

a number of fields. Russia stated that the decision was aimed at supporting Russian citizens and the local population and responded to what it called Georgia's aggressive intentions. The Georgian side protested what it considered a blatant violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, amounting to legalizing a factual annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In late April, the Russian Federation reinforced the Russian-manned CIS peacekeeping force stationed in the restricted weapons zone, and in May it introduced a military railways unit to rehabilitate the railways south of Sukhumi, outside the area of responsibility of UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force. Differences between the two countries rose to a new level, with Georgia blaming Russia for "accelerated annexation" of Abkhazia, and Russia accusing Georgia of preparing for the imminent implementation of a military option in Abkhazia.

Concerned over those developments, senior representatives of the Group of Friends met in Berlin on 30 June, together with the Special Representative, to discuss ways to prevent further deterioration. However, the subsequent period saw a dramatic increase in violence, including indiscriminate bombings of public places in Gagra, Sukhumi and Gali on the Abkhaz-controlled side of the ceasefire line, as well as roadside explosions on the Georgian-controlled side. The bombings resulted in four fatalities, including one UNOMIG staff member.

The Secretary-General called upon every stakeholder to preserve the integrity of the ceasefire regime. He appealed to the Abkhaz side to observe the freedom of movement of UNOMIG and to the Georgian side to observe the freedom of movement of the CIS peacekeeping force.

Communication. On 10 July [S/2008/453], Georgia informed the Security Council that on 8 July Russian military aircraft had intruded into Georgian airspace, and requested a meeting of the Council.

Security Council consideration (July). On 21 July [meeting 5939], at a closed Security Council meeting, Council members and the representative of Georgia had an exchange of views.

New Special Representative. On 30 July [S/2008/518], the Secretary-General informed the Security Council of his intention to appoint Johan Verbeke (Belgium) as the Special Representative for Georgia and Head of UNOMIG. On 1 August [S/2008/519], the Council took note of that intention.

Georgian-Russian conflict

Escalation of hostilities

On 9 July, in the lower Kodori Valley, a clash between the Abkhaz and Georgian sides on the Acham-

khara heights was reported. The Abkhaz side claimed that an Abkhaz de facto security post had been raided by the Georgian side, resulting in two Abkhaz reservists being injured, while the Georgian side stated that one of its patrols had been attacked while securing the Achamkhara heights in anticipation of a UNOMIG visit to the Kvabchara Valley. It reported that three Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs personnel had been injured. Tensions rose further after allegations by the Georgian side of mortar firing by the Abkhaz side into the Kvabchara valley on 26 July. UNOMIG began investigations of both incidents, but had to suspend them because of ensuing events the following month.

In the Zugdidi sector, existing tensions between the CIS peacekeeping force and Georgian law enforcement representatives led to the suspension in July of the sector-level tripartite meetings which—by bringing together the Georgian side, the CIS peacekeeping force and UNOMIG—had served as a forum for resolving operational issues. Following a series of bomb blasts in public places in Gagra and Sukhumi on 29 and 30 June, in which 12 people were injured, the Abkhaz de facto authorities ordered the closure of the ceasefire line as at 1 July. The most serious incident in years in the UNOMIG area of responsibility occurred on 6 July, when four people were killed and six injured following an explosion in a café in the town of Gali, near the Mission's sector headquarters. Among the fatalities were a UNOMIG language assistant and the head of the Gali de facto Abkhaz security service.

During this period, UNOMIG was assisting the efforts of Germany, as the Coordinator of the Group of Friends, to advance a plan for the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict that had been proposed by the German Minister for Foreign Affairs, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and presented to the sides during his visit to the region in mid-July. The plan contemplated a three-phase process: agreements on security measures, including a declaration on the non-use of force and modalities for the return of internally displaced persons and refugees; economic rehabilitation and confidence-building measures; and discussions on the political status of Abkhazia. The Georgian and Abkhaz sides stated their readiness to participate in a meeting in Berlin, but predicated their support for the proposed plan on a number of conditions.

At the same time, tensions between Georgia and Russia were rising. Russian officials were increasingly insisting that the Georgian side sign non-use of force agreements with the Abkhaz and South Ossetian sides to defuse tensions and restore confidence as a basis for negotiation. Georgian officials accused the Russian Federation of attempting to annex Georgian territories and demanded again that both the negotiations and peacekeeping formats be further internationalized.