

Reconvening of the Joint Control Commission for South Ossetia

Report

I.

Two documents signed in Moscow on 31 October by the representatives of Russia, Georgia, South Ossetia, North Ossetia and the CSCE opened the way for the reconvening of the Joint Control Commission. During a first meeting of the Commission on 1 November, the sides agreed to set up three working groups and to meet again in Vladikavkas on 22 November.

II.

1. In a meeting chaired in Moscow on 31 October 1994 by Mr Boris Pastukhov, Russian deputy foreign minister, and attended by the Head of the CSCE Mission to Georgia, deputy prime ministers of Georgia, North Ossetia and South Ossetia accepted a Russian proposal to reconvene the Joint Control Commission for South Ossetia. An Agreement on the Further Development of the Process for a Peaceful Settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict was signed and Terms of Reference on the Joint Control Commission for the Settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict adopted.

The event was preceded by one-day long negotiations in a matter-of-fact like atmosphere. The Russian, Georgian and North Ossetian sides as well as the CSCE delegation (which included a councillor of the Italian Embassy in Moscow) seemed agreed on almost all points. The South Ossetian delegation displayed a remarkable sense of compromise. They proved ready to negotiate on the basis of a Russian-Georgian draft of the Terms of Reference, which South Ossetia had formerly rejected, and of a Russian draft of the Agreement, thus withdrawing a draft of their own.

- a. The South Ossetians made the following concessions:

- Already in their own draft of the Agreement, they refrained from spelling out the full names of the sides (among others 'Republic of South Ossetia') as they had insisted before with the aim of implicit recognition.
- They ceased to insist that the Peacekeeping Forces should be deployed along the 'border' between South Ossetia and Georgia proper and that the Georgian contingent should be withdrawn.
- The South Ossetian delegation were ready to name the commission 'Joint Control' instead of 'Joint Co-ordinating Commission' as South Ossetia had previously insisted.
- They agreed to the unqualified participation of the CSCE whom they had previously wanted to make an 'observer'.

b. The South Ossetians insisted successfully on two points:

- They stopped Tskhinvali from being named the working place of the Joint Control Commission (which they had initially proposed in their own draft). The question where the Commission will convene is thus left open for the time being.
- In a last-minute effort, they made their signature dependent on the condition that the Head of Mission should not sign 'for the CSCE Mission' (as the other heads of delegation signed 'for the Russian side' and so on) but 'in the presence of the CSCE'. We agreed.

2. The first meeting of the reconvened Joint Control Commission chaired by Mr Nikolay Medvedev, Russian deputy minister of co-operation with the CIS member states, was as down to earth as the negotiations the day before. It was agreed to set up three working groups - military (peacekeeping) problems, economic questions and return of refugees, but due to South Ossetian misgivings no group to work on a political settlement - for which everybody named their representatives. A second meeting of the reconvened Commission was scheduled for 22 November 1994 in Vladikavkas.

III.

The reconvening of the Joint Control Commission is conditional for a political settlement of the South Ossetian conflict. One can only hope that the readiness to compromise displayed by the South Ossetian delegation in Moscow reflects a new, more realistic approach in Tskhinvali. It must be noted that the documents will yet have to be accepted by the South Ossetian parliament.

The positive outcome of the Moscow meeting is a success for Russian diplomacy. It is obvious that much hard work was put in to pave the way for an agreement. Certainly, the Russian side did a lot to make the South Ossetians move towards compromise.

The CSCE will participate in the work of the Joint Control Commission according to its mandate. It received praise namely from the Georgian and North Ossetian delegations, both of which saw a link between the success of this meeting and the one called by the Mission in Vladikavkas on 13 June.

