



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No 1106
Vienna, 23 June 2016**

**EU Statement on 36th round of the Geneva International
Discussions**

The Geneva International Discussions are a very important forum to address and resolve the challenges stemming from the conflict in Georgia. The latest round provided the opportunity to have extensive and substantial exchanges on the security and humanitarian situation on the ground despite participants' persistent differences.

It is positive that the latest round allowed for extensive discussions on the fatal shooting of a Georgian citizen, which occurred at the Khurcha-Nabakevi crossing point on the Administrative Boundary Line of Georgia with the breakaway region of Abkhazia on May 19. We join the Co-Chairs call for a swift and objective investigation into the circumstances surrounding this deeply regrettable crime and for the detention and prosecution of the perpetrator. The resumption of the Gali IPRM was instrumental in the de-escalation of the situation.

We believe that fully functional IPRMs are essential for confidence, predictability and transparency on the ground. In this respect, we welcome the continued constructive efforts by the participants in the Ergneti IPRM and the resumption of the Gali IPRM. We look forward to the next meeting on July 6.

The European Union notes that debates have continued on a possible joint statement on non-use of force. Such a step is essential and should be complemented by mechanisms to improve security and transparency on the ground. With the view of the continuing Russian military and security related presence and infrastructure reinforcements in the Georgian breakaway regions, in violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and OSCE commitments, we continue to believe that a clear non-use of force commitment by Russia is necessary to enhance security, help build confidence and provide space for further political dialogue.

We commend the Chairmanship's initiative to host a discussion on confidence and security building measures with all participants in the margins of the round.

We note that the latest round allowed for extensive discussions on the continued lack of clarity on the status and associated rights of the ethnic Georgian population in the Gali and Akhalkalaki districts of the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia respectively. This is a matter of serious concern. We call for increased transparency on this issue as well as for objective information on the human rights situation in the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The recent visit of former Council of Europe Commissioner Thomas Hammarberg to the breakaway region of Abkhazia is significant in this regard.

We remain concerned about restrictions to freedom of movement between the breakaway regions and the rest of Georgia. Continued deployment by the Russian Federation of so-called border signs, fences and other obstacles at different locations along and beyond the Administrative Boundary Lines, divides communities and has a negative impact on the daily life of the local populations. Such provocative steps are unacceptable and we call on the Russian Federation to reverse these moves.

We recall our statement of May 5, where we expressed our concern regarding the conclusion of the so-called "Agreement on the State Border" by the Russian Federation with the breakaway region of South Ossetia. This, together with previous so called agreements by the Russian Federation further violates the fundamental norms of international law, including the principles of inviolability of Georgia's sovereignty, territorial integrity and internationally recognized borders, as well as Russia's international commitments under the August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement.

We underline that IDPs and refugees, and their safe, dignified and voluntary return are a core issue of the Geneva International Discussions and we therefore regret the lack of discussions on this matter in the latest round.

The European Union continues to call for impartial information about the human rights situation in the breakaway regions. A follow-up of the 2008 ODIHR/HCNM report on human rights situation is essential. Improving the human rights situation and addressing violations without delay in full respect of international law and OSCE commitments is of essence to improve the conditions of the conflict affected population.

We remain convinced that there is a need for a meaningful cross-dimensional OSCE presence throughout Georgia, in particular for the benefit of the civilian population, including monitoring capacity able to operate unhindered across the Administrative Boundary Lines.

The European Union reiterates its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised 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 EUMM access to the breakaway regions.

The European Union looks forward to the next round of the Geneva International Discussions scheduled for 4-5 October 2016.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

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