

Georgia

Since attaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia has grappled with persistent separatist movements in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These disputed territories have been a long-standing source of contention between Georgia and Russia, which shares a border with the two regions, and led to a five-day war in 2008. In 2011 the situation remained tense and uncertain.

The EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) deployed shortly after the 2008 war. The mission plays a vital role as the only remaining peacekeeping presence in the country, but its inability to regularly access the disputed territories themselves has prevented it from fulfilling its mandate.

Background

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, South Ossetia and Abkhazia sought independence from Georgia. Armed conflicts between Georgian authorities and separatists prompted the deployment of peacekeeping and observer missions by the UN, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The situation was stable through the early 2000s, but the basic issues underlying the conflict remained unresolved. A new Georgian administration in 2004, led by President Mikhail Saakashvili, made “territorial integrity” a priority and sent troops to Georgia’s de facto border with South Ossetia. A military confrontation that year ended with a cease-fire, but the situation remained tense. Russia took steps to strengthen its ties to Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, forming direct relationships with their de facto authorities,

and the breakaway regions called for international recognition.

The situation climaxed in August 2008 as a series of military incidents led to a five-day war between Georgia and Russia. The war caused hundreds of casualties, displaced over 100,000 people, and devastated South Ossetia’s capital. The EU negotiated a cease-fire and peace agreement, but Russia recognized the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and signed bilateral agreements providing them border protection and establishing military bases in the two territories. Due to loss of support from the disputants and stalemates at the UN and OSCE, all multilateral peace missions except for the newly created EUMM ceased operations within a year of the conflict.

The EUMM began operations in October 2008 and currently comprises more than 200 monitors from twenty-six EU member states. Its initial primary task, monitoring the withdrawal of Russian forces from Tbilisi-controlled Georgia, was largely completed in the first months of the mission’s deployment.

EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM)

• Authorization Date	15 September 2008 (EU Council Joint Action 2008/736/CFSP)
• Start Date	October 2008
• Head of Mission	Andrzej Tyszkiewicz (Poland)
• Budget	\$37.1 million (1 October 2010–30 September 2011)
• Strength as of 30 September 2011	Civilian Police: 89 Civilian Staff: 218

Since then, it has focused on monitoring the stabilization process, compliance with the 2008 peace agreement, normalization of civil governance, restoration of the rule of law, return of displaced persons, and the promotion of confidence-building measures. The mission facilitates conflict resolution between the parties and generally works to improve the security situation through its presence in relevant areas. EUMM conducts day and night patrols in areas adjacent to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but has not been permitted regular access within the borders of the disputed territories. EUMM works to make the areas adjacent to the administrative boundary lines (ABLs), which serve as the de facto borders, safe for local residents, and seeks to facilitate civilian crossings in both directions without obstruction. In addition to its headquarters in Tbilisi, the EUMM has three field offices in Georgia located near the ABLs. In July, Andrzej Tyskiewicz was appointed head of EUMM.

The mission maintains a high level of contact with Georgian authorities, including through liaison officers in government ministries, and it benefits from agreements restricting Georgian police and military movements near the ABLs. While EUMM is mandated to cover the whole territory of Georgia within the country's internationally recognized borders, Abkhazian and South Ossetian authorities have denied it regular access to the disputed territories. EUMM contact with Abkhazian and South Ossetian officials is also very limited. Despite these shortcomings, the mission still plays an important early warning function. The EUMM is able to gather information on new developments, which is then passed on to the relevant local, national, and international bodies. The mission asserts that access to Abkhazian and South Ossetian territory would increase transparency, bring clarity to events that have already taken place, and decrease the risk of destabilizing incidents.

EUMM maintains working contact with Russian security forces. The continued presence of 7,000 to 9,000 Russian military personnel and Russian military equipment in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, along with the

construction of permanent military bases, is seen by EUMM as a violation of the 2008 agreement that brought an end to the conflict, but Russia holds that its recognition of the territories nullified that commitment.

Key Developments

The UN and OSCE have been facilitating a series of discussions in Geneva bringing together Georgian, Russian, Abkhazian, and South Ossetian representatives. The fifteenth round of these talks occurred in March 2011, but the parties have been unable to agree on the larger issues the negotiations are intended to address. In June, Georgia threatened to pull out of the talks, but this has yet to happen.

The Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), founded in 2009, provides a framework for regular meetings of representatives of the EUMM, the OSCE, the UN, Georgia, Russia, and the de facto governments of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This serves as a forum for discussing and resolving specific incidents and issues, with the aim of developing greater confidence and cooperation between the parties. The IPRM is facilitated by the EUMM and OSCE and includes a "hotline" telephone system, which has helped to de-escalate tensions quickly through development of common understandings of specific incidents. IPRM is the primary vehicle through which to exchange information on ABL incidents and related issues. Recurring issues during meetings in 2011 involved troop movements, military asset deployments, missing persons, detention cases, and a number of ABL-related matters, including border-crossing procedures and access to resources around the ABLs. Through the IPRM, the EUMM has also been able to participate in some investigations in the disputed territories.

Events in 2011 illustrate the high level of mistrust and suspicion existing between Georgia and Russia. In February, Georgian police crossed the ABL to arrest a suspect in a series of bombings that occurred in Georgia in 2010 and 2011. Georgia has asserted Russian

involvement in these attacks and released a document in June purporting to show evidence supporting that accusation. In August, Russia accused Georgia of preparing a peaceful incursion of displaced individuals into South Ossetian territory on the third anniversary of Abkhazia and South Ossetia's proclaimed independence; however, no such march occurred.

Incidents in the breakaway territories are difficult to evaluate, as the facts are often disputed between the two sides and the EUMM cannot cross the ABL to verify any details. In April, a shootout in Abkhazia resulted in the deaths of a Russian border guard and two Georgians. Russia says the Georgians were working for the Interior Ministry, but Georgia asserts that they were criminals. In May, two Georgian civilians were wounded while straying across the ABL with South Ossetia. Georgia claims they were shot by Russian soldiers, while South Ossetian officials assert that they were in fact South Ossetian border guards.

Also in May, the EUMM sought to engage with both sides as Georgian authorities increased their presence near South Ossetia as part of recently enhanced security measures. The mission maintained contact with Georgian authorities and expressed concerns about the implications for freedom of movement of the local populations. EUMM was in touch with Russian border guards and South Ossetian authorities to share information on developments. The mission increased its visible presence in these areas and urged restraint from all sides.

The EU and NATO have supported Georgia's position regarding the breakaway republics. Both organizations have stated that they do not recognize the results of the August 2011 Abkhazian presidential election and have issued statements referring to Abkhazia as a "Georgian region." Georgia has been working

with the EU on creating status-neutral travel documents that would allow residents of the disputed territories to travel abroad. Currently, Georgia does not recognize the Russian passports issued to some of those inhabiting the disputed areas.

In June, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution recognizing the right of return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees from Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Tbilisi-controlled Georgia. The resolution condemns forced demographic changes in the area and calls for unimpeded access for humanitarian activities for all IDPs, refugees, and other persons residing in conflict-affected areas throughout Georgia.

Conclusion

As 2011 came to a close, it did not appear that South Ossetia or Abkhazia would give up their aspirations of independence or that Georgia and Russia were moving any closer to an agreement resolving their bilateral disagreements. Georgian leadership asserts that it is ready for direct talks with Russia without preconditions, but Moscow has said it will not talk to current Georgian president Saakashvili and will wait for a change of power in Georgia to open direct bilateral talks. The legacy of 2008 lives on, as over 20,000 ethnic Georgians displaced during the war are still prevented from returning to their homes.

With the EUMM unable to access the contested territory, it remains unable to properly fulfill its mandate and monitor activity within the disputed areas. While it serves a vital role as the only peacekeeping presence in Georgia and has helped to lessen violence and increase communication between the key actors, the threat of a return to armed conflict is still very real.