

Abkhazia-Georgia

During 2005 the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) witnessed a series of promising developments in the region, although a mutually acceptable settlement on Abkhazia's status within Georgia remained elusive. Following an eight-month hiatus in contact between the two parties, a UN-hosted meeting in April 2005 signaled a resumption of the formal peace process. The Georgian leadership affirmed its commitment to a peaceful solution and its readiness to engage with the new Abkhaz leadership, elected in January 2005. However, Abkhazia questioned this commitment in view of Georgia's increased military expenditure and its closure of the Abkhaz portion of the Black Sea to international maritime traffic. Strains between the parties and between the Georgian government and Russia culminated in a vote by the Georgian parliament in October that called for a withdrawal of the CIS peacekeeping force (CISPKF).

UNOMIG was established in August 1993 with an initial mandate to verify compliance with a cease-fire agreed by the government of Georgia and the Abkhaz authorities. After a period of resumed fighting, the two parties signed an agreement on a cease-fire and separation of forces (the Moscow Agreement) in May 1994, mediated by the Russian Federation. On the basis of that agreement, the CISPKF was established to observe the cease-fire, conduct joint patrols with UNOMIG in the Kodori Valley, maintain a "security zone" free of armed forces and heavy military equipment, and through its presence "promote the safe return of refugees and displaced persons,

UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG)	
• Resolution passage and start date	24 August 1993 (UNSC Res. 858)
• SRS	Heidi Tagliavini (Switzerland)
• Chief military observer	Niaz Muhammad Khan Khattak (Pakistan)
• Senior police adviser	Colonel Jozsef Boda (Hungary)
• Budget	\$34.56 million (1 July 2005–30 June 2006)
• Strength as of 31 October 2005	Military observers: 120 Civilian police: 12 International civilian staff: 102 Local civilian staff: 184

especially in the Gali district." The CISPKF was initially composed of 3,000 peacekeepers, but later reduced to 1,200. Although originally envisaged as a multinational force, the reluctance of other states to contribute troops under Russian command resulted in a solely Russian force. The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 937 in July 1994, expanding UNOMIG's mandate to include observation of the CIS force, monitoring of the cease-fire, verification of troop withdrawals from the security zone, and oversight of the withdrawal of Georgian troops from the Kodori Valley.

Humanitarian and human rights concerns in the conflict zone posed a major challenge for UNOMIG throughout 2005. The mission worked with a range of organizations to provide assistance to vulnerable groups affected by the conflict. Human rights protection and promotion has been a core activity of UNOMIG

CIS Peacekeeping Forces in Georgia, Abkhazia

• Authorization date	14 May 1994 21 July 1994 (UNSC Res. 937)
• Start date	June 1994
• Head of mission	Sergey Chaban (Russia)
• Budget as of 30 September 2005	—
• Strength as of 30 September 2005	Troops: 2,325

since 1996, when a joint UNOMIG–Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights office was established in Sukhumi. Although the reporting and capacity-building functions of the office proceeded well in 2005, the unwillingness of Abkhaz authorities to permit the opening of a human rights suboffice in the Georgian-populated Gali district was a setback. With a new political leadership in Sukhumi that has sought to exert its autonomy, human rights will likely remain a critical function for UNOMIG.

UNOMIG’s civilian component continued to work closely with local law enforcement agencies. Although Abkhaz authorities have been relatively open to collaboration with the UN civilian police force, they have been reluctant to permit UNOMIG to deploy police advisers on the Gali side of the cease-fire line. This has limited the mission’s capacity to address crime. In a continued effort to build local capacity, UNOMIG hosted a training course on human rights, law enforcement, and community policing for the Georgian police force.

The lack of security in the region remained a core concern throughout the year. In the Gali district, armed robberies, shootings, abductions, detentions, and explosions were reported. Similar incidents were documented in other areas, where local populations have reported threats by the Georgian armed forces and by Abkhazis, and violence prompted by criminal activity such as smuggling. In response to these incidents, and to the robbery of eleven

UNOMIG military observers and two interpreters, the mission increased the security level for its personnel operating in the lower Gali district. The Georgian government reacted to increased levels of crime by tightening its border with Abkhazia.

The deteriorating security situation prompted the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to convene a meeting on 12 May 2005 between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides at UNOMIG’s Gali headquarters, also attended by the force commander of CISPCKF. The discussion concluded with the signing of a protocol to the Moscow Agreement by both parties, UNOMIG and the CISPCKF. The parties committed to making force strength figures transparent in the conflict zone, enhancing communication by law enforcement agencies, maintaining a minimum distance between the positions of law enforcement agencies and the cease-fire line, exchanging information on criminal activities, and ensuring the continued safety of the staff of international organizations in the region. Despite these commitments made in May, the situation failed to improve in the months that followed. In early November, UNOMIG expressed concern that the security situation in Gali had deteriorated, and maintained its offer to establish a human rights office and to deploy a UN police force in the area.

UNOMIG and the CISPCKF continued to cooperate on security matters. Regular meetings between the chief military observer of UNOMIG and the CISPCKF force commander as well as respective liaison teams helped to improve working relations between the missions, which over the years had been strained by the issue of compliance with UN norms regarding rules of engagement and codes of conduct.

Nevertheless, the presence of CISPCKF in the region remains a source of tension. The Georgian government has long held that Russia’s dominating role has complicated its efforts to reestablish authority in the Abkhaz region. Although Russia officially recognizes Georgian sovereignty in Abkhazia, Tbilisi

accuses Moscow of backing, arming, and financing the rebels, and for supporting Abkhazia in the 1992–1993 civil war. Moreover, the provisions of the Moscow Agreement pertaining to the repatriation of approximately 200,000 displaced Georgians, most of whom continue to be housed in the Zugdidi region close to the conflict zone and Tbilisi, have not been fulfilled, which remains one of the single largest issues for the Georgian government. Return of internally displaced persons was one of the UN's core functions; in October 2005 it hosted a meeting of Georgian and Abkhaz officials to discuss the issue.

The interposition of peacekeepers has played a constructive short-term role in separating opposing forces, stabilizing cease-fire lines, and creating an environment conducive to the provision of humanitarian assistance. However, the UN and CIS's effort to share security tasks in Abkhazia has been deeply affected by regional and geopolitical strains. In October 2005, the Georgian parliament voted to plan for a possible withdrawal of the Russian-led CISP KF on the grounds that it had not been able to provide adequate security. Soon thereafter, Russian president Vladimir Putin stated that the Russian Federation would

remove its forces from Abkhazia if the Georgian government made a clear request. Although CISP KF remained in Georgia through the end of November, the Georgian government continued to argue that the presence of Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia posed a threat to its national security due to their engagement in criminal activities and support of the Abkhaz "separatist" government.

The Abkhaz conflict and tension regarding the role of the CISP KF in Abkhazia is only one piece of the troubled Russian–Georgian relationship. In the past year, Tbilisi has repeatedly accused Moscow of providing military assistance to separatists in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. On the Russian side, Moscow insists that Tbilisi is enabling Chechen separatists to seek shelter in the isolated Pankisi Gorge in northern Georgia. Russian media reports allege that elements of the Georgian military and political leadership have joined forces with Chechen separatists in an alliance against the Russian Federation. It remains to be seen what impact these geopolitical tensions will have on the future of UNOMIG and the CISP KF, which remain mutually dependent in both structure and function.