

EUMM ONE YEAR ON

22.09.2009

Q: How is the security situation on the ground in Georgia?

Ambassador Haber: The situation is quite calm. There are few serious incidents, mainly occasional night shootings, in which no civilians have been injured or killed. Otherwise, problems around the administrative boundary are generally not security-related but rather pertain to difficulties for the civilian population to cross the line. There is a general lack of transparency about the conditions of passing and trading across the Administrative Boundary Line. In the South Ossetian theatre the high number of detainees (both Georgian and South Ossetian residents) on both sides is a cause of concern. Individuals are detained because of what is considered to be "illegal border crossing", sometimes allegedly in connection to criminal activities, very often because they have been found without the proper identification documents. We call for pragmatism. The EU supports the legal position of Georgia, Russia the one of the de-facto governments. There is no need to demonstrate legal positions on the back of simple civilians.

On the ground, the situation has been relatively calm, including in the week before the 1st anniversary of the outbreak of the war, when one major incident was reported both by Tbilisi and Tskhinvali. The rhetorical exchanges in the media depicted a much more tense situation than the one we registered on the ground.

Q: Will there be any security implications for EUMM inherent in the publication of the Tagliavini Report?

Ambassador Haber: The publication of the Tagliavini report which we expect for the end of this month will of course be a very important event. We do not know the content of the report. We have not contributed to the investigation nor to the drafting of the report, as we had not been on the ground when the war broke out and even when the August 12 and September 8 agreements were concluded. As for the effects of the publication on the ground, I am optimistic that the end of the month will pass just as calmly as the anniversary of the outbreak of war on August 7. In any case, however, the mission will reinforce its patrolling activities to be able to effectively counter any emerging tension.

Q: What were the key points discussed in Geneva?

Ambassador Haber: The discussion on September 17 focused on security guarantees. Russia asked for a reconfirmation of the security guarantees already contained in the Sarkozy-Medvedev plan but granted on a bilateral basis, from Georgia to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Georgia argued for security arrangement including an international presence in the Georgian populated sector of Abkhazia. There was however little common ground in the discussion.

The second working group focused on humanitarian questions, in particular on the problems of internally displaced persons. Despite the very good paper prepared by the co-moderators of the working group, there was unfortunately relatively little progress on the substance of these issues.

Q: Is the EUMM introducing any changes in its structure for the next annual mandate?

Ambassador Haber: EUMM started its second annual mandate on September 15. We have had a significant but regular turnover of monitors on the ground. They are currently being trained to ensure their effectiveness in implementing the mandate. The mission has been reorganised into three field offices (in Gori, Mtskheta and Zugdidi) and we are setting up a number of forward bases in strategically significant locations.

Q: How do you see the future of the mission? Are there any changes in the attitude of the parties towards it?

Ambassador Haber: The de facto authorities are gradually relaxing when it comes to contacts with the EU mission, but we are still far from conducting a patrol across the administrative boundary line. We are interested in increasing contacts with the de facto authorities. They would help us to better fulfil our mandate.

Q: What is EUMM's position in relation to the recent maritime incidents in the Black Sea?

Ambassador Haber: EUMM is not monitoring the movement of ships and vessels in Georgian territorial waters or beyond, but we are of course following close events and have asked for a discussion on the issue to be included in the last meeting of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) on September 8. The legal issues involved are very complex indeed and we would advise any party to get independent legal advice before resorting to action. Generally I think the parties are now more aware of the problems of taking action than they used to be.

Q: There have been media reports about Turkey's and the US interest in participating in EUMM's activities, especially sending monitors. Is it true?

Ambassador Haber: The mission currently has sufficient monitors from EU member states, and we do not need any contribution from third countries in order to fulfil our mandate. The decision as to whether to invite Turkish or US participation in the mission is a purely political one and it is up to the EU member states to make it. I am not aware of any ongoing talks on this topic. The Georgians have often proposed to further strengthen the mission, but this is not being discussed at the moment. As foreseen by the Sarkozy - Medvedev agreement, we can assure the presence of at least 200 monitors on the ground. Currently we have 210 monitors deployed, but after our regular staff rotation is completed in the next few days, we will be able to go back to a total of 220.

Q: Is Georgia respecting its commitments under the Memorandum of Understanding the Ministry of Defence signed with you?

Ambassador Haber: Yes, it is. Minor infractions are usually corrected very quickly. The new Minister of Defence has already assured us that our working relationship will remain unchanged and that Georgia will not react to what it would consider provocations. The Memorandum will remain active unless it is terminated, but it has already been renewed automatically twice.

Q: What is the situation in Perevi like?

Ambassador Haber: The problem in Perevi has not been yet solved and the Russian troops still hold their positions there. The village is not part of South Ossetia, and the South Ossetian de facto official in charge of conflict resolution has acknowledged this in a recent press statement. We see no reasons for the Russians not to withdraw from their position there, thus fulfilling part of their commitments under the Sarkozy - Medvedev agreement.