

## South Ossetia–Georgia

While Georgia's establishment of a parallel administration in South Ossetia at the end of 2006 was designed to change the status quo and reduce support for the Tskhinvali administration, negotiations remained frozen during 2007 and a missile incident in August kept tensions high. Continued statements linking the outcome of the Kosovo status talks with South Ossetia's future contributed to unease in Tbilisi, while the lack of productive high-level talks by the Joint Control Commission (JCC) left negotiations at a stalemate.

Violent conflict erupted in Georgia's South Ossetia region in January 1991 after the Georgian government denied a request by Ossetian officials for autonomous status within Georgia. The war continued until June 1992, leaving some 1,000 dead, 100 missing, more than 65,000 internally displaced, and the South Ossetian administrative center, Tskhinvali, destroyed. The 1992 "Agreement on the Principles of Settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict Between Georgia and Russia" (also known as the Sochi Accords) established both a cease-fire and the Joint Control Commission. The JCC was created primarily to monitor the terms of the agreement, implement settlement measures, coordinate economic reconstruction, and facilitate the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. Composed of representatives from Georgia, Russia, and North and South Ossetia, the JCC was also tasked with coordinating the efforts of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF), a peacekeeping battalion commanded by the Russians and composed of 1,500 troops, equally drawn from Russia, Georgia, and North and South Ossetia.

For twelve years there was no military confrontation between the sides, with South Ossetians establishing their own de facto state

### CIS–South Ossetia Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF)

- Authorization Date 24 June 1992
- Start Date July 1992
- Head of Mission Major-General Marat Kulakhmetov (Russia)
- Strength as of 30 September 2007 Troops: 1,500

### OSCE Mission to Georgia

- Authorization Date 6 November 1992
- Start Date December 1992
- Head of Mission Ambassador Terhi Hakala (Finland)
- Budget \$14 million (October 2006–September 2007)
- Strength as of 30 September 2007 Civilian Staff: 29

institutions, including a presidency, a parliament, and armed forces. In 2004, newly elected Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili made restoration of Georgian territorial integrity his top priority. As part of a robust antimuggling campaign, Saakashvili closed the Ergneti market outside Tskhinvali and ordered a significant number of Georgian troops to the border of the region. Violence rapidly increased and threatened to drive the conflict into war. While an August 2004 cease-fire agreement ended the direct military confrontation in South Ossetia, the zone of conflict continues to be a volatile area, with frequent border skirmishes and criminal incidents.

Since November 2006, there have been two self-proclaimed, competing governments in South Ossetia. The Tskhinvali-based administration, led by Eduard Kokoity and backed by Russia, has sought independence from Georgia and is generally supported by South Ossetians. The Kurta-based administration, just a few miles north of Tskhinvali, is supported by Tbilisi and was created in a November 2006 parallel election in South Ossetia's Georgian community. Dmitri Sanakoyev, a former member of Kokoity's administration, was elected on a platform of allegiance to Tbilisi and support of the territorial integrity of Georgia. Tbilisi's support of Sanakoyev through 2007 was seen by Russia as an attempt to undermine Kokoity and therefore a direct threat to the peace process. Nonetheless, Tbilisi has continued to implement measures

to solidify the parallel government, including an 8 May 2007 resolution to establish a temporary administrative unit in South Ossetia.

Beyond the informal JCC discussions held in June and July 2007, Saakashvili's 2005 plan to build confidence and demilitarize the conflict zone did not see meaningful progress during the year in review. Hopes of high-level talks between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali receded still further on 6 August, when Georgian authorities reported an unexploded bomb near the South Ossetian border. Tbilisi lodged a formal protest with Russia, and called for EU and UN investigations of the matter. Amid this heightened tension, the JCC-brokered meetings planned for mid-August fell through, underscoring the debate over whether the JCC is the appropriate mechanism for defrosting the conflict.