The OSCE Mission to Georgia and the Georgian-Ossetian conflict: An overview of activities

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Introduction
The background to the establishment of the OSCE Mission in Georgia was the emerging internal armed conflicts following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Military hostilities followed between Georgia and its former Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia, which in 1990 had declared itself independent. After the Sochi Ceasefire Agreement of 24 June 1992, Georgia applied to the CSCE Headquarters in Vienna with a request for mediation assistance in the search for a settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict.

Following a decision by the Committee of Senior Officials (later renamed the Permanent Council), the Mission started its activities on the ground in December 1992. Its mandate has been significantly expanded since then, covering activities in all three OSCE dimensions, but conflict resolution still lies at the heart of its tasks.

The general objective of the Mission’s initial mandate was: (1) to initiate a presence in the region; (2) to liaise with local military commanders of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF); (3) to gather information on the military situation, and (4) to promote negotiations between the conflicting parties aimed at reaching a peaceful political settlement.

In 1994, the mandate was expanded to facilitate cooperation with and among the parties concerned and, with their consent, to monitor the activities of CSCE/OSCE principles. To implement these tasks effectively, a Mission Field Office was established in Tskhinvali. This is currently manned by 6 Mission members — one Political Officer and 5 Military Officers. In order best to describe how the Mission has, through its evolving activities, attempted to meet the terms of its mandate, what follows is a brief chronology of the developments in the conflict resolution process. The contributions and activities of the Mission will be identified as they have occurred.

The Georgian-Ossetian conflict: A chronology
The Georgian-Ossetian conflict ended on 24 June 1992 when the Russian President Yeltsin and the Head of the Supreme Council of Georgia Shevardnadze signed the Sochi Ceasefire Agreement. It foresaw the setting up of a Joint Control Commission (JCC) entrusted with monitoring the cease-fire and the demilitarization process.
It also foresaw an immediate start of negotiations on economic rehabilitation in the zone of conflict and on the repatriation of refugees. It stipulated that the sides should secure freedom of movement for goods, services and persons and considered inadmissible the imposition of economic sanctions or a blockade.

**Deployment of the Joint Peacekeeping Force (JPKF)**

The JCC held its first meeting on 4 July 1992 in Vladikavkaz on a tripartite basis (Georgia, the Russian Federation, and the Republic of North Ossetia — Alania of the Russian Federation). It decided to deploy a tripartite Joint Peacekeeping Force, subordinated to a Joint Military Command and placed under JCC supervision. The JPKF was subsequently deployed on 14 July 1992 and consisted of a separate Russian, a Georgian, and a Republic of North Ossetia — Alania of the Russian Federation battalion, each up to a strength of 500 servicemen.

The JCC defined two areas of operation of the JPKF at its third meeting in Vladikavkaz: the zone of conflict (an area within a radius of 15 km from the center of Tskhinvali), and the security corridor (an area within 7 km on both sides of the administrative border of the former autonomous region of South Ossetia). The JCC agreed that within the zone of conflict the Georgian battalion of the JPKF would take responsibility for areas inhabited by Georgians, the North Ossetian battalion of the JPKF for areas inhabited by Ossetians, and the Russian battalion of the JPKF for mixed areas and Tskhinvali.

The JCC did not meet again until the end of 1994. The conflict settlement process remained limited to meetings of the JPKF Joint Military Command, which determined on a day-to-day basis the locations of deployment of the JPKF. Furthermore, at the beginning of 1994, Military Monitors of the Mission observed that the North Ossetian battalion of the JPKF was de facto manned by South Ossetians.

**Establishment of the current JCC mechanism**

On 31 October 1994, Georgia, the Russian Federation and the Republic of North Ossetia — Alania of the Russian Federation decided on the formal participation of the South Ossetian side and transformed the JCC into a permanent quadripartite mechanism. Furthermore, they decided that the CSCE Mission to Georgia would participate in the activities of the JCC, which should meet at least every two months and have a secretariat based in Tskhinvali.

Amongst other tasks, the JCC was entrusted with the elaboration of measures towards the rehabilitation of the zone of conflict and the repatriation of IDPs and refugees. In this respect, the JCC followed up the implementation of a bilateral Georgian-Russian agreement of 14 September 1993 on economic rehabilitation in the zone of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. In the absence of a high level political impulse, the JCC did not meet on a regular basis and did not set up its secretariat. However, it held an important meeting on 6 December 1994, which defined the basic principles of the JPKF operation.