

Caucasus and Moldova

Increased clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh became a growing challenge in 2012, while the stalemate between Georgia and its breakaway territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia continued. In contrast, some positive developments were observed in the Moldova-Transdniestria dispute, where actors showed a new willingness to cooperate on settling the long-standing conflict.

Background

At the close of the Cold War, Armenia and Azerbaijan were drawn into a war over Nagorno-Karabakh. Populated by an ethnically Armenian majority, this region within Azerbaijan unilaterally declared independence in 1991. Fighting stopped by and large with a cease-fire agreement in 1994, but the territorial dispute has yet to be settled. Since 1992, international engagement to settle the conflict has been coordinated primarily by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The organization's efforts to solve the frozen conflict are guided by the Minsk Process, jointly co-chaired by France, Russia, and the United States. Settlement of the conflict is also guided by a Special Envoy based in Georgia—the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office on the Conflict Dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference (CiO Personal Representative)—a position held by Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk since 1996. He is supported by field office staff in Tbilisi, Baku, Yerevan, and Stepanakert. The OSCE's offices in Armenia and Azerbaijan are not involved in settling

the conflict, focusing instead on issues of press freedom and justice.

As clashes broke out over Nagorno-Karabakh in the early 1990s, the former Soviet republics of Moldova and Georgia succumbed to secessionist wars. Despite various cease-fire agreements, the conflicts remain unresolved.

Despite their inability to politically solve the conflict, the Russian-led Joint Control Commission Peacekeeping Force (JCC), the OSCE mission, and, since 2005, the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) assisted in preventing renewed outbreak of violence between Moldova and the Transdniestria region after a cease-fire was reached in 1992.

In Georgia, the UN deployed military observers to the secessionist region of Abkhazia, while the OSCE had a presence in Tbilisi that engaged with both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Violent conflict was curtailed until 2004, when Russia began to strengthen its ties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russo-Georgian tensions culminated in a 2008 war that ended decisively in Russia's favor. After the war, Russia recognized the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, amid harsh critiques of the international community. Differences between Russia and Western powers on the breakaway regions' sovereignty status led to the closure of the OSCE and UN missions in Georgia, leaving the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), established shortly after the war ended in 2008, as the sole peacekeeping presence on the ground. However, despite closing their missions, both the UN and the OSCE remain involved in political efforts to resolve the Georgian conflict.

Armenia and Azerbaijan

Since 1994, Armenian troops have held Nagorno-Karabakh and a significant part of southwest Azerbaijan. Though the front line has always been highly militarized, significant military buildup occurred in 2012, with both sides investing in sophisticated defense systems. Armed clashes increased markedly and the number of conflict-related casualties in 2012 was the highest since 1994.

These developments notwithstanding, the French, Russian, and US co-chairs of the Minsk Group travel to Baku and Yerevan every two months to meet with the Azeri and Armenian presidents. The meetings serve as a forum to identify basic principles for a comprehensive peace settlement. Minsk Group meetings have also discussed mechanisms to investigate cease-fire violations along the front line and the development of both military and civilian confidence-building measures. In May and July 2012 the co-chairs combined meetings in Baku and Yerevan with travels to Nagorno-Karabakh to discuss matters on the ground with de facto leaders of the breakaway region.

The Minsk Group's efforts in mediating between Azerbaijan and Armenia were strongly supported by CiO Personal Representative Kasprzyk, who took part in all the group's activities. He also maintained regular contact with de facto Nagorno-Karabakh authorities to discuss developments at the line of contact between Karabakhi and Azerbaijani armed forces. In keeping with his mandated tasks and the consent, support, and involvement of all relevant authorities, the CiO Personal Representative further scheduled bimonthly monitoring exercises at the line of contact.

Increased remilitarization, violent incidents at the front line, and hostile rhetoric undermined the Minsk Group's mediation efforts to defuse Azeri-Armenian tensions throughout 2012. Both countries are scheduled to hold presidential elections in 2013 and the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is very likely to be politicized throughout the electoral period.¹

CiO Personal Representative on the Minsk Conference

• Authorization Date	23 March 1995 (Doc. 525/95)
• Start Date	10 August 1995
• Head of Mission	Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk (Poland)
• Budget	\$1.5 million (1 January 2012–31 December 2012)
• Strength as of 30 September 2012	International Staff: 5 National Staff: 11

EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM)

• Authorization Date	7 October 2005 (Memorandum of Understanding)
• Start Date	30 November 2005
• Head of Mission	Udo Burkholder (Germany)
• Strength as of 30 September 2012	International Staff: approx. 100 National Staff: approx. 120

Source: *EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine*, 9 January 2013, http://www.eubam.org/en/about/who_we_are.

Joint Control Commission Peacekeeping Force (JCC)

• Authorization Date	21 July 1992 (Agreement on the Principles Governing the Peaceful Settlement of the Armed Conflict in the Transdniester Region)
• Start Date	July 1992
• Heads of Mission	V. Birca (Moldova), V. Bugaev (separatist), A. Zverev (Russia), E. Sidorov (Ukraine)
• Strength as of 30 September 2012	Troops: 1,102 Military Observers: 40

Georgia

At the request of the Georgian government, EUMM was established in September 2008, with the immediate task of monitoring the withdrawal of Russian forces after the Russo-Georgian war. Since completing this initial

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 \$30.85 million (1 October 2011–30 September 2012)
- Strength as of 30 September 2012 Civilian Police: 59
International Civilian Staff: 216
National Civilian Staff: 114

OSCE Office in Baku

- Authorization Date 16 November 1999 (Permanent Council Decision no. 318)
- Start Date 17 July 2000
- Head of Mission Ambassador Koray Targay (Turkey)
- Budget \$3.7 million (1 January 2012–31 December 2012)
- Strength as of 30 September 2012 International Staff: 10
National Staff: 27.5

Note: The OSCE Office in Baku has twenty-seven full-time and one part-time national staff.

OSCE Office in Yerevan

- Authorization Date 22 July 1999 (Permanent Council Decision no. 314)
- Start Date 16 February 2000
- Head of Mission Ambassador Andrey Sorokin (Russia)
- Budget \$3.6 million (1 January 2012–31 December 2012)
- Strength as of 30 September 2012 International Staff: 6
National Staff: 40

task within the first months of its deployment, the mission has focused on monitoring, stabilization, normalization, and building confidence between the parties. EUMM conducts patrols along the administrative boundary lines with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, since

its deployment it has been denied access to both of the disputed territories.

To foster confidence building among parties to the conflict, EUMM co-facilitates monthly Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meetings, with the OSCE in South Ossetia and the UN in Abkhazia. These meetings provide a venue for discussing critical issues, including border incidents and questions of boundary demarcation. The IPRM's "hotline" system, administered by EUMM, has served as a critical mechanism for defusing tensions and developing shared understanding of events along the administrative boundary lines. In April 2012, Abkhazia's de facto foreign minister declared the head of EUMM, Andrzej Tyszkiewicz, persona non grata, citing alleged disrespect toward Abkhazia.² As a result, Abkhaz representatives have refused to join subsequent IPRM meetings to date.

EUMM's claim that it has the right to access the breakaway regions was further bolstered by an OSCE resolution adopted on 9 July 2012 that calls on parties "to allow the European Union Monitoring Mission unimpeded access to the occupied territories of Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia, Georgia."³ Calling the breakaway regions "occupied territories" provoked harsh reactions from Russia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, but reflects the EU's position that the regions are part of Georgia's territory.

To support mediation between the parties, the EU has also appointed a Special Envoy to the region. Since June 2011, Philippe Lefort has been double-hatted as EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia. The EUSR is responsible for developing and maintaining contacts with key political actors in the crisis surrounding Georgia, and co-chairs the Geneva discussions with the UN and OSCE. Launched in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 war, the Geneva discussions bring together representatives from Georgia, Russia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, the UN, the OSCE, and the EU about four times a year to address key

political, security, and humanitarian dimensions of the conflict.

In light of the suspended IPRM meetings on the Abkhazian side, the Geneva talks gained importance as the only remaining platform for institutionalized dialogue between interlocutors on both sides as well as the international community. The restoration of IPRM meetings with Abkhazia was made the central issue of the twenty-first round of the Geneva talks in June 2012, but the discussion made no progress in this regard. The Geneva meetings generally made limited progress in 2012. They were overshadowed by an increasing level of apprehension between Russia and Georgia in advance of Georgian elections in October. In January 2012, Georgia's foreign minister accused Russian authorities of trying "to kill" the Geneva talks by refusing to discuss security arrangements and humanitarian core issues.⁴ As in previous years, the key issue of tensions was Russia's refusal to commit to a nonuse-of-force pledge, which Georgia made in 2010.

Moldova

In September 1990, Transnistria, a thin strip of land on Moldova's eastern border with Ukraine, declared independence. Since clashes and a subsequent truce in 1992, Transnistria has maintained de facto independence in this frozen conflict. The cease-fire agreement created the Joint Control Commission Peacekeeping Force, comprising Russian, Moldovan, and Transnistrian troops, to supervise the cease-fire in the security zone.

Although the JCC has successfully prevented a renewed outbreak of armed conflict since 1992, tensions related to the free movement of people and goods have challenged the mission from the outset. In January 2012 a Moldovan died after being shot by a Russian JCC soldier at a checkpoint while driving to a gas station. In response, Moldova reiterated a demand it has made for years—to transform the peacekeeping mission into a civilian operation with an international mandate, a

EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and Crisis in Georgia	
• Authorization Date	25 August 2011 (EU Council Decisions 2011/518/CFSP and 2012/326/CFSP)
• EUSR	Philippe Lefort (France)
• Budget	\$2.6 million (1 October 2011–30 September 2012)
• Strength as of 30 September 2012	International Civilian Staff: 14 National Civilian Staff: 8

OSCE Mission to Moldova	
• Authorization Date	4 February 1993 (19-CSO/Journal no. 3, Annex 3)
• Start Date	25 April 1993
• Head of Mission	Ambassador Jennifer Leigh Brush (United States)
• Budget	\$2.7 million (1 January 2012–31 December 2012)
• Strength as of 30 September 2012	International Staff: 13 National Staff: 36

proposal supported by the OSCE and EU. As in previous years, Russia and de facto Transnistrian authorities continue to reject this proposition.

Since 1993 the OSCE mission's major task has been to assist in negotiating a lasting political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. In June 2012 the OSCE mission facilitated a three-day conference in Germany, bringing together Moldova's prime minister and Transnistria's de facto president. The meeting was considered a success, as the two parties agreed to accelerate the elimination of barriers in communication, transportation, and banking, and to restore transport corridors between Moldova and Transnistria.

A major breakthrough in restoring transport corridors was reached with the resumption of freight rail traffic through the Transnistrian region in April 2012. EUBAM played a key role in supporting this agreement.

Deployed in 2005 to monitor trade between Ukraine and Moldova through Transdnestrian territory, in 2012 EUBAM facilitated technical expertise and conducted seminars to train customs experts from Chisinau and Tiraspol in aiding implementation of the rail cargo agreement.

Diplomatic discussions on the frozen conflict are intended to take place in the “5+2” format, involving Moldova, Transdnestria, Russia, Ukraine, and the OSCE, plus the European Union and United States as observers. However, the talks, initiated in 2005, were suspended only a year later until November 2011, when they were eventually resumed. Since then, 5+2 meetings have been held every two months. Since their resumption, these meetings—chaired by the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the Transdnestrian Settlement Process—have been an important forum for communication. A milestone was reached in the April 2012 meeting when Moldovan and Transdnestrian officials agreed on common principles and mechanisms for negotiation. Subsequent meetings developed an agenda for the negotiation process, including social and economic questions, humanitarian issues and human rights, and security issues and the political settlement of the conflict. In the September 5+2 meeting, the Moldovan prime minister and the Transdnestrian leader agreed to an intensified meeting schedule to work toward an agreement on outstanding issues. While this is a positive development and discussions have generated progress on a number of small steps to minimize obstacles in the area of economics, transportation, and communications,

to date the 5+2 meetings have generally avoided addressing more critical issues.

Conclusion

While new openings for a settlement of the long-standing frozen conflict in Moldova have begun to appear, the risk of continued violence between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh is high. Scheduled elections for 2013 in Armenia and Azerbaijan have fostered reluctance of political leaders to undertake diplomatic solutions that have a high likelihood to politicize the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the lead-up to the voting.

Parliamentary elections in Georgia in October 2012, meanwhile, heralded the country’s first peaceful, democratic transition, in which current president Mikhail Saakashvili conceded defeat to the opposition Georgian Dream coalition. However, Saakashvili will remain in power for another year, with extensive executive oversight, before stepping down as president, after which phased-in changes to the constitution will assign executive powers to the prime minister. The impact that this election will have on the conflict thus remains to be seen, although some observers have voiced cautious optimism that coalition leader Bizdina Ivanishvili’s promise to improve relations with Russia may help to break the conflict’s stalemate.

Given the circumstances on the ground, the international community’s presence in the region, particularly through the OSCE and EU missions, remains vital to addressing the outstanding issues and to further building confidence between the various conflict parties.

Notes

1. “Caucasus Business Forecast Report,” *Business Monitor International*, 13 July 2012.
2. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Abkhazia, “Statement of the MFA of Abkhazia,” 25 April 2012, http://mfaapsny.org/en/information/index.php?ID=78&sphrase_id=466.
3. OSCE, “Resolution on the Situation in Georgia,” 9 July 2012, http://www.oscepa.org/publications/declarations/doc_download/1266-monaco-declaration-english.
4. “Georgian FM: Geneva Talks Stalled,” *Civil Georgia*, 25 January 2012, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24380>.