The EU Monitoring Mission...

Ten Years of Continuous Presence in Georgia

October 1st, 2018 marked the tenth anniversary of the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM). The EUMM was established following the August 2008 conflict. EU Member States decided to deploy at least 200 civilian monitors to contribute to security and stability, for an initial period of one year. The mandate of the Mission has been extended ever since, as a clear commitment by the EU to regional stability.

Our experts monitor that all parties abide by the EU-brokered Six-Point Agreement of 12 August 2008. The agreement was brokered by the European Union and signed by both Georgia and the Russian Federation. Its method of implementation was detailed in a subsequent document titled the ‘Agreement on Implementing Measures’ of 8 September 2008. Later additional technical agreements were signed with key Georgian institutions, specifying commitments by Georgian authorities to stability and transparency.

Since deployment, the Mission has patrolled day and night, every day of the week. The mandate of the Mission covers the whole of Georgia within the borders that are recognized by the international community – including South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Unfortunately, the Mission was never able to carry out its mandated tasks in these regions. However, during the past 10 years, the Mission has used all monitoring means at its disposal to follow developments in the whole of Georgia. This included gradually introducing more advanced technological means into its toolkit. In terms of patrolling by EUMM monitors, the focus has been on covering the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) – which separates the part of the country under central government control from the breakaway regions.

The first and most important task in the early days of the Mission was to help ensure an end to hostilities after the conflict.

EUMM activities started with oversight of the withdrawal of Russian armed forces from the territory adjacent to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This culminated in Russian forces leaving the area near the village of Perevi at the South

The EUMM Monitor
Ossetian ABL in October 2010. There were still cases of armed clashes and shooting at the ABL well into 2012. The EUMM presence and monitoring gradually helped reduce this.

Since 2008, more than 1,700 contracted and seconded personnel from all 28 EU member states have served in the EUMM, illustrating the very strong support – both politically and in terms of resources – to the activities of the Mission. The EUMM to date has conducted over 65,000 patrols. One of the key tasks of the EUMM is to report to EU capitals and EU institutions on a whole range of areas – ranging from military dynamics to the socioeconomic conditions of Internally Displaced Persons who fled in the aftermath of the conflict. This gives decision makers in EU organisations and EU Member States the necessary updates allowing them to take informed decisions about conflict issues.

The EUMM has also established itself as the main source of reliable information for the wider international community concerning developments at the ABL and beyond.

The EUMM is the only international monitoring presence on the ground as international Missions deployed by the UN (UNOMIG) and OSCE (OSCE Mission to Georgia) were discontinued in 2009. The basis for the collection of information and reporting by the EUMM is the principle of “operational impartiality”. Reporting must be fact based and unbiased.

In the South Ossetian theatre, physical ‘borderisation’ includes more than 60 km of security fences, 20 km of surveillance equipment, over 200 ‘Republic of South Ossetia border’ signs, 19 Russian border guard bases and four controlled crossing points.

In the Abkhaz theatre, physical ‘borderisation’ includes over 30 km of fences, surveillance towers with an ABL coverage of approximately 25 km, 19 Russian border guard bases and two controlled crossing points.

The constant presence of EUMM patrols and monitors at the ABL clearly has a stabilizing and confidence-building effect. The EUMM has regular patrolling patterns and is able to deploy patrols at very short notice to potential hotspots from its three Field Offices in Zugdidi, Gori and Mtskheta. By maintaining a visible presence along the ABLs, the Mission has increased a sense of safety for the conflict-affected population. This has been enhanced by various activities as the Mission engages in building dialogue, trust and cooperation across the ABLs.

During its ten years of continuous presence on the ground, the Mission has seen security improve, moving from a situation in 2008/2009 where Georgian police lost their lives or were injured along the ABL. Shooting incidents were not infrequent compared to the relative stability today. Serious challenges remain at the ABL, and the conflict remains unresolved. Nonetheless, a situation without clashes and armed confrontation must in itself be assessed as a major achievement.

The relative stability, however, has taken place against a backdrop of ever-increasing challenges for the population most affected by the conflict – especially women, men and children living near the ABLs. Their freedom of movement, economic opportunities and basic rights have come under pressure during the past decade. Developments have affected their opportunities to maintain social relations, protect their property rights, to have a decent income, and for children to be educated in their mother tongue.

One of the key dynamics which the Mission has been closely monitoring since 2009 is so-called ‘borderisation’ - the process of establishing de facto state ‘borders’ between the territories controlled by the Georgian government and the two regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The ambition of the Russian Federation and decision-makers in Tskhinvali and Sukhumi has been to establish tight checks and control over ‘territory’ of the breakaway regions.
Gradually since 2009, physical barriers and other measures have been established to block people from crossing the ABL freely. The physical infrastructure includes fencing and barbed wire, signs informing people that they are approaching the so-called ‘borders’ of the self-proclaimed ‘republics’, guard towers and advanced surveillance equipment. Over the years, this incremental process has made the ABLs—both in the Abkhazia and South Ossetian areas—more and more impenetrable and securitized. The closing of three crossings points at the Abkhazia ABL in 2016-2017 was a major challenge for local villagers wanting to cross, despite some mitigating measures put in place by the de facto authorities.

The ‘borderisation’ process followed the construction of Russian bases and the deployment of Russian border guards in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Border guards of the Russian Federation are the main force responsible for protecting the so-called ‘borders’ of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The restrictions on freedom of movement adversely affect livelihoods of villagers on both sides of the ABL. It impairs access to properties, agricultural land, medical assistance, places of worship, education and justice. In the agricultural sphere, the gradual borderisation has meant that villagers have lost access to land plots near or straddling the ABL. The process of transhumance has been severely affected, depriving some of the most vulnerable people of income.

After ten years, the Mission continues to advocate freedom of movement of people who live close to the ABL and for a humanitarian approach to be shown in cases where people are detained, particularly where elderly or children are involved. The local population should be free to go about their daily lives without fear or unnecessary obstacles. The Mission also closely monitors developments when it comes to rights to education in one’s mother tongue, as well as initiatives that may affect other fundamental rights, such as property rights and freedom of expression.

Confidence-building was central to ‘Borderisation’ encompasses three main elements:

1. The establishment of physical infrastructure to force commuters, vehicles and goods to use special ‘controlled crossing points’ established at the ABL;
2. Surveillance and patrolling by either Russian border guards or security actors from the breakaway regions that monitor the situation and detain people if they are in violation of established ‘rules’;
3. A crossing regime requiring commuters to have specific documents and only use ‘official’ crossing points.

Borderisation has resulted in many detentions through the years. The detention of civilians for crossing the ABL remains a significant concern: since the beginning of 2018, there have been at least 650 Hotline activations concerning detention cases. The EUMM works to resolve these and other issues, wherever it can, through the Hotline and the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meetings.

The Mission plays an essential role in managing and facilitating the two existing communication channels. One is the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism meetings and the second is the telephone Hotline that is managed by the EUMM. Both became essential platforms for managing stability and improving the lives of the local populations still suffering from the aftermath of war.
the Mission’s mandate from the beginning. It has gained increasing importance, as mechanisms were developed to enhance communication and information sharing between Georgia, Russia and the breakaways.

Two IPRM mechanisms exist – one normally held in Gali dealing with issues in the Abkhazia theatre, the other convened in Ergneti to discuss incidents and developments at the South Ossetian ABL. The meetings in Gali are chaired by the UN, but with EUMM as one of the participants. The EUMM co-facilitates the Ergneti IPRM meetings with the OSCE. Both formats commenced in 2009 based on agreement reached at the Geneva International Discussions – the format set up after the 2008 war to address the consequences of the conflict.

The IPRMs are deemed non-political, where people involved in managing security and human security issues on the ground meet to address current challenges. It also discusses how to prevent incidents and new problems for people living at the ABL. Beyond providing a format for valuable face-to-face communication, the IPRMs have therefore resulted in numerous practical achievements, ranging from the release of detainees to cross-ABL cooperation on agricultural matters and other issues important to local villagers. This being said, the IPRM meetings have also faced many challenges over the past ten years, including lengthy disruptions due to disagreements between leading participants on sensitive issues. Currently, the IPRMs – which remain essential to manage the security situation on the ground – remain interrupted.

Despite temporary disruptions to the IPRM format, other means of cross-ABL communication are constant and very efficient. Recognising the importance of communication across the ABL, despite deep disagreements at the political level, a ‘Hotline’ was established in 2009.

The EUMM plays an essential role in keeping the Hotline infrastructure running and transmitting messages across the ABL. The Hotline has proved essential in discussing developments on the ground.

The use of the Hotline increased year-on-year, rising from 30 activations in 2009 to 1,700 in 2017 – averaging 4.6 calls a day. During the entire decade, over 8,000 Hotline activations took place. All security actors have ‘Hotline Holders’ that activate the Hotline or respond to queries coming from others. The Hotline is open 24/7 and activated instantly whenever needed. The main issues currently discussed over the Hotline refer to detentions - the Mission, for example, facilitating releases by ensuring the swift exchange of information about civilians who have been detained at the ABL. The second highest number of activations relate to medical crossings, an area where the Hotline continues to save lives by coordinating the transfer of patients in need of medical assistance. A number of other issues are typically addressed through
the Hotline, so that all sides have the facts needed to discuss concrete problems. The Hotline is used to discuss new borderisation features, or reports of shootings or artillery fire heard close to the ABL. This dialogue mechanism clearly helps to reduce tensions.

As previously mentioned, the Mission has never been granted access to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Consequently, the Mission developed other means of observation and used new technologies to maintain an awareness of developments at the ABL and in the breakaways. These include the acquisition of vehicle-mounted cameras on tall masts and more recently the ‘High-Lifted Camera System’ - a camera mounted on an aerostat (tethered balloon).

Since its inception, the Mission closely monitors the human rights situation among the conflict-affected population. By using a combination of ground-patrols, open source analysis and satellite imagery the Mission monitors the human rights situation in all three theatres. The Mission reports regularly on the impact of on-going ‘borderisation’ and other efforts by the de facto authorities to consolidate their respective control over the breakaway territories. Observations include, but are not limited to, any increase in restrictions on basic human rights such as freedom of movement, freedom from arbitrary detention, freedom of religion, access to education, the right to family life and others. The Mission uses all resources at its disposal to address the human rights situation with the parties in conflict and occasionally organises technical meetings between the parties outside of the regular IPRMs.

As a Mission of the EU, the EUMM continues to strongly advocate the role of women in its own organisation and in the conflict resolution process in general. The EUMM is the CSDP Mission with the highest proportion of female staff and a strong female presence in its management team. Because of these efforts, the Mission is seen as a model of best practice in this regard and is regularly invited to share its experience with other Missions and international organisations.

In the autumn of 2008, there were widespread concerns that a resumption of hostilities was a real possibility. Today, although the conflict remains unresolved, there is a greater sense of security among the affected population – though fears understandably persist.

Incidents do occur daily and the Mission continues to work to handle such challenges until a lasting solution to the conflict, acceptable to all involved, can be reached.
Mr. Erik Høeg explains in detail the activities, achievements, results and challenges of the EUMM

Mr. Høeg, in your opinion, how productive has the Mission’s work been in the past 10 years? Have there been concrete results?

The EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) continues to make a difference in ensuring a safe and normal life for local communities living in areas adjacent to the Administrative Boundary Lines (ABL) between the Tbilisi-administered territory and the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. There has been no return to hostilities and the EUMM has had an important impact by its very presence and continuous patrolling both day and night and in all weather conditions. Many take the lack of daily incidents at the ABL for granted – but I don’t think we should. To handle the situation we need mechanisms. The IPRMs are facing difficulties now, but it is important not to underestimate their value allowing for face-to-face discussion on sensitive and urgent topics affecting security. The very effective use of the EUMM managed Hotline is very positive and a clear success. It is activated during incidents or occasions related to stability and where it affects the lives of people living at the ABLs. In other words, it is a way to ‘reduce tensions by phone’. Altogether, the Mission – deployed on the ground, constantly monitoring and reporting and ready to react by supporting communication and dialogue – remains highly relevant and essential to manage the security situation.

Could you tell us about the difficulties you face during everyday work? In addition, what are the key challenges you would like to overcome?

In terms of the mandate itself, the main problem remains our restricted possibilities to monitor in the breakaways. From the very first day the Mission arrived in Georgia, we have been denied access to both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. We continue our efforts and the EU has a clear policy regarding our Areas of Responsibility where we should be patrolling, which is the whole of Georgia. In terms of my team, I am obviously focused on ensuring that they are safe, properly equipped and trained to handle the security challenges at the ABL. The situation is definitely better with respect to the risk of encounters with armed personnel and other immediate threats than in the early days. Tragically, a local staff member supporting the Mission died in 2009 while accompanying a patrol. Certain risks persist. Unexploded ordnances in areas where we regularly patrol, for example, are one of the security problems we have to face. We focus on ensuring the best possible protection for our team of 320 national and international staff members.

Do you think that the presence of the EUMM helps prevent escalations along the Administrative Boundary Lines with the breakaway regions? How serious is the risk of significant escalations in these areas?

Yes. The presence of EUMM at the Administrative Boundary Lines is a preventative measure in itself. The risk of significant escalation is always there, however unlikely it may seem today. The Mission describes the security situation along the Administrative Boundary Lines as one of ‘managed stability’. What this means is that the risk of incidents is low, but this is also because of the Mission’s presence on the ground in these areas and the ability to react quickly if something happens. We can quickly deploy monitors to the spot and activate the confidence - building mechanisms in place. The Hotline is actively used to keep one another informed – in 2018, there is an average of six activations each day. Additionally, participants from both sides of the Administrative Boundary Line meet in person in the framework of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism, which have normally been held on a monthly basis.

In the end, we hope to make ourselves superfluous. We all hope that one day a lasting solution to the conflict will be found that will not require a Mission like ours to be on the ground. Until then, the Mission will continue to patrol day and night, helping to maintain stability in the region.
Between 2008 and 2018...
The EU Monitoring Mission has been headed by five EU diplomats

**Ambassador Hansjörg Haber** served in EUMM Georgia as the first Head of Mission from October 2008 until April 2011. He is a German diplomat with previous experience as German Ambassador in Lebanon, Russia, Turkey and other countries. Ambassador Haber left Georgia at the end of April 2011 to become the EU Civilian Operations Commander and Head of the EU Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) in Brussels. In September 2017 he was accredited as Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in Sanaa, Yemen.

**Ambassador Andrzej Tyszkiewicz** (deceased) served in EUMM Georgia as the second Head of Mission from July 2011 until June 2013. Ambassador Tyszkiewicz was a Polish diplomat, and before that a Lieutenant General (retired). He had previously served as the Commanding General of the Multinational Division Central-South in Iraq, the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Land Forces, as well as Defence, Military and Naval Attaché in Ankara, Turkey.

**Mr. Toivo Klaar** served in EUMM Georgia as the third Head of Mission from September 2013 until December 2014. An Estonian diplomat, Mr. Klaar previously held the posts of Head of Division for Central Asia and Head of Division for Human Resources Policy and Coordination, both in the European External Action Service. Currently, he is the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia.

**Ambassador Kęstutis Jankauskas** served in EUMM Georgia as the fourth Head of Mission from December 2014 until August 2017. Ambassador Jankauskas is a Lithuanian career diplomat and worked previously as Chancellor of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, State Secretary of the MFA, Ambassador to the Political and Security Committee of the EU Permanent Representation of Lithuania to the European Union, Director of the Security Policy Department in United States of America, MFA and held other high-ranking posts. Currently he serves as Ambassador of the European Union Delegation in Azerbaijan.

The present Head of EUMM is **Mr. Erik Høeg**. A Danish diplomat, Mr. Høeg was appointed as Head of Mission on 19 December 2017. Prior to this, Mr. Høeg served as Deputy Head of EUMM Georgia, since April 2015 and Acting Head of Mission since 1 September 2017. Before joining the EUMM, Mr. Høeg worked for 16 years in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark both with bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. During his diplomatic career, he held management positions in Copenhagen and at missions abroad, including in New York and Moscow.
June 2009
Death of a Georgian citizen driving an ambulance in support of an EUMM patrol

From day one the safety and security of Mission employees and staff supporting our work has been a priority. The Mission prepares its staff through training, providing proper protection equipment and constant updates on the security situation. Even with such precautions, the work is not without risk. During the many years in Georgia the Mission, on several occasions, has faced direct threats to EUMM patrols. On one tragic occasion in 2009, the consequences were fatal.

On the 10th year of deployment in Georgia, the Mission remembers the tragic death of Mr. Avtandil Akhaladze, a Georgian citizen who was killed in an explosion on the morning of the 21 June 2009. Mr. Akhaladze was driving an ambulance of ‘MediClub Georgia’ in support of an EUMM patrol near the village of Eristskali, close to the Administrative Boundary with Abkhazia.

“I would like to send my sympathy to the family and friends of the MediClub driver who died today. The EUMM has an agreed mandate to carry out unhindered patrols adjacent to the Administrative Boundary Line. We are still looking into the details of this incident, but I would like to make it clear that any unprovoked attacks on our unarmed monitors and their patrols, going about their legitimate duties, are completely unacceptable.” - Former Head of EUMM Georgia, Ambassador Hansjörg Haber, 21 June 2009

"I strongly condemn the attack against a patrol of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia near the Abkhazian administrative boundary, in which the driver of an accompanying medical vehicle was killed. I want to extend my most sincere condolences to the family and relatives of Avtandil Akhaladze. EUMM is an unarmed Mission that aims at improving the lives of the people in the region. Any attacks on our unarmed monitors and their patrols are completely unacceptable. I remind all the parties of their responsibilities to ensure stability and security in the territories under their physical control." - Former EU High Representative for the CFSP in, Javier Solana, 23 June 2009

COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Javier SOLANA,
EU High Representative for the CFSP,
condemns the attack against an EUMM patrol near the Abkhazian administrative boundary line

Brussels, 23 June 2009
S168/09
For more information about the EUMM activities ... Check our previous bulletins
EUMM monitors have been working 24/7 for the last 10 years to facilitate the resumption of a safe and normal life for the local communities living along the Administrative Boundary Lines. EUMM Field Office Mtskheta monitor taking notes while on patrol, 2009.

Head of Mission, Mr. Erik Høeg briefs the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, H.E. Ms. Angela Merkel on recent developments in the vicinity of the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) with South Ossetia, August 2018.

Former Head of Mission, Ambassador Andrzej Tyszkiewicz on a patrol with the Mission monitors during winter days, 2012.
European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia
Contact: press@eumm.eu
- Des Doyle, Spokesperson: Des.Doyle@eumm.eu
- Iuliu Draghici, Press and Public Information Officer: Iuliu.Draghici@eumm.eu

The European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia is the EU’s only current CSDP Mission that is specifically dedicated to monitoring. The current mandate of the Mission will likely be extended until 14 December 2020.