

# Georgia and the Geneva discussions: “Negotiations are the only way ahead”



“Every single conflict reflects a failure of diplomacy. It is a tragedy for people on the ground. Every case is unique and demands our special attention. However, there is one constant in all conflicts: There is no military solution. Therefore, negotiations are the only way ahead.” Making good on her word at the launching of the Greek Chairmanship, Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis, Chairperson-in-Office, wasted no time appointing Ambassador Charalampos Christopoulos as her Special Representative for protracted conflicts. OSCE Press Officer Sonya Yee caught up with the senior Greek diplomat during his recent visit to Vienna and asked him about the latest developments stemming from his shuttle diplomacy between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali and the Geneva discussions on the peace process in the region.

**Sonya Yee: You've been on the road since January, travelling back and forth between your base in Athens and Geneva, Vienna and Moscow, not to mention key spots such as Tbilisi, Tskhinvali, Sukhumi, Chisinau and Tiraspol. As far as the Geneva discussions on Georgia are concerned, how do you see the achievements and the setbacks since the start of the year?**

**Ambassador Christopoulos:** I believe we are making progress, although this is not to deny the very real difficulties that we're still encountering — with the negotiations on a continued OSCE presence, for example. But at the same time, there have been steps forward in other areas.

On 19 May, we completed the fifth round of the Geneva discussions on stability and security in Georgia, which the OSCE co-chairs with

the United Nations and the European Union. Together, we have visited Tbilisi, Tskhinvali and Sukhumi several times especially to prepare for the talks. All sides agree that dialogue is necessary, but it's obvious that things have not been easy. Emotions are still raw and positions are far apart in some cases. Nevertheless, I believe we all share the view that things are moving in a positive direction.

In an earlier round, the participants welcomed the OSCE's role in the resumption of gas deliveries to Tskhinvali, saying that it reflected a positive approach that they would like to see more of on the ground. The environment is still fraught with risks, and the Geneva discussions provide the only forum in which all sides can engage with one another on security and stability as well as on humanitarian matters. So it's important that we give the process the time it needs.

**What came out of the latest round of discussions?**

At the fifth round, the participants were ready to launch discussions on concrete security arrangements. We also started moving forward on the humanitarian front. I was particularly pleased that the participants agreed to create a joint team to find out exactly what repairs would be needed to guarantee the supply of potable and irrigation water across the administrative boundary line. The team, led by an international

United Nations Office in Geneva, Palais des Nations, 19 May 2009: Johan Verbeke, Special UN Representative to Georgia (left), Pierre Morel, EU Representative for the crisis in Georgia (centre) and Charalampos Christopoulos, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, address the press after the fifth round of Geneva discussions. Photo: AFP/Fabrice Coffrini

Village of Dvani, south of the administrative boundary line, 29 May: Deputy Director Pascal Heyman of the OSCE's Conflict Prevention Centre and Ambassador Hansjörg Haber (left, partly hidden by camera), Head of the EUMM in Georgia, brief journalists after the second meeting of the joint incident prevention and response mechanism. Behind them are (left to right) Gill Janvier, Deputy Head of the EUMM in Georgia; Gottfried Hanne, Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission to Georgia; Wing Commander Steve Young, Chief Military Officer; and Clive Trott, EUMM Deputy Chief of Operations.



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expert under the auspices of the OSCE, visited the region during the week of 8 June and aimed to submit a report in early July.

During the discussions, the co-chairpersons also presented five concept papers focusing on socio-economic rehabilitation, property and housing rights, facilitation of returns, the legal status of refugees and displaced persons, and the rehabilitation of water supplies. We had an initial exchange of views on this wide range of subjects, including the human rights aspects, and the participants agreed to provide comments prior to the next round of discussions on 1 July.

**The OSCE is committed to playing its part in the joint incident prevention and response mechanisms, which seek to tackle security-related incidents. How are the mechanisms operating in practice?**

These mechanisms have been designed to enable security experts from all sides to exchange information regularly at the working level. On 23 April, the first meeting of the mechanism dealing with Georgian-Ossetian issues took place in a tent that had been pitched in the village of Ergneti, at a spot between the checkpoints of the two sides. It was the first time Georgians met with officials from South Ossetia on the ground since the conflict in August. The EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) and the OSCE were co-facilitators. The focus was largely on procedural matters, but at least the sides had a dialogue lasting three hours and expressed their commitment to strengthening security in the region.

The second meeting took place on 29 May in the village of Dvani, in the Kareli district, again in a tent between the checkpoints of the two sides. This time, the outcome was more substantive; the participants exchanged views for four hours about real concerns affecting the daily

### Incident prevention and response mechanisms: Towards a safer life for residents

In February 2009, during the fourth round of the Geneva discussions, the participants agreed to create mechanisms at the working level to tackle security-related incidents in the region, especially for the benefit of civilian populations living close to the administrative boundary line. The proposal, agreed on by consensus, envisaged regular meetings between representatives of "structures with responsibility for security and public order in the relevant areas" and international organizations. Also proposed was the creation of a round-the-clock hotline.

The mechanisms have been designed to ensure that all sides respond swiftly and adequately to issues relating to incidents and their investigation, the security of vital installations and infrastructure, criminal activities, the delivery of humanitarian aid, and any other issues that could affect stability and security. The prevention of incidents and the response to them will come into special focus. Also foreseen is the possibility of agreed joint visits to incident-related places.

As of early June, two meetings of the mechanism dealing with Georgian-Ossetian issues had taken place — on 23 April and 29 May. The mechanism dealing with Georgian-Abkhaz issues had not yet met.

lives of villagers, such as the free and safe movement of people on both sides to their farm lands close to and across the administrative boundary line, as well as to cemeteries and places of worship. The sides exchanged information on missing persons and detainees. The provision of gas to Akhagori, and electricity cuts in Akhagori and Tskhinvali were brought up as well.

At the next meeting of the mechanism, the participants will continue discussing all these substantive matters.

The mechanism dealing with Georgian-Abkhaz issues has yet to convene. We hope it will do so soon.

Obviously, there is much to be done to overcome the mistrust and to ensure that these mechanisms become truly effective in reducing

## Geneva discussions: Towards security and stability in the region

In the aftermath of the conflict in Georgia, and in line with the agreements of 12 August and 8 September 2008, the Geneva discussions were launched on 15 October as a platform to address practical and concrete matters and help lay the foundations for lasting security and stability in the region. The discussions are co-chaired by the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union. The participants are Georgia, the Russian Federation and the United States of America, as well as Abkhaz and South Ossetian representatives.

The discussions take place in two parallel groups working on interdependent issues: one focuses on security and stability in the region, and the other on internally displaced persons and refugees. In 2008, three meetings took place: on 15 October, 18-19 November, and 17-18 December. This year, two meetings have been held so far: on 17 and 18 February and 18-19 May. The sixth round of discussions was scheduled for 1 July.

tensions. Repeated incidents on the ground, including the detention of unarmed OSCE monitors on 21 April, show that the parties cannot afford *not* to take advantage of this channel of communication. I think everyone agrees that practical and realistic measures *can* improve the situation, especially for people who live in the vicinity of the administrative boundary line, where the situation is still fragile.

However, for the mechanisms to become fully operational and efficient, the Greek Chairmanship remains convinced that OSCE military monitoring officers would benefit from being deployed on both sides of the administrative boundary line so that they could observe and report on incidents on both sides. This is, of course, linked to the wider question of the OSCE's presence in the region.

**At the end of 2008, the participating States did not reach a consensus on renewing the mandate for the OSCE Mission to Georgia, and in May, the Greek Chairmanship suspended negotiations on a continued OSCE presence. How do you see developments unfolding?**

Let me retrace the OSCE's efforts so far. As of 1 January, when Greece embarked on its Chairmanship, the OSCE Mission to Georgia was in a phase of technical closure. The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis, and I travelled

to Moscow on 21 January and to Tbilisi on 23 March to demonstrate our resolve to address this unfortunate turn of events. I also held extensive consultations with the leadership of the Russian Federation and Georgia, as well as South Ossetia.

We were greatly encouraged when, in February, the participating States agreed to extend the mandate of the OSCE's unarmed military monitoring officers in Georgia until the end of June. We were hoping to build on this consensus by somehow finding a principled compromise for maintaining a meaningful presence in the region.

Despite the Chairmanship's considerable efforts, however, which involved intense, delicate and difficult consultations with the main parties, the negotiations had to be suspended on 14 May. The Chairmanship's proposal of 8 May — based on a "status-neutral" formula that would allow the OSCE to continue its vital work — was acceptable to an overwhelming majority of the participating States and remains on the table.

It is worth recalling why the Greek Chairmanship's position right from the outset has always been that we need *more*, not less, of the OSCE's presence in the region, and why we have not wavered in this conviction: Thousands of people have been directly affected by the conflict of August 2008, and there is so much that an Organization such as the OSCE — with its unparalleled experience on the ground — can do to provide support and restore trust and confidence. And, as Minister Bakoyannis has reiterated time and again, it is also crucial that the OSCE be allowed to continue the efforts it launched in 1992 to build democratic institutions, protect human rights, integrate minorities and support economic rehabilitation in the region.

It is a challenge to find common ground and to bridge the considerable differences that exist, but we remain hopeful that we will still be able to bring about a consensus.

**Charalampos Christopoulos, Special Representative of the Greek Chairmanship of the OSCE for protracted conflicts, has had almost four decades of distinguished service with the Greek Foreign Ministry. Prior to his Chairmanship appointment, he was his country's ambassador to Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam and Timor-Leste (2007), and to Indonesia (2006). He was also his country's top diplomat in Nigeria (1995) and Slovenia (1998). In 2005, he headed the directorate in the Greek Foreign Ministry responsible for the OSCE and the Council of Europe. In the early 1990s, he served as the Deputy Permanent Representative of Greece to NATO. Ambassador Christopoulos is a graduate of the Law School of the University of Athens with a degree in political and economic sciences.**



# A flagship project takes off

**Vision:** The OSCE Border Management Staff College (BMSC), hosted by Tajikistan, seeks to serve as a single point of knowledge delivery for international standards and best practices concerning all aspects of border management — from techniques to technology. Based in Dushanbe, it will also serve as a platform for sharing information and experience within Central Asia and beyond.

**Context:** Cross-border activities such as terrorism, transnational organized crime, illegal migration and the illicit trafficking of weapons, drugs and human beings pose serious threats to all of the OSCE's 56 participating States and 11 Partners for Co-operation, hinder legitimate travel and trade, and affect every dimension of the Organization's work.

The goal of the Border Management Staff College is to rise to this complex range of challenges by strengthening co-operation between the participating States and Partners for Co-operation in accordance with the OSCE's Border Security and Management Concept.

**Funding as of 15 June 2009:** Belgium, Finland, Germany, Greece and Norway (Several other participating States have expressed keen interest in providing funding and support.)

## THREE COMPONENTS

### The Staff Course

Up to four staff courses a year will be offered to current and potential senior managers from border agencies (border guard, border police and customs) from OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation, including Afghanistan as a Central Asian

neighbour with a key role to play in the region's security and stability. Each course will be limited to 25 participants.

An academic advisory board comprising the College Principal, the Senior Border Issues Adviser in the OSCE Secretariat, and representatives of College affiliates will ensure that the highest possible standards are put in place. The Board will advise the Course Director on the core curriculum, assist in identifying expert lecturers and contribute training material. International organizations and professional training establishments will be invited to affiliate themselves to the College to enhance its professionalism and visibility.

### Research and Development Centre

As an integral part of the College, the centre will create a network and links with other border management training and research institutes in the OSCE area. Research (as well as training) will emphasize the free and secure movement of persons, border-crossing procedures, trade facilitation, co-operation during natural disasters and serious incidents, and transport security — along with such border management-related threats as terrorism and organized crime. Border management personnel will have a reference and training library put at their disposal.

### Outreach Programme

Workshops and seminars within Central Asia will promote and support cross-border dialogue and inter-agency co-operation through the exchange of information and lessons learned and through the identification and development of best practices.

## Related OSCE programmes in the region

### Tajikistan

Support for the development of a national border strategy  
Customs assistance in Murgab, Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast  
Training Afghan police officers as trainers in counter-narcotics work  
Training the Ministry of Interior's trainers in counter-narcotics work  
Training the Tajik border guard in patrol and surveillance

### Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Development of a customs training facility

### Turkmenistan

Border guard and customs assistance through the provision of operational training and equipment



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Launching ceremony, Dushanbe, 27 May 2009

"The establishment of the Border Management Staff College reflects our positive relationship with the OSCE. We will make every effort to continue strengthening this co-operation."

— Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi of Tajikistan

"The College is a unique entity that will play a strategic role in promoting international standards in all aspects of border management. We are convinced that it will evolve into a well-established and vibrant institution."

— Ambassador Mara Marinaki, Chairperson of the Permanent Council, on behalf of the Greek Chairmanship of the OSCE

**Dushanbe, 29 May:** Ambassadors and Heads of Delegation to the OSCE from Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway, the Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden and the United States were among the guests at the launching of the Border Management Staff College. The event was hosted by Ambassador Vladimir Pryakhin, Head of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan.



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## A highly promising centre of excellence

*“The Border Management Staff College aims to be a centre of excellence epitomizing the best of the OSCE and responding to regional needs in innovative ways,” OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut told participating States on 28 May. “Our sincere thanks go to the initial donors, without whose support the start-up of the College would not have been possible. I am pleased that additional contributions have been pledged, and I hope this positive momentum is maintained in order to ensure the smooth operations of the College. We would also like to thank the host of the College, the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, whose wish to see the institution created has now come to fruition.”*

*Earlier, several participating States had hailed the realization of the concept behind the College. The occasion was the visit of Major General Kasym Gafarov, First Deputy Head of the State Committee for National Security of Tajikistan, who briefed the Permanent Council on the country’s OSCE-supported National Border Security and Management Strategy and its implementation plan, which he is co-ordinating. The following are excerpts from the remarks of some of the participating States on 14 May:*

*“We are impressed by the comprehensive approach taken in the strategy to strengthen the security of Tajikistan’s borders, primarily its border with Afghanistan. We are counting on the OSCE to make a useful contribution to improving security in Central Asia. The opening of the OSCE Border Management Staff College is an important step. The study programme will include training courses and lectures involving experts from many specialized international organizations and major national institutes concerned with security. We have already informed the Secretariat that the Russian agencies concerned are also willing to participate in this process.”* *Delegation of the Russian Federation*

*“Norway remains a strong supporter of efforts to assist Tajikistan in strengthening border security and management. Supporting Central Asian participating States in their efforts to strengthen border management security and implementing the Ministerial Council Decision concerning the OSCE’s engagement with Afghanistan represent areas of assistance in which the OSCE can add real value to the efforts of other international actors.”* *Delegation of Norway*

*“Border security is becoming an increasingly important component in the OSCE’s comprehensive approach to security, and Tajikistan is paving the way for the OSCE’s involvement in the region. We hope that the recently completed National Border Security and Management Strategy can serve as a ‘best practice’ model for other participating States. The United States sees Tajikistan as a contributor to regional stability and an important partner in tackling the challenges along Afghanistan’s border. We are therefore encouraged by Tajikistan’s efforts to include Afghan officials in its various training projects, including at the Border Management Staff College.”* *Delegation of the United States*

*“Kazakhstan welcomes the establishment of the Border Management Staff College and is ready to make some contributions to that end. Unfortunately, Central Asia is in an uneasy neighbourhood, with States suffering from the flow of illegal drug-trafficking and their territories being used as transit routes for drugs. The fight against drug-smuggling and the threat posed by terrorist groups are draining our nations’ resources. The OSCE’s support in these matters is, therefore, highly valued. We are already seeing how this sort of assistance can be very constructive and results-oriented.”* *Delegation of Kazakhstan*