

OSCE

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Conference Services

Please find attached the report of the Head of the OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya made at the 214th Meeting of the Permanent Council on 11 March 1999.

**Chechnya. Report to the OSCE Permanent Council, Vienna,
11 March 1999.**

1. Background

The Assistance Group (AG) began working in Grozny on 26 April 1995, pursuant to its mandate as established by the Permanent Council on 11 April 1995 (16th meeting, decision (a)). The provisions of the mandate reflect the particular situation prevailing at the time of its adoption. That situation has subsequently changed in several respects - for the better as well as for the worse. Parts of the mandate may now seem to be of less relevance than envisaged originally. Thus, in a statement by the Russian Federation of 13 March 1997 it was explicitly stated that the part of the AG's mandate related to mediation efforts in the context of settling the armed conflict and smoothing the way to negotiations had been carried out in full. Other parts of the mandate address still existing needs, which would seem to have become even more relevant - and indeed even more pressing - as a result of developments taken place in the aftermath of the 1994-96 Russian-Chechen hostilities. In addition, the pulling-out of the area of other international bodies, leaving the AG as the only remaining international institution with a representation in Chechnya, lends yet another important dimension to its continued presence.

2. The Security environment

Thus, the cause for discussing ways and means for the continued operation of the AG is *not* the lack of meaningful tasks, but rather a perceptibly deteriorating security situation which has made it progressively more difficult for the AG to perform its tasks in a meaningful way, while at the same time observing acceptable standards of safety for its own personnel.

As will be well known, the Chechen Republic has become a high-risk area especially for expatriates with regard to kidnappings, hostage-takings and even wanton and seemingly pointless killings. Such incidents take place against the backdrop of ever-worsening socio-economic conditions, continuing political unrest, the perceived weakening of the President's position, the presence of uncontrollable and well-armed opposition groups including criminal (mafia) elements as well as religious fanatics. In the midst of this overall negative security environment the AG - being the only remaining international institution - has come to be seen

as an increasingly vulnerable and likely target for a possible onslaught by malevolent forces.

3. The evacuation regime

Extensive security measures notwithstanding, the AG four times during 1998 was forced to evacuate temporarily its expatriate staff from Grozny to Moscow. The last such evacuation took place on 16 December 1998. Unlike previous such periods, which did not extend beyond 3 weeks' duration, this latest evacuation has been prolonged repeatedly in view of a deteriorating security situation. The decision to evacuate Grozny is still in effect, and - while keeping its office with complete infrastructure and local staff in Grozny - the AG continues to operate from Moscow, monitoring the political and security situation in Chechnya. Suitable temporary AG office facilities have been established at the premises of the Embassy of Norway. The understanding is that the AG will return to Grozny when the Chairman-in-Office (CiO) is satisfied that positive improvements in the security situation have occurred. Periodic visits to Grozny by AG members are, however (subject to advance approval from the CiO), made in order to ensure continuity and regularity of the AG's on-the-spot operations, and whenever specific needs arise.

4. The political situation - recent developments

Broadly speaking, the overall political situation may be said to have gone from bad to worse. Whereas the break-down of the normal structures of authority that characterize a functional civilized society seem to be endemic, the power-struggle between the (popularly elected) President and the opposition groups ("field commanders" etc.) demanding his resignation has moved from one crisis to another, with particularly tense situations occurring at mid-December and late January. In a bid to regain the political initiative and at the same time neutralizing his opponents by adopting their demands as his own policies, president Maskhadov on 3 February announced the "full implementation of the Shariah rule in Chechnya". A special Commission has been set up by the President to draft a new Islamic Constitution. The draft was expected to be released to the public in mid-March (now likely to be postponed), presumably for subsequent adoption in a referendum or some other form of popular consultation.

The new Constitution is expected to create the background for the new, Islamic State, forge the state bodies, and regulate the relations between them. The regulating principles for the

most important aspects of Shariah rule - the criminal and civil systems of justice - are also expected to be reflected in the new Constitution. The principles for the implementation of the Shariah rule has not yet been clarified.

Maskhadov's Shariah initiative has drawn mixed reactions:

- Parliament protested the initiative as anti-constitutional
- The extra-parliamentary opposition grudgingly admitted their agreement with the initiative, but sought to counter the President's move by setting up their own Council ("Shura"), which elected field commander Shamil Basayev "Emir" and called on Maskhadov to resign.
- Other reactions range from mild confusion to various lines of scepticism.

The decision to implement Shariah law by president Maskhadov, who is otherwise known for his moderate and sensitive attitude towards democratic and secular values, came as a surprise to most observers. The decision probably reflects Maskhadov's genuine commitment to peaceful solutions and to avoid, at all costs, further inter-necine bloodletting or an all-out civil war. Whether his appeasement tactics will succeed remains of course to be seen. In the short-term perspective it would seem that he has gained some breathing-space. Tensions have eased somewhat and the critical moments of confrontation between the President and the opposition have passed, as the conflict has moved from the streets to institutions.

There is, however, as of yet no sign of any significant improvement in the over-all security situation. On the contrary, recent incidents (such as the abduction of the RF Interior Ministry representative general Shpigun, and also the armed attack on an AG vehicle) seem to confirm a further deterioration.

(Note: The past few days – with the abduction of the RF Interior Ministry representative and subsequent events – have obviously brought an acute deterioration in the security situation in Chechnya. Whether this situation will prevail will depend on developments during the next few days; i.e. whether general Shpigun is released or not, whether the warnings of possible Russian counter-measures are carried out, etc. As far as the AG is concerned, visits to Grozny would not be envisaged at the immediate moment. However, unless the present crisis leads to a more permanent worsening of the situation, there should be no need for a re-assessment of the modalities for the AG's further operations).

5. *The socio-economic situation*

Chechnya shows few signs of recovery from the near-complete physical destruction caused by the 1994-96 hostilities. There is hardly any reconstruction of buildings, infrastructure or production facilities. Investments from abroad are non-existent, and unemployment – esp. among the youth – is massive. Large segments of the population are left without access to cover their most basic needs such as adequate food and shelter, clean water, heating and the most generic medicines. The economic decay is having a disastrous effect on the quality and availability of basic social services. The overall socio-economic conditions are, if anything, deteriorating, and no progress can be anticipated for the nearest future. Needless to say, this seemingly desparate situation serves to further aggravate the already volatile political situation.

6. *Current activities of the AG*

Under the present circumstances - i.e.:

- the absence of any sign of a revival of the Russian-Chechen negotiation process;
- the prevailing negative developments in the political situation in Chechnya; and
- the extremely dangerous security situation, which has necessitated the present evacuation regime;
 - the possibilities for the AG to fulfil its mandate are somewhat restricted.

Different teams from the AG visited Grozny 30 January - 4 February, 21-23 February and 28 February - 4 March. These visits included numerous and extensive meetings and talks with Chechen official representatives (including president Maskhadov and government ministers) and other local leaders and spokesmen. (For further particulars, see recent *Activity Reports* and *Spot Reports*). In the view of the AG, these visits have been useful and valuable as a means of

- Receiving fresh and updated information on current developments;
- Maintaining a dialogue with key Chechen representatives; i.e. hearing their views on a wide range of issues, including views and analyses of political developments, on the role of the OSCE AG and on the security situation in particular; and likewise, for the AG to explain the contents and direction of the OSCE involvement in the area.;
- Providing the AG with a better background for making its own assessments on general

developments, including in particular on matters relevant to its current and further operations.

Main impressions from meetings with officials and others in Grozny included the following:

- The role of the OSCE is highly appreciated, with expressions of gratitude for the work carried out by the AG. The prolonged absence of the AG from Grozny is noted with some concern, and positive expectations are being expressed with regard to the continued presence of the AG in Grozny.
- Humanitarian aid is identified as the main area where the AG can make a valuable contribution. The importance for Chechnya of the AG as a channel of contact with the international community is appreciated.
- Assurances of support for the AG are expressed everywhere.

7. The road ahead: Prospects and priorities for the AG's further work

As mentioned already, our contacts with officials and others in Moscow as well as in Grozny indicate that *humanitarian aid* is identified as the main area where the AG can make a valuable contribution. The AG's mandate includes the following task:

- *facilitate the delivery to the region by international and non-governmental organisations of humanitarian aid for victims of the crisis, wherever they may be located;*

In utilising the support given by the OSCE decision-making bodies and Participating States as far as the AG's own humanitarian activities are concerned (budget allocation this year \$ 100,000), the AG has concentrated on most pressing needs, such as heating and water-supply in hospitals, schools and social institutions, support of local NGOs to make them more capable in helping their compatriots, etc. In addition to own sources, the AG has succeeded in attracting some voluntary contributions from OSCE states, providing distribution and monitoring of their aid.

Current voluntary contributors' projects include:

- "500 metric tons of Wheat Flour" Program, US State Department, 50 % finished
- "Psycho-medical Rehabilitation Project", SIDA/Sweden, 15 % finished.

For the purpose of encouraging and attracting further voluntary efforts in the field of humanitarian assistance to Chechnya, the AG is issuing an appeal to the international community in this regard. If requested, the AG would be in the position to provide potential donors with solid information concerning their particular sphere of interest, or to establish a

direct channel to a relevant Chechen partner.

(The increased activities thus envisaged might entail the need to increase the AG's humanitarian aid ability by hiring additional local staff with background in such work).

A main provision of the AG's mandate includes, inter alia, to

- *promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, ... (and) help foster the development of democratic institutions and processes;*

For the purpose of encouraging and attracting voluntary efforts in supporting these aims, the AG is also issuing an additional appeal to the international community, with specific mention of recently received requests for projects support.

8. AG staffing requirements

The AG initially consisted of a team of 6 members (not including the local staff in Grozny). The CiO, in consultation with the Russian Federation, is authorized to decide on the Group's membership. There are currently 5 members of the Group (provided by viz. Norway, The Czech Republic, Romania, Poland and Moldova), which must be considered an absolute minimum for the AG to be operational. One member will leave the AG upon termination of his contract 22 April, which means that the question of finding a suitable replacement has acquired some urgency. In order to broaden the scope of the overall involvement of the OSCE Participating States in the operations of the AG, it would be considered useful if a candidate could be found among the European Union group of countries.