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**Key messages**

Every conflict is unique and therefore each of them is different from the other in many ways. Positions surely differ and sometimes it is almost impossible to marry them when it comes to the different geo-political and geo-strategic interests of different players.

What really constitutes a basis to the sustainable solution to the conflict is a peaceful resolution of it, which of course requires enormous efforts both internationally and domestically as well as patience and time. That is achieved only through dialogue and engagement, as well as through exercising responsibility and accountability to the public and each other.

Brief outline of the situation: The armed forces of the Russian Federation remain in Georgia and occupy 20 percent of its territory. This unfortunate reality is recognized and strongly opposed by the international community. Russia has proceeded to recognize the regimes created with its political support and military backing both in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Under the pretense of concluding interstate agreements with these entities created through ethnic cleansing, Russia has set up two military bases on the territory of Georgia and has deployed over ten thousand servicemen therein.

Contrary to the provisions of the 12 August cease-fire agreement between the Russian Federation and Georgia mediated by the French EU Presidency, Russia continues to flout its obligation to withdraw its forces to the pre-war positions, openly opposes to the establishment of international security and stability arrangements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and safe and dignified return of the forcefully displaced persons to their places of residence. Conflict affected communities continue to be divided and freedom of movement between the communities is not safe and guaranteed.

Peaceful conflict resolution, first of all, is important to the people of Georgia, to its all ethnic minorities and first and foremost for Ossetians and Abkhazs. At the same time resolution of the conflict is extremely and increasingly important internationally as well. Conflict between Russia and Georgia has not only local or regional relevance but a direct bearing on the security architecture in Europe.

Lasting and just solution to this conflict should be also in best national interests of the Russian Federation, which will undoubtedly have its positive effect to the much required peace and stability in the Russian part of Caucasus, where the turbulence, disorder and violence has been spiraling over the last decade or so.

What should be the basis in order to ensure peaceful and just conflict resolution in Georgia? These are fundamental principles of the international law enshrined in the UN Charter and Helsinki Final Act and only by upholding them we would be able to achieve this goal. As the Council of the European Union puts it, "a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict in Georgia must be based on full respect for the principles of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity recognized by the international law and UN Security Council Resolutions".

Position of the Government of Georgia with regard to the political status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia had long been outlined in the Government's "Peace Plan" and policy papers. Scope of "fullest possible" autonomous status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia within the state of Georgia shall be determined in a peaceful and negotiated process.

Peaceful conflict resolution in Georgia and lasting solution to it must address number of different layers: relations between the Georgian authorities and the Ossetian and Abkhaz minorities, relations between Georgia and the Russian Federation and relations between Russia and the West. And key phenomena in conflict resolution process are dialogue and engagement in good spirit, renouncement of use of force and adherence to only peaceful solution of all outstanding issues and international security arrangements.

On November 23, 2010 in an address to the European Parliament the President of Georgia pledged that Georgia will not use force either against Russia or against the regimes in the Georgian territories occupied by the Russian Federation. This unilateral commitment to non-use of force has become Georgia's legal obligation under the international law. It is fundamentally important Russia finally to reciprocate Georgia's unilateral pledge not to use force.

Georgia made an offer to start dialogue with Russia without putting conditions prior to that dialogue, at any place and at any time. In order conflict resolution to commence in its full capacity, it is of fundamental importance Russia finally to make its decision and to engage in the dialogue.

International community's and organizations engagement and direct participation in the conflict resolution are absolutely fundamental. Geneva International Discussions represent the formal venue for the international engagement today, where the EU, OSCE and the UN are co-chairing the talks among Russian, Georgian, American participants as well as south Ossetian and Abkhaz community representatives. These discussions aim at establishing international security arrangements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia as well as facilitating safe and dignified return of IDPs and refugees to their places of residence.

EUMM was deployed swiftly immediately aftermath of the war between Russia and Georgia and since then it has been contributing significantly to everyday stability by reducing the space for military and political provocations, although it has not been able so far to fully to implement its mandate on the whole territory of Georgia.

International community has been strong and proactive in its non-recognition policy as well and it continues to call on Russia to end the occupation and withdrew its troops to their pre-war positions, thus safeguarding and upholding fundamental principles of international law. International community has been also unequivocal in its calls on Russia, latter to uphold its commitment under 1999 Charter for European Security and respect the right of every state freely to choose their security arrangements and alliances as well as to abandon considering parts in the OSCE area as its spheres of influence.

Has the international involvement and engagement with Russia as well as in the overall peace process been adequate and effective enough and how is it now? "Tagliavini report": "...there had been no adequate reaction by the international community which would have been both timely and vigorous enough to contain the continuing build-up of tensions and the increasing threat of armed conflict. Regardless belated international efforts, the crises had an

almost free run". Moreover, as the head of the independent fact-finding mission observed, "...passive and non-innovative approach to the peace process adopted by the international community also contributed to the unfolding crises".

Are we in a better situation now in this regard? The European Union and the US both have increased their efforts aimed at peaceful conflict resolution between Russia and Georgia and of course there has been unequivocal conviction that this conflict will not dissipate on its own accord unless proper international arrangements are put in place and continued pressure on Russia latter to uphold fundamental principles of international law are further enforced. Still, much remains to be done.

Constructive engagement and confidence-building measures between the Government of Georgia and South Ossetian and Abkhaz minorities, between conflict divided populations of Georgia as well as interaction with the authorities in control in South Ossetia and Abkhazia is crucially important layer as well for peaceful conflict resolution in Georgia.

Regardless the fact that this conflict in question primarily is a conflict between Russia and Georgia, the Georgian Government does recognize the existence of political differences with parts of the populations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Therefore, any successful development will require consistent engagement with populations that have different perceptions of the conflict.

The Georgian people and the Government have made their firm choice for the future of Georgia. That is to build value based, free and democratic country with its vibrant civil society and part of European and euro-Atlantic family. Benefits and opportunities of current development and future unquestionable perspectives should also be available for the populations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The State Strategy on Engagement and its Action Plan, development of which entailed close consultation and coordination with many stakeholders, international partners, experts, NGOs, affected populations, opinion makers and others, serve exactly this very purpose. The Strategy seeks to counter the isolation and division by creating frameworks, incentives and mechanisms for engagement in a status-neutral way.

The Action Plan introduced detailed mechanisms for implementation of the goals articulated in the Strategy and identified four dimensions of engagement – humanitarian, human, social and economic. The Action plan included seven practical instruments and menu of different programs through which strategy goals are being advanced and communication and cooperation between all communities of Georgia are being pursued. Since the launch of the Action Plan, these instruments have been tested already and the plan has been implementing rather successfully.

Peaceful conflict resolution between Russia and Georgia has been a failure so far. Today one can observe growing attempts and elements to address two layers of this conflict: engagement and interaction between the Government of Georgia with populations and/or authorities in control in the occupied regions and engagement and interaction between the International community and Russia. What has been persistently missing is the engagement between Russia and Georgia. It should be rectified.