



Information Documents

SG/Inf(2020)10

3 April 2020¹

Consolidated report on the conflict in Georgia (October 2019 – March 2020)

Document presented by the Secretary General

¹ This document has been classified restricted until examination by the Committee of Ministers.

Introduction

1. At their 1080th meeting on 24 and 26 March 2010, the Ministers' Deputies took the following decision: "*The Deputies, restating the previous decisions of the Committee of Ministers, invited the Secretary General to prepare his consolidated report on the conflict in Georgia based on his outline and taking into account the comments made during the present meeting*".

2. It is recalled that the objective of the report is to take stock of the situation in Georgia following the August 2008 conflict, to report on the related activities of the Council of Europe and to propose further Council of Europe action. The report is composed of four parts:

- update on major developments in the period under review;
- assessment of statutory obligations and commitments related to the conflict and its consequences;
- the human rights situation in the areas affected by the conflict; and
- current Council of Europe activities aimed at addressing the consequences of the conflict, their follow-up and proposals for future action.

3. This 21st consolidated report covers the period between October 2019 and March 2020. It notably builds on the previous consolidated reports and on the related decisions by the Deputies.

4. A delegation of the Secretariat carried out a fact-finding visit to Tbilisi on 3-5 February 2020 and had the opportunity to discuss the situation with the Georgian authorities as well as representatives of international organisations. The Secretariat wishes to express its gratitude to the Georgian authorities for their support in organising the visit and to all interlocutors for their assistance and valuable contributions.

5. Despite continued efforts, the Secretariat was not given authorisation to visit Abkhazia and South Ossetia for the purpose of this consolidated report. The Secretary General intends to pursue her efforts in view of fact-finding visits to Abkhazia and South Ossetia for the preparation of future consolidated reports. At the same time, it should be noted that, in the period under review, the Secretariat members and experts continued to have contact with interlocutors in Sukhumi for the purpose of the implementation of activities on Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) (cf. Section IV.3).

6. This report does not replace the monitoring procedures established in the Council of Europe. Nor should it be seen as prejudging any possible decisions in the cases related to the conflict and its consequences, which are currently pending before the European Court of Human Rights.

7. Nothing in this report should be interpreted as being contrary to the full respect of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders.²

² It is a fundamental objective of the member states of the Council of Europe to uphold the territorial integrity of Georgia. However, the Russian Federation recognised South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states on 26 August 2008.

8. This report does not prejudge or infringe upon a possible future political settlement of the conflict within the framework of the Geneva International Discussions (GID), nor the implementation of the six-point ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008 and the implementing measures of 8 September 2008.

I Update on major developments in the period under review

9. The 49th and 50th rounds of Geneva International Discussions (GID) co-chaired by representatives of the European Union (EU), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations (UN) were held respectively on 9 October³ and 10-11 December 2019.⁴ Participants have continued to express commitment to the GID. At the same time, at the last meeting the Co-Chairs noted that, while engagement by participants contributed to relative stability over the past decades, the core security and humanitarian issues have remained unresolved. The Co-Chairs in particular noted a deteriorating situation on the ground and that the participants' diverging positions on key issues of the agenda have become further entrenched. They pointed out serious security challenges in the Chorchana–Tsnelisi area since August 2019. The Co-Chairs reiterated their calls for participants to reduce tensions on and along the Administrative Boundary Line with South Ossetia, for all crossing points to be reopened, for all detainees to be released, and for participants to engage constructively in dialogue - in Geneva, as well as in the Gali and Ergneti Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs).

10. As reported, in Working Group I, dealing with security issues, the exchanges focused on the situation on the ground and the worrying developments of August 2019, in particular in the Chorchana–Tsnelisi area, as well as on various other issues, including extensive discussions on non-use of force and international security arrangements. In Working Group II, dealing with humanitarian issues, discussions concentrated on the impact of restrictive measures on the freedom of movement and livelihoods of the conflict-affected population. The participants also discussed issues relating to missing persons, mobility, documentation, public health, education, cultural heritage and environmental challenges. As in previous rounds, it was not possible to address issues relating to internally displaced persons/refugees due to a walkout by some participants.

11. Representatives of the Georgian authorities met by the delegation in Tbilisi strongly highlighted that the security situation in the territories adjacent to the Administrative Boundary Line had been extremely fragile and tense, especially in terms of so-called “borderisation” activities, leading to the escalation and further deterioration of the human rights situation for the local conflict-affected populations. Furthermore, the Georgian interlocutors continue to point to several negative trends in terms of the human rights situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia affecting the ethnic Georgian population (cf. also Section III). It was also underlined that Georgia remains utterly committed to the GID and IPRMs.

³ Press communiqué of the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, 9 October 2019. <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/435188>

⁴ Press communiqué of the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, 11 December 2019. <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/441940>

II Assessment of statutory obligations and commitments related to the conflict and its consequences

12. Below is an update on statutory obligations and specific commitments – as listed in PACE Opinions 193 (1996) and 209 (1999) – which have been selected for the purpose of reporting on the conflict in Georgia and its consequences. This part builds on Part 1 of the first and second consolidated reports on the conflict in Georgia ([SG/Inf\(2010\)8](#) and [SG/Inf\(2010\)19-final](#)).

- i. *To accept the principles of the rule of law and of the enjoyment by all persons within its jurisdiction of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to collaborate sincerely and effectively in the realisation of the aim of the Council of Europe*
- ii. *To settle international as well as internal disputes by peaceful means (an obligation incumbent upon all member states of the Council of Europe), rejecting resolutely any forms of threats of force against its neighbours*

13. The decision in the Inter-State application (II) No. 38263/08 relating to the 2008 conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation and its aftermath is still pending following the Grand Chamber hearing on the merits in 2018. The consideration of Inter-State application (IV) 39611/18 lodged in August 2018 on the alleged deterioration of the human rights situation along the Administrative Boundary Line is underway.

14. As regards individual cases related to the conflict, 435 applications against Georgia are still pending.⁵ Furthermore, 21 of these applications were registered against both Georgia and the Russian Federation. To date, the Court has also received 176 applications against the Russian Federation.⁶

15. The investigation authorised by the International Criminal Court (ICC) continued during the period under review.

16. In her address to the UN General Assembly, on 25 September 2019, Georgian President Zourabichvili reaffirmed her country's commitment to the peaceful resolution of the conflict and non-use of force. A similar message was delivered in her address to the PACE on 28 January 2020, notably citing as evidence Georgia's peace initiative "A step to a better future" aimed at improving the humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of people residing on the other side of the Administrative Boundary Line.⁷

- iii. *To respect strictly the provisions of international humanitarian law, including in cases of armed conflict on its territory*

⁵ Ten of them were communicated and the applicant parties submitted their initial and/or additional observations on the admissibility and merits. The respondent and third government now have the possibility to submit their comments by the end of March 2020.

⁶ Out of which 170 applications were communicated to the Russian government for information. The Georgian government was informed about the communication as a third party.

⁷ PACE, Address by Ms Salome Zourabichvili, President of Georgia, 28 January 2020: <http://assembly.coe.int/nwbs/verbatim/?sessionid=202001&day=2020-01-28&afternoon=False&lang=EN&contentlang=EN#theme-570>

17. On 14 October 2019, the Georgian government established by decree an interagency commission tasked with the search and transfer of the remains of persons missing after armed conflicts. The commission comprises ten different agencies. The body is also mandated with providing support to the families of the missing persons.⁸

18. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has continued its activities in support of efforts aimed at ascertaining the fate and whereabouts of persons unaccounted for as a result of the armed conflicts and alleviating the plight of their families. Regarding Abkhazia, a meeting of the Forensic Working Group (under the *Tripartite Co-ordination Mechanism*) was held during the period under review and additional burial sites were processed, leading to the further exhumation of human remains. The ICRC also continued to accompany the families of missing persons through a series of activities and programmes. As regards South Ossetia, the ICRC also remains engaged in re-establishing family links, visiting prisoners and facilitating emergency medical evacuations and assistance to the vulnerable population.

- iv. *To co-operate in good faith with international humanitarian organisations and to enable them to carry out their activities on its territory in conformity with their mandates*
- v. *To facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable groups of the population affected by the consequences of the conflict*

19. The delegation was informed that the “Peace Fund for a Better Future” was expected to become fully operational in the spring 2020. It is a financial instrument established under the peace initiative “A Step to a Better Future”, which was launched in 2019 and aims at promoting dialogue and reconciliation through facilitation of trade, education and mobility opportunities, including through status-neutral solutions. The government is hoping to mobilise international support for this financial mechanism.

20. In the meantime, the Georgian government continues to make available free access to health care, education and other social benefits for all residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. A new “Post-Secondary Education Preparation Programme” accessible without entry exam was recently established.⁹ A grants programme to support business and trade initiatives also receives significant interest.¹⁰

21. In Abkhazia, the UN agencies and funds, as well as several development agencies along with international NGOs, have been able to conduct protection, humanitarian and development programmes. In particular, the Liaison Mechanism established under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) continues to facilitate *inter alia* the delivery of various types of humanitarian and medical aid. The EU continues to support these actions in line with its engagement without recognition policy.

⁸ Statement by the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia: <https://smr.gov.ge/en/news/read/1715/>

⁹ Within the framework of the programme, beneficiaries have undergone an intensive training course in order to continue their studies in higher education programmes. In total, 139 students from both Abkhazia and South Ossetia have completed this programme since September 2019.

¹⁰ According to the Office of the Georgian State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, out of around 400 applications to this grants programme, 75% have come from Abkhazia and/or South Ossetia.

22. Emphasis was put by several interlocutors on the need to preserve the operational space for international organisations and NGOs in Abkhazia for the benefit of the local populations. This involves ensuring that all the mandated personnel of international humanitarian organisations have a constant and unimpeded access to the population affected by the conflict.

23. Throughout the reporting period, access for international engagement to South Ossetia remained limited.

24. No specific progress has been reported as regards amendments to Georgia's "Law on Occupied Territories" in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission's opinions.

III Human rights situation in the areas affected by the conflict

25. As mentioned above (Section I), the security situation on the ground has been assessed by various interlocutors as deteriorating, in particular in reference to the serious security challenges in the Chorchana-Tselisi area since August 2019. The human rights and humanitarian situation of the conflict-affected communities remained under strain, notably due to persisting and/or newly imposed restrictions on freedom of movement, documentation issues and obstacles on access to basic services. Concerns are also constantly expressed that prolonged closures of both Administrative Boundary Lines by the *de facto* authorities have continued to affect the access of vulnerable groups to humanitarian and medical assistance.

26. Notwithstanding continued appeals at the international level, regrettably no progress has been made in ensuring unfettered access for international human rights monitoring mechanisms, including those of the Council of Europe, to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. According to all interlocutors, there remains an urgent need for regular and standards-based assessments of the application of principles and standards of the European Convention on Human Rights and other international human rights treaties.

III.1 Reports on Abkhazia

III.1.i Security

27. As in previous reports, continued restrictions with respect to basic rights and services compound perceptions of insecurity and uncertainty. The predominantly ethnic Georgian population in the Gali district continues to be the most vulnerable group in this respect. Attempts to hold IPRM meetings during the period under review have failed. The EUMM-facilitated hotline continues to operate.

III.1.ii Freedom of movement

28. The so-called "borderisation" process is reported to be continuing at an incremental level and still constitutes a major obstacle to freedom of movement. The Georgian central government and the international community maintain their firm opposition to this process. Its harmful impact on the local population is underlined, particularly as regards freedom of movement, livelihood and security issues. The matter is regularly raised in the GID format.

29. To recall, access to territory controlled by the Georgian central government was until recently allowed only in two places, but mainly occurred over the Inguri bridge. The crossing points remained open during most of the period under review.

30. However, representatives of the Georgian central government informed the delegation that, since the end of January, medical checks had been conducted by the *de facto* authorities on people crossing the bridge, reportedly to prevent the spreading of viral diseases in the region. These checks were expected to continue until the end of March and, at the time, there were concerns by the Georgian central government that this process might be used to restrict further freedom of movement. Furthermore, information has since been received on additional restrictions, followed by a full closure of the bridge as of 14 March, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

31. In addition to already existing restrictions, the Georgian authorities highlighted that people willing to pass the Administrative Boundary Line also regularly face various obstacles in an arbitrary manner.

32. There are no developments to report with respect to the issue of crossing documentation. It is recalled that the absence of crossing documentation remains a major freedom of movement constraint for the people affected. In that regard, concerns expressed on earlier occasions regarding the January 2019 restrictions barring ethnic Georgian holders of so-called old Abkhaz “passports” from crossing the Administrative Boundary Line persist, even though the so-called temporary “document” Form No. 9 is reported to continue to be used in practice. The use of these so-called temporary “documents” had been initially extended until the end of 2019.

33. All these measures combined continue to seriously limit people’s access to basic rights and services in the territory controlled by the Georgian central government, and to impact the humanitarian situation through disruption of access to livelihood opportunities. The situation was, overall, depicted to be worsening by various interlocutors.

34. Against this background, cases of arbitrary detention for crossing outside the “crossing points” continue to be reported. The trend is said to be decreasing slightly, but mostly because of the dissuasive impact of current restrictions.

35. Urgent medical evacuations are also affected as they continue to require clearance by the *de facto* authorities.

III.1.iii Identity documents

36. The documentation gap continued to have an adverse impact on the status and effective enjoyment of rights of the ethnic Georgian population living in Gali but also in Ochamchire and Tkvarcheli.

37. The process of issuance of so-called “foreign temporary residence permits” continues to be problematic. There are no major developments to report in that regard for the reporting period, let alone difficulties for the people concerned to obtain clear information, a slight decrease in the number of applications and/or reluctance to being assimilated to so-called “foreigners” – as reported by interlocutors.

38. To recall, the large majority of ethnic Georgians are not entitled to obtain a so-called Abkhaz “passport” if they possess Georgian citizenship. Therefore, obtaining the so-called “foreign temporary residence permit”¹¹ is the only option for most of them in terms of being “authorised” to reside in the region and to enjoy basic rights. Overall, the people concerned by these issues remain very vulnerable.

III.1.iv Access to education, including teaching of/in the native language

39. As regards the situation of education in the Georgian language in schools in the Gali district, no progress has been noted since the last report. Previously expressed concerns on access to education in the native language persist. Representatives of the Georgian central government recalled that restrictions affected not only schools but kindergartens as well.

40. According to the Georgian central government, currently, in one out of nine schools in the Upper Gali, the native Georgian language is taught only in 5th grade as a facultative subject and for only two hours per week. In the remaining eight schools, only one hour per week is devoted to Georgian language teaching and only one hour to Georgian literature. The rest of the subjects are taught in the Russian language. In the Lower Gali, teaching in the Georgian language is conducted only in 9th, 10th and 11th grades, but hours devoted to teaching the Georgian language were reduced once again in September 2019 in ten of the schools. Last year, at elementary level, one hour per week was dedicated to the Georgian language and two hours to Georgian literature. As of September of the current academic year, Georgian literature teaching time has reportedly been reduced by one hour. In 11 schools of the Tkvarcheli and Ochamchire districts, the Georgian language and literature are not taught at all.

41. The Georgian authorities reiterated to the delegation that they consider such practices to be discriminatory and, more generally, to impair access to quality education. They continue to raise the issue in all available platforms, including the GID.

42. As regards freedom of movement of schoolchildren attending school in the central government-controlled territory, no incident or new development has been reported. Commuting nonetheless remains difficult and time-consuming for the children concerned. The number of pupils crossing the Administrative Boundary Line each day for school attendance has been decreasing since 2016¹², mainly due to the various restrictions imposed on freedom of movement.

43. The delegation was informed that, in this context, the Georgian central government had implemented a number of measures aimed at improving educational conditions.

III.1.v Other developments in Abkhazia

¹¹ Under the new so-called regulations, including the amended 2016 *de facto* “Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners in Abkhazia”.

¹² There are currently 25 children crossing the Administrative Boundary Line on a daily basis, compared to 39 in 2016.

44. In other developments, in Abkhazia, the *de facto* president resigned on 12 January following protests calling for the invalidation of last September's *de facto* presidential elections. In addition, the *de facto* supreme court invalidated the *de facto* presidential elections' results paving the way for the *de facto* central election commission to new *de facto* presidential elections on 22 March 2020. These *de facto* elections were vividly condemned by the Georgian central government as being illegitimate.

III.2 Reports on South Ossetia

III.2.i Security

45. During the visit, all the security observers pointed to the worsening situation along the Administrative Boundary Line, in particular in the Chorchana–Tsnelisi area where a move of 1.5 km into Georgian government-controlled territory was reported in September 2019. Representatives of the Georgian central government met by the delegation assessed these developments as highly worrying.

III.2.ii Freedom of movement

46. The delegation was informed by various interlocutors that so-called “borderisation” activities along the Administrative Boundary Line continued to be carried out periodically throughout the reporting period. In particular, fencing activity in the vicinity of Gori had been reported. The Georgian central government has continued to condemn this process in the strongest terms. Efforts towards de-escalation took place in technical meetings in Ergneti, facilitated by the EUMM and the OSCE. It was reported that seven such meetings had taken place during the reporting period, the last one in November 2019. There was no regular meeting of the IPRM as such. As reported to the delegation by representatives of the Georgian central government, the South Ossetian participants associate the disruption of the IPRM to developments in the Chorchana–Tsnelisi area. Against this background, representatives of the Georgian central government underlined to the delegation the importance of the IPRM meetings to address the immediate security and humanitarian issues and highlighted the necessity for their unconditional resumption.

47. In connection with these developments, the crossing points on the Administrative Boundary Line, including the main one Mosabruni/Odzisi, have essentially remained closed, allegedly for security reasons, with the exception of grave humanitarian cases. By the end of January, the *de facto* authorities in South Ossetia indicated that the main crossing point would be open for ten days every two months for the collection of pensions by ethnic Georgians only. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the whole Administrative Boundary Line was closed by the end of February.

48. Representatives of the Georgian central government expressed concern that this policy of closure reflects an instrumentalisation of the humanitarian situation. Other interlocutors described the situation as a serious impediment to the freedom of movement severely affecting the local population, especially in Akhalkalaki, in terms of the humanitarian situation, access to livelihoods and to basic necessary service, including health care, i.e. medical evacuations (cf. also below). It was pointed out to the delegation that access to medicine also remained a problem, amid reports that, in February 2020, the *de facto* authorities had seized Tbilisi-produced medicines in local pharmacies. The State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia strongly denounced this development as also going against humanitarian principles. There are concerns that this practice, coupled with the closure of the crossing points, has created a shortage of medicines and supplies, thus further aggravating the humanitarian situation.

49. The GID Co-Chairs have reiterated their warnings concerning additional hardships and severe impact on the local conflict-affected population resulting from these restrictions.¹³ They in particular appealed to the relevant actors to re-open, without delay, all crossing points closed since September 2019, pointing out that while the concerns regarding the security situation were shared, steps to address these should be proportional and always take humanitarian aspects into consideration.¹⁴ The Georgian central government and the international community also repeated the concerns of the humanitarian impact on the local population, citing as a tragic illustration the death of a woman in need of urgent medical evacuation on 29 October 2019. Other cases of local residents unable to get medical treatment in due time have also been reported. The need to ensure that all urgent cases are duly processed was stressed.¹⁵

50. A strict arbitrary detention practice continues to be enforced for violations of the crossing restrictions, raising major issues from a human security and human rights perspective. The Georgian authorities informed that more than 30 people had been detained by the *de facto* authorities while attempting to cross into territory controlled by the central government during the period under review. Generally, cases of arbitrary detention continue to be handled through the EUMM-managed hotline. Representatives of the State Security Service noted however that, although the hotline had been activated, it functioned poorly. Representatives of the Office of the Georgian State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality (SMR) also pointed out that six times more people had been precluded from crossing without necessarily being detained.

51. The delegation's attention was also drawn to the arbitrary detention of well-known traumatologist Dr. Vazha Gaprindashvili, detained by the South Ossetian *de facto* authorities. The case had prompted national and international concerns, including by the Council of Europe, which led to Mr Gaprindashvili's release after two months of arbitrary detention. The Georgian central government vividly denounced this incident.

¹³ Statement of the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, 15 September 2019. <https://www.osce.org/what/conflict-prevention/430031>

¹⁴ Statement of the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, 6 November 2019. <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/438179>

¹⁵ To be noted, medical evacuations continue to be facilitated by the ICRC at the Ergneti crossing point, with around two cases per week.

III.2.iii Identity documents

52. The continued lack of clarity and information on so-called crossing “permission documents” for the ethnic Georgian population in Akhalkalaki remains of concern. According to the SMR, around 300 people were able to cross during the above-mentioned 10-day window (cf. paragraph 47). However, those who lacked the proper “documents” could not cross. As such, the inability to collect pensions further weakens the socio-economic conditions of the affected local residents.

III.2.iv Access to education, including teaching of/in the native language

53. To recall, the last six remaining Georgian schools (out of ten) in the Akhalkalaki district have now been obliged to switch to the South Ossetian curricula standards and to adopt Russian as the language of instruction in grades one to four.¹⁶ The Georgian authorities had expressed strong concerns about these changes. In February, the SMR condemned the dismissal of two ethnic Georgian principals by the *de facto* authorities in South Ossetia.

III.3 The situation of internally displaced persons

54. During the period under review, no progress could be reported as regards the voluntary, safe, dignified and unhindered return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees on the basis of internationally recognised principles.¹⁷

55. In the absence of conditions conducive to return, the Georgian government continued to provide IDPs with alternative durable solutions in terms of housing and improvement of socio-economic conditions, under its Action Plan 2019-2020 on the implementation of the State Strategy on IDPs.

56. Representatives of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia informed the delegation of the creation of the “Internally Displaced Persons, Ecomigrants and Livelihood Agency” in December 2019. The new agency is responsible for the implementation of the state policy with regard to IDPs and eco-migrants, their resettlement and improvement of their socio-economic conditions. As explained, the establishment of the agency is a further demonstration of the priority given to the issue by the Georgian central government.

57. According to the information provided by the Ministry and the Agency, in 2019 a total of 2097 IDP families received housings and 803 families received ownership of their housing. Furthermore, 6513 IDPs received one-off financial assistance and 1548 IDP families rent subsidy. Two hundred and twenty-four families benefited from various livelihood programmes. It is reported that, in 2020, more than 2500 IDP families should receive housing and ownership of housing should be granted to 1500 families.

¹⁶ It is reported that a total of 30 schoolchildren study in grades one to four in the six schools.

¹⁷ According to the information provided by the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, 286,193 persons (90,354 families) are officially registered with IDP status as of January 2020.

IV Activities of Council of Europe organs and institutions and their follow-up

IV.1 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

58. In Resolution 2325 (2020) on the Progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure (January-December 2019), the Assembly expressed concern about "the continuing borderisation and creeping annexation of the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by the Russian Federation, which are at odds with its obligations and accession commitments to the Council of Europe. The Assembly therefore asked the Russian Federation to reverse these processes".¹⁸

IV.1 Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

59. On 29 October 2019, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation 437 (2019) on "The role of local and regional governments in protecting internally displaced persons (IDPs)". The related explanatory memorandum made specific references to the situation of Georgia.¹⁹

IV.2 Operational activities

IV.2.i DG II/Women's rights

60. Georgia continued to benefit from a regional project on preventing and combating violence against women, which also takes into account specific vulnerabilities of the conflict context and aims to increase the national capacity to implement the standards of the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention. It will strengthen the prosecution's response to cases of violence against women and enhance the skills of legal professionals and other public officials when dealing with such cases. Georgia is also one of the EU Eastern Partnership countries involved in a regional project on improving access to justice for victims of violence against women.

IV.3 Operational activities on Confidence-Building Measures and their follow-up

(a) Activities organised during the reporting period

61. During the period under review, the Council of Europe continued the implementation of CBMs. CBM activities have continued to support the protection of human rights of people from conflict-affected communities, by considering possible solutions in several areas relying on the expert technical support provided by the Council of Europe and individual member states.

62. CBM priorities are identified jointly with relevant actors and are closely coordinated with the SMR and the Liaison Mechanism established under the UNDP. It is recalled that CBMs also draw on the Secretary General's annual reports on the state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The pragmatic approach has enabled dialogue and trust to be built between all actors concerned.

¹⁸ Resolution 2325 (2020). Text adopted by the Assembly on 30 January 2020 (8th Sitting).

¹⁹ The Congress, CG37(2019)09final.

CBMs with Abkhazia

63. Historians and archive specialists from Tbilisi and Sukhumi continued to work on a series of historical events on which little information has so far been published. The second publication on *“Anti-Soviet uprisings of 1931 in the village of Duripsh in the Gudauta district”*, based on the archives of the Ministry of the Interior of Georgia, complemented by photos from private collections in Abkhazia and newspaper articles is being finalised. The third publication focusing on *“Missing persons from Abkhazia during the Second World War”* was finalised in a meeting that took place in Paris on 6-7 November 2019. A meeting in Venice on 23-24 January 2020 allowed the script of the documentary film on the Duripsh uprisings and the structure of further publications on the criminal cases against the monks in Abkhazia in the 1921–1956 period to be finalised. The presentation of the two books published in 2019 is foreseen in the spring 2020.

64. On the basis of a successful experience with the trainings of interpreters from/to the Abkhaz language, a segment for the training of translators from/into the Abkhaz language was launched in the autumn 2019 (Istanbul, 2-3 September and 13-15 November). As a result of these activities, the capacity of Tbilisi and Sukhumi translators from/into the Abkhaz language has been enhanced and special attention has been paid to the terminology for social/legal/political matters, discussion on the availability of dictionaries and use of the same terminology as well as the translation of texts on current affairs/journalism and publicist writing. The dialogue between said specialists will continue in 2020 with the aim of concentrating efforts on legal terminology and the translation of the European Convention on Human Rights into the Abkhaz language.

65. Dialogue on activities aimed at preventing and combating violence against women, including domestic violence, has resumed. During a meeting of civil society representatives involved in the fight against domestic violence (Istanbul, 23-25 October), focus was placed on the work of hotlines and individual consultations for the victims of violence. Moreover, the meeting of journalists from Tbilisi and Sukhumi in Istanbul on 11-13 December was devoted to media coverage and combating violence against women, as well as the role of media in the economic and social empowerment of women as a tool of prevention of violence. The follow-up of the segment is scheduled for 2020 in the form of the training of psychologists and psychiatrists working with children from socially vulnerable families and dealing with the suicidal attitude of minors. Moreover, journalists' possible initiatives in this segment will be followed up and further engagement of social workers - jointly with the representatives of the civil society engaged in the prevention of fight against women - will be promoted.

66. An activity on drug prevention aimed at producing joint video clips for the prevention of drug use among young people took place in Istanbul on 11-13 February 2020. Moreover, a common digital workspace between drugs prevention and treatment professionals from Tbilisi and Sukhumi was fully maintained in 2019.

CBMs with South Ossetia

67. The Secretariat was unable to develop and implement CBMs during the reporting period in South Ossetia. Various factors, not least stringent conditions of access for the international community to South Ossetia, continued to prevent a meaningful involvement of participants from Tskhinvali in the CBM programme. However, efforts have been deployed to launch CBM activities in South Ossetia.

(b) Plans for further action

68. The Secretariat will continue to build on the substantial results of the CBMs carried out since 2010 to maintain the level of trust and contacts between actors on both sides of the Administrative Boundary Line to promote reconciliation through respect for human rights. At the same time, options will be explored to increase the impact and extend dialogue to new domains with a pragmatic approach relying on the technical support of experts from other member states.

69. In addition to the planned follow-up on the previous and current initiatives mentioned above, efforts will focus on contributing to the holding of a Youth Peace Camp; facilitating dialogue with English teachers from South Ossetia; facilitating dialogue between mental health specialists, specialists on the situation of minors in prisons, and journalists. Other proposals are currently under discussion with the Georgian central government and stakeholders in Sukhumi.