

1998 Athens Meeting of the Georgian and Abkhaz Sides on Confidence -Building Measures

The meeting in Athens of the Georgian and Abkhaz Sides on Confidence-Building Measures took place 16 to 18 October 1998 under the Chairmanship of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Georgia, Mr. Liviu Bota. This meeting is an integral part of the Geneva Process begun on the initiative of the United Nations Secretary-General in order to step up the peace process and achieve a comprehensive settlement of the conflict.

The Athens Meeting was the most representative since the end of the armed conflict in 1993. The high-level delegations were headed on the Georgian side by Mr. Vazha Lordkipanidze and on the Abkhaz side by Mr. Sergei Bagapsh. They included representatives of government bodies, members of parliament, businessmen, cultural figures, representatives from academic circles, members of non-governmental organizations, and journalists.

Representatives of the Russian Federation as the facilitator, the OSCE and also of the countries of the group of Friends of the Secretary-General participated in the meeting. The Executive Secretary of the joint/bilateral Coordinating Commission was also present at the meeting.

Such a meeting provided an opportunity for discussion of a broad range of questions of mutual interest.

The Athens meeting was convened in accordance with the closing statement adopted at the first Geneva meeting, 17 to 19 November 1997 which notes inter alia: "The parties have agreed that progress towards strengthening trust, mutual understanding and cooperation between them could be achieved through direct bilateral contacts and other means."

In this context such measures include a broad range of concrete steps in the following major areas: political statement, ensuring security, return of refugees, economic cooperation, cultural and humanitarian interaction.

During the course of the meeting both sides put forward concrete proposals, some of which require more detailed work.

The representatives of the Russian Federation, acting as facilitator, the countries members of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General, and the OSCE also made proposals and rendered assistance to the sides in drawing up ideas for concrete confidence-building measures.

Agreement was achieved to continue holding such meetings to develop contacts between the sides and for the adoption of confidence-building measures and measures for mutual understanding.

During the meeting the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, representatives of the Russian Federation, as facilitator, and the countries members of the Friends of the Secretary-General, gave the sides for their consideration the draft protocol on priority measures for a settlement to the conflict. It was proposed to the parties to state their view on this draft protocol at the next meeting of the Coordinating Council.

The parties agree on the following:

1. Having once again reaffirmed their commitment undertaken earlier regarding the right of refugees and displaced persons to voluntary return to the places of their former permanent residence, they agreed to speed up conclusion of work on the relevant documents.
2. To provide for full implementation of the provisions of the protocol of 24 September 1998 signed in Sukhumi.
3. To create a joint mechanism with the participation of representatives of UNOMIG and the CIS-PKF, to investigate acts of violation of the Ceasefire and Separation Forces Agreement of 14 May 1994 and for the prevention of a repetition of such acts, and also for the immediate consideration of complaints of one of the sides regarding actions of the other side which might represent a threat to security in the conflict zone.
4. To conclude drawing up the order for interaction of the prosecutors of the sides in investigating criminal cases regarding subversive acts perpetrated in the security zone.
5. To ensure an operative link between the leaders of the military structures of the sides, inter alia, at the local level, for rapid response to situations and actions which may lead to an aggravation of the situation in the conflict zone.
6. To promote in all possible ways the implementation of programmes of demining.
7. Having noted the importance of the dialogue begun on the development of trade and economic relations between them, to promote the conclusion of direct working contracts in the areas of energy, trade, agriculture, construction, etc.
8. To conduct active investigation of cases involving persons missing during the hostilities and the handing over of the remains of the dead. To request from donor countries expert and material support in carrying out psychological social rehabilitation of post-trauma syndrome.

Other proposals put forward by the parties to the meeting will be further studied.

The implementation of confidence-building measures will be carried out within the framework of the activity of the Coordinating Council and bilateral meetings. The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General shall inform the

Coordinating Council regarding the implementation of concrete confidence-building measures.

The sides and all participants in the meeting expressed to the government of Greece their profound gratitude for the invitation and warm hospitality, and for the creation of an atmosphere which promoted fruitful work.

(Signed) V. Lordkipanidze

(Signed) S. Bagashvili

(Signed) L. Bota