.

2. A secure, stable, peaceful and prosperous South Caucasus is a priority for the EU and its Member States. However, this can only be achieved if long-standing conflicts in this region are resolved. This message was once again underlined during the recent joint visit of the Foreign Ministers of Austria, Lithuania and Romania – on behalf of the EU High Representative Josep Borrell– to all 3 countries of the region on 24-26 June.

3. Madam Chair, the resolution of conflicts in OSCE area, including the conflict in Georgia, is only possible if there is strong political will on all sides to implement their respective commitments and to engage constructively in the existing negotiating formats. In this context, we wish to commend Georgia for demonstrating such a commitment on its side. We also urge the other GID participants to engage constructively in the work of the GID and IPRMs. We call on Russia to implement its part of the EU-mediated 2008 ceasefire agreement and its implementing measures fully and in good faith.

4. As the security situation on the ground, and in the wider region, remains tense, we welcome the fact that discussions during the last GID meeting focused particularly on core security issues, such as the non-use of force (NUF) and the international security

arrangements. We encourage further efforts in this direction and continue to believe that a clear NUF statement by Russia is essential.

5. Regrettably, the Russian military presence in Georgia continues together with increased military exercises and infrastructure reinforcements as well as illegal acts aimed at integrating the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Russia's regulatory and security space. This also includes the most recent de facto annexation by Russia of the Georgian village of Aibgha. All 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.

6. The ongoing violations of the freedom of movement, including through the actively pursued so-called "borderization" process, continue to severely impact the security, safety and well-being of the local population. In addition, socio-economic hardships, stemming from the COVID19 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. In this regard, we note positively the efforts of the Georgian government to develop an inclusive approach, including the continued implementation of the Georgian strategy "A Step To A Better Future" and engagement with people in occupied territories. It is vital that civilians are ensured unhindered passage across both ABLs in particular to better address current public health concerns. We therefore welcome the fact that the crossing of people across the Inguri River is as of 5 July restored to its pre-pandemic capacity. This is a positive development allowing for a greater freedom of movement for the conflict-affected population.

7. We also welcome the result-oriented discussions by GID participants on how to improve human security in and around the conflict-affected areas. Sincere dialogue is needed in order to build trust and confidence and to significantly contribute to a future durable and sustainable solution of the conflict.

8. Another source of our concern is the detentions of Georgian citizens near the ABLs. In few days, it will be one year since the illegal detention of Mr Gakheladze. We reiterate our call to release Mr Gakheladze, without further delay and all other 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 who died, while in arbitrary detention in Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and to bring those responsible to justice.

9. We regret that the GID discussions regarding IDPs and refugees were 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 constructively.

10. The EU welcomes the continuous efforts undertaken at the Ergneti IPRM meeting in order to ease tensions and to facilitate dialogue on the ground. We also call for the immediate and unconditional resumption of the Gali IPRM, suspended for 3 years already, in accordance with the established practices and without any preconditions.

11. The EU fully supports the efforts by the GID Co-Chairs to continue promoting greater participation of women in the GID and the IPRMs. It is essential that the voices of women are heard throughout the phases of the conflict cycle, including in this particular conflict.

12. Madam Chair, 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 the only international presence on the ground.

13. 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 its 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 urges the Russian Federation to ensure the proper follow-up of the landmark judgement of 21 January 2021 of the ECHR in the case Georgia vs Russia.

14. The European Union looks forward to the next round of the Geneva International Discussions scheduled for 12-13 October 2021.