



# SECURITY COUNCIL REPORT UPDATE REPORT



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## GEORGIA

### Key Facts

On 31 January, the Council adopted a two-month technical rollover of the mandate of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) in resolution 1656. This came as a major surprise since UNOMIG's mandate, in place since 1993, has routinely been renewed by the Council (see our January Forecast).

This unusual decision was triggered by Russian objections to the inclusion in the traditional resolution of standard UN language reaffirming the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and supporting a political solution that reflects the inclusion of Abkhazia within the boundaries of the state of Georgia. Such language had been repeated in each substantive resolution since 1994.

Russia's objections, initially voiced at lower levels on 26/27 January, took on a vastly more important character following comments by President Vladimir Putin at a press conference on 31 January. President Putin is reported to have linked the situation in Georgia with that in Kosovo and warned that Russia would move to recognise the independence of Abkhazia (and the other Georgian breakaway region of South Ossetia.)

The sixty-day rollover was a temporary compromise within the "Group of Friends" – Russia, the US, the UK, France and Germany.

There is speculation that the dramatic shift in Russia's position may be linked to the deterioration of Georgian-Russian relations in the past year. This culminated with the adoption of a resolution by the Georgian Parliament on 11 October 2005, which criticised the performance of Russian peacekeepers (currently deployed in Abkhazia and South Ossetia through the Commonwealth of Independent States) and threatened that Georgian consent for the presence of the Russian forces may be withdrawn by 15 February in the case of South Ossetia, and 15 July in the case of Abkhazia. Relations also reached a new low point in January, when Georgia accused Russia of deliberately cutting natural gas supplies causing the recent energy crisis in Georgia.

Meanwhile, in a move that is unlikely to be coincidental, the Abkhaz *de facto* leadership, in a communication to the Security Council dated 20 January, stated that,

“We are ready to conduct civilised negotiations on all issues except the status of the Republic of Abkhazia...we are also closely following the development of the international practice in this field and see that during recent years the efforts on the settlement of similar conflict situations do not follow the path of incorporation of one of the parties to the conflict into the other one.”

Examples cited in the Abkhaz letter included Kosovo.

### **Council Dynamics**

Many observers were surprised at the relative ease with which the Council in October 2005, despite traditional Russian reluctance, had managed the evolution of the position on Kosovo from the “standards before status” policy (see our February Forecast Report for background) to the decision recorded in S/PRST/2005/51 of 24 October 2005 that negotiations on the future status of Kosovo should begin.

It seems possible, with hindsight, that Russia concluded in October that the trend towards independence for Kosovo was unstoppable and that perhaps there were other Russian interests that would be best served by accommodating the trend and seeking to apply it elsewhere. If so, the Council is now confronted with a new dynamic. If this course is pursued by Russia in a muscular way, it will certainly cause significant anxiety amongst Council members such as China, who adhere very strongly to traditional UN concepts such as support for the territorial integrity and unity of UN member states.

The US, France and the UK will, in this particular case, want to support the traditional language in the Georgia resolution—or some compromise variant—if only to head off a potentially very serious crisis. In this regard, recent strengthening of high level US political support for Georgia will be an important factor. Nevertheless, the P3 will also be concerned about the Georgian Parliament’s resolution creating unnecessary tensions and are likely to be lobbying for a more conciliatory approach in Tbilisi.

It seems that, initially, the “Friends” will want to try and resolve the issue amongst them and are meeting in Geneva this week to look for solutions. The wider Council membership has not yet been closely involved in the issue. But all Council members are aware of the sensitivities raised in Georgia by the issue of Abkhaz independence and the close interest Russia maintains in the former Soviet republics. Most members will probably be reluctant to buy into the debate at this stage. However, they will also be acutely aware of the wider implications in the UN of expanding the Kosovo precedent so quickly and so bluntly.

Amongst the wider UN membership, many will see the extension of the Kosovo precedent as a dangerous encouragement of separatist movements. Others will recognise, however, that Russia is on strong ground, when it says that the Kosovo precedent represents a major watershed in terms of the interpretation and application of Charter principles and UN practice. Other recent examples involved very different characteristics. East Timor, for instance, involved territory that the UN had never recognised as incorporated into Indonesia. In the case of the Former Yugoslavia, the United Nations was not responsible for instituting, overseeing and authorising the process of separation.

Against this background, a major question lurking in the minds of many Council members will be whether this development may, in time, turn out to have implications for some of the other stalled civil wars with peace processes on the Council's agenda, but which seem to be going nowhere.

## Options

In the short term, the issue is being handled outside the Council and it is possible that the “Friends” will come back with compromise language.

Council members will be concerned, however, that this will only be a temporary solution and that the issue will return in an even more acute form in the coming months.

An option (bearing in mind the Georgian deadline in February for the CIS peacekeepers in South Ossetia) is for the Council, without cutting across the negotiations between the “Friends”, to consider a Presidential Statement:

- urging Georgia to exercise restraint regarding the position of the CIS peacekeepers and refrain from setting deadlines;
- expressing concern about the provocative statements in the Abkhaz letter of 20 January; and
- confirming its readiness to renew the mandate of UNOMIG by 30 March subject to the outcome of ongoing negotiations.