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EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1349
Vienna, 16 December 2021

EU Statement on the 55th round of the Geneva International Discussions

1. Madam Chair, the European Union welcomes the holding of the 55th round of the Geneva International Discussions (GID) on 7-8 December. We wish to reiterate our support to the GID Co-Chairs for their tireless efforts in steering the work of GID. We also wish to thank the authorities of Switzerland for ensuring that the GID meeting could take place, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. The EU continues to be deeply concerned by the severe impact the conflict in Georgia has on civilian population, whose everyday lives have also been seriously affected by the COVID-19 pandemic during the last two years. The EU echoes the Co-Chairs' call on all participants to increase efforts to build trust and confidence and to address all elements of comprehensive and human security, including by engaging constructively in technical-level discussions, as well as with international humanitarian and human rights organisations. We therefore welcome that this last round of GID addressed issues of topical importance to conflict affected populations and that an expert exchange between medical professionals on how to counter the COVID-19 pandemic was also held. In this context, the EU commends the efforts of the Georgian government to provide necessary medical support, including COVID-19 vaccines, to the people living in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We also welcome other support measures, implemented through the Georgian strategy "A Step To A Better Future".

3. Moreover, the situation for the civilian population remains concerning due to the freedom of movement restrictions across the administrative boundary lines. We urge the Russian Federation to ensure that these restrictions are lifted. These restrictions, as well as other pressing humanitarian issues, such as illegal detentions, unresolved cases of missing persons, investigation of cases of those who died while in custody, issues surrounding documentation and education in Georgian language should remain at the centre of the GID discussions.

4. 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 constructively in the discussions on these important matters.

5. Madam Chair, in addition to humanitarian issues, security issues can only be effectively addressed if there is strong political will by all sides to implement their respective commitments and to engage constructively in the existing negotiating formats. In this context, we call on Russia, as a party to this conflict, to step up its efforts in this regard, in particular by implementing its part of the EU-mediated 2008 agreement and its implementing measures fully and in good faith. We also urge other GID participants to engage constructively in the work of the GID and IPRMs.

6. As the security situation in the wider region remains tense, we welcome the fact that discussions during the last GID meeting also focused 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 non-use of force statement by Russia is essential to ease tensions on the ground.

7. Regrettably, the Russian military presence in Georgia continues together with its intense military exercises, the “borderisation” activities and other 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. All these steps are in violation of Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, run contrary to the principles of international law and commitments undertaken by Russia, including in the EU-mediated 2008 agreement and its implementing measures, and must be reversed.

8. 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 took positive note that the Gali IPRM, suspended for more than three years now, may soon resume and we trust that this will be the case a in accordance with the established practices and without any preconditions.

9. In conclusion, the EU regards the GID as the key international platform for facilitating a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Georgia and we will continue to be actively involved in it. We will also continue our engagement in the IPRMs and through the work of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), which remains the only international presence on the ground.

10. The EU calls on Russia to fulfil its obligations under the EU-mediated 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.

11. The European Union looks forward to the next round of the Geneva International Discussions scheduled for 29-30 March 2022.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC of MOLDOVA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA, SAN MARINO and CANADA align themselves with this statement.

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