

Abkhazia-Georgia

Despite promising signs at the end of 2005, the past year brought little progress in determining the status of the breakaway Abkhaz republic. In fact, the prospects for a mutually agreeable solution appear less likely. A general decline in Russo-Georgian relations, along with efforts to link the dispute to the outcome of the Kosovo status negotiations, exacerbated an already tense situation. Violence erupted in late summer when Georgian forces entered the Kodori Gorge en masse, ostensibly in pursuit of a local warlord.

The UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) was established in August 1993 to monitor a July cease-fire between Georgia and Abkhazia, which declared its independence from Georgia in July 1992. Before the UNOMIG team was fully deployed, the cease-fire broke and hostilities resumed. In spring 1994, negotiations culminated in the “Agreement on a Cease-Fire and Separation of Forces,” also known as the Moscow Agreement. The Moscow Agreement created the Commonwealth of Independent States Peacekeeping Force in Abkhazia-Georgia (CISPKF), drawing on the over 1,000 Russian troops already present in the conflict zone. The CISPKF responsibilities include maintaining the cease-fire, promoting the safe return of refugees, supervising the implementation of the Moscow Agreement, and maintaining a “security zone” free of armed forces and heavy military equipment.

Human rights and security issues were the primary source of tension in the early part of 2006, with January bringing a surge of robberies and kidnappings to the Gali region, a part of Abkhazia with a significant Georgian

population. The Georgian government continued to request UNOMIG for an expansion of its monitoring of human rights violations against ethnic Georgians, and for an international police force for Gali. Presently, eleven UNOMIG police personnel operate on the Georgian side of the administrative border in the region of Zugdidi, but none are deployed within the Abkhaz part of the conflict zone. The outgoing UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative to Georgia, Heidi Tagliavini, argued on 22 June that the presence of peacekeepers and UN observers in the conflict zone is the only factor preventing the situation from spiraling out of control.

On 28 March 2006, Security Council Resolution 1666 extended UNOMIG’s mandate by six months, and reaffirmed the Council’s commitment to the territorial integrity of Georgia. While the United Nations has always supported Georgia’s territorial integrity, the Russian Federation moved closer to acknowledging the independence of Abkhazia during the year under review. Throughout the spring, President Vladimir Putin and foreign minister Sergei Lavrov continued to promote the concept of referenda on independence in contested areas of the CIS, hinting at the possibility of official recognition of the separatist republics within the former Soviet Union. Despite concerns about the safety of ethnic Georgians, the CISPKF is generally seen by international observers as a stabilizing force in the region.

In early May 2006 the Abkhaz administration released a peace plan that envisioned “fundamentally new, neighborly relations” between Abkhazia and Georgia as independent states, and also demanded an apology from the

Georgian government for its policy of “war and intimidation.” A Georgian peace initiative released on 9 June offered Abkhazia “broad internal sovereignty” based on the principles of federalism. Both plans were rejected and the governments pledged further negotiations. As 2006 drew to a close, negotiations had been suspended as a result of a breakdown in relations between Tbilisi and Sukhumi following Georgia’s July incursion into the Kodori Gorge.

The Kodori Gorge is located in the north of Abkhazia, on the Russian border, and has been under nominal Georgian jurisdiction since 1994. It has long been controlled by local leader Emzar Kvitsiani, who on 23 July 2006 announced that he no longer recognized Tbilisi’s authority over the region. Georgia’s subsequent deployment of over a thousand police and special forces into the Kodori Gorge neutralized Kvitsiani’s militia with a minimum of casualties, but Kvitsiani himself escaped.

The significant Georgian military presence in Kodori prompted unease in Moscow and Sukhumi. Russia accused Georgia of violating the terms of the 1994 cease-fire, which called for the demilitarization of the Kodori Gorge. This position was accepted at the UN, where a Security Council resolution unusually critical of Georgia was passed on 13 October. Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili’s statement, on 27 July 2006, that he planned to install the Abkhaz government-in-exile in the upper Kodori region increased tensions. The situation worsened significantly when Georgia announced that it would not allow the CISP KF to patrol the Kodori Gorge, preferring instead that the valley be patrolled by Georgian forces and UNOMIG.

The debate over monitoring of the upper Kodori Gorge brought to the fore the question of whether Georgia has the right to withdraw its consent to the CIS peacekeeping mission. Throughout the year, the Georgian parliament and legal advisers debated this question with-

out coming to a definitive conclusion. Meanwhile, Russia has stated that it does not intend to withdraw its peacekeepers from the conflict zone, particularly as the majority of Abkhaz have received Russian passports.

In early October 2006, after Russo-Georgian relations hit a new low following the arrest of four Russian officers accused of espionage, Georgia acceded to Russia’s demand to allow Russian CISP KF troops to inspect the upper Kodori Gorge. Despite this compromise solution, Russia’s relationship with Georgia remained extremely strained, and the situation in Abkhazia remained tense.

UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG)

• Authorization and start date	24 August 1993 (UNSC Res. 858)
• SRSG	Jean Arnault (France)
• Chief military observer	Major-General Niaz Mohammad Khan Khattak (Pakistan)
• Senior police adviser	Alexey Telichkin (Ukraine)
• Budget	\$33.4 million (1 July 2006–30 June 2007)
• Strength as of 30 September 2006	Military observers: 121 Civilian police: 13 International civilian staff: 100 Local civilian staff: 180 UN volunteer: 1

For detailed mission information see p. 356.

CIS Peacekeeping Force in Abkhazia-Georgia (CISP KF)

• Authorization date	21 October 1994 (CIS Council of Collective Security) and 21 July 1994 (UNSC Res. 937)
• Start date	June 1994
• Head of mission	Major-General Sergei Chaban (Russia)
• Strength as of 30 September 2006	Troops: 1,600