

# **OSCE**

**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
Secretariat**

PC.FR/30/99  
21 October 1999  
RESTRICTED  
ENGLISH only

---

**Conference Services**

**Please find attached the statement of the Head of the OSCE Assistance Group to  
Chechnya, made at the 254<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Permanent Council on 21 October 1999.**

## **Chechnya. Report to the OSCE Permanent Council, Vienna, 21 October 1999.**

### **1. Background - the security environment and the evacuation regime**

The modalities of the Assistance Group's work in 1999 have largely been defined by the *security environment*. During 1998, the security situation in Chechnya was deteriorating to an extent which 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. Thus, since December last year, the Assistance Group - as a temporary measure by decision of the Chairman-in-Office (CiO) - has been evacuated to Moscow for security reasons. Working visits to Grozny by members of the AG were made three times during January-March this year, but then a stricter evacuation regime was introduced to exclude any further travels to Chechnya by AG members. The understanding has been that the AG would return to Grozny when the security situation has improved significantly. Unfortunately, this prerequisite has yet to materialize. To the contrary, developments so far in 1999 have only exacerbated the situation. From its Moscow office at the Embassy of Norway, the AG continues to monitor the political and security situation in Chechnya, while at the same time directing the practical activities involving the local staff at the AG's Grozny office, which - until quite recently - has been maintained fully operational with complete infrastructure. However, during September Chechnya became engulfed in renewed and continuing hostilities including extensive military operations. In view of the ensuing untenable security situation the decision was taken at the end of September to re-locate temporarily the AG's local staff and OSCE property to neighbouring Ingushetia. The evacuation was completed on 12 October. Thus, as of today, the OSCE does not have any personnel in Chechnya.

Under the prevailing circumstances, which have included:

- the continuing stand-still of the Russian-Chechen negotiation process;
- the negative developments in the internal political situation in Chechnya; and
- the dangerous security situation, which has necessitated the evacuation regime; the practical possibilities for the AG to fulfil its mandate have been visibly restricted.

The conditions existing until very recently did not, however, entail unsurmountable obstacles for the continuation of the AG's activities along previous lines and in line with priorities discussed with and approved by the OSCE Permanent Council at the 11 March and 24 June meetings. For the duration of the AG's absence from Chechnya, adequate routines were established for directing and ensuring the continuity and regularity of our on-the-spot operations.

## **2. AG field activities - humanitarian assistance etc.**

Our contacts with officials and others in Moscow as well as in Grozny confirm that *humanitarian aid* is seen as the main area where the AG can make a valuable contribution. This is a task which is also provided for in the AG's mandate. The *need* for such assistance is immense, in view of the enormous physical destruction caused by the 1994-96 hostilities, the consequent collapse of the economy and the steadily deteriorating socio-economic conditions. In addition, the destruction caused by the recently renewed hostilities - and the fear of further escalating operations - have forced huge numbers of people to flee their homes. In the AG's estimate, the total number of IDPs in the region may by now be in excess of 200.000, including approximately 50.000 inside Chechnya and at least 150.000 who have left the republic - the great majority of these being in the tiny neighbouring republic of Ingushetia.

During the past few months, the AG has continued all the previously started long-term humanitarian aid projects in Chechnya, and also initiated some new ones. Our humanitarian aid capability was strengthened by our hiring additional local staff in Grozny with expertise in this field. In addition to utilising our own budgetary means, the AG has succeeded in attracting some voluntary contributions from OSCE states, providing distribution and monitoring of their aid.

Among these, special mention should be made of the "Wheat Flour Program", financed by the U.S. State Department, and the "Psycho-medical Rehabilitation Project", financed by the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA). Plans and agreements made prior to our evacuation have ensured that the projects have been implemented as scheduled.

Other parts of the AG's mandate which have been given such attention as has been practically possible, include:

- monitoring of the human rights situation;
- assistance in establishing democratic institutions and in ensuring the return of displaced persons; and
- supporting the creation of mechanisms guaranteeing the rule of law, public safety and law and order.

Given the circumstances, the AG's accomplishments in carrying out these tasks have been rather modest. As the only remaining international organization with fully developed facilities in Grozny, the AG has to a certain degree fulfilled the functions of a human rights watch, advising and urging Chechen authorities to adhere to internationally recognized standards in the field of human rights. Recent developments have not been encouraging. Notably, there has been an increased occurrence of persecution and harassment of non-Muslim religious bodies (i.e. the Russian Orthodox Church) and non-confessional NGOs such as the Chechen Red Cross and Red Crescent Society. The introduction (as of February 1999) of so-called *Shariah* rule has weakened the position of the legitimate (democratically elected) political institutions and contradicts the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, i.a. with regard to discrimination of the political rights of non-Muslims.

### **3. Recent developments**

Recent developments taking place in and around Chechnya have also affected the AG's activities. Following the incursions into Dagestan in August of Chechnya-based irregular armed groups or "bandits" (the term including separatist fighters, insurgents and Islamist militants), Russian federal forces at the beginning of September launched large-scale bombing operations (i.e. air and long-range artillery strikes) directed at Chechen territory, with the aim of liquidating the bandits and their bases. The still on-going bombing operations, which also have caused substantial civilian casualties and triggered off an exodus of IDPs, were gradually extended to include infrastructure targets all over Chechnya; from 23 September also the city of Grozny. Ground operations, aimed at creating a "Sanitary Zone" around Chechnya, have since the end of September also included the northern one-third of Chechnya. Chechen authorities (president Maskhadov) have responded by declaring a state of emergency, general mobilization, and introducing (from 6 October) martial law in the republic. The irregular armed groups led by various so-called "field commanders" (or warlords) have subsequently been reported to be joining forces with regular Chechen military units in resistance to the advancing federal forces.

By the end of September, and on the background of overall expectations in Grozny of the inevitability of full-scale armed conflict with the federal army in central Chechnya and Grozny itself, the security situation was deteriorating significantly, as the "field commanders" were completing their formations by manpower, military equipment and other supplies, arbitrarily and forcibly confiscating equipment of perceived operational value.

In this situation the AG office in Grozny was becoming an increasingly vulnerable target for attacks by irregular forces or bandit groups. I therefore took the decision (in consultation with the OSCE Chairmanship and Secretariat) to withdraw temporarily - to the extent possible - the OSCE property and the AG local staff into Ingushetia, with only a small voluntary duty shift with communication equipment staying at the AG headquarters in Grozny. Following further threatening incidents - including several armed attacks resulting in certain property losses (one generator, some radio equipment etc.) but fortunately no personnel casualties - I was compelled to order full evacuation of the premises, which was effected on 12 October.

We have subsequently received reports that our premises have been looted and occupied by a group of Islamist militants - so-called Wahhabites - who have taken possession of and installed themselves at the OSCE AG office in Grozny.

With the AG's local staff and property being temporarily re-located to Ingushetia, the OSCE does not at the moment have any personnel in Chechnya. The local staff is to return to Grozny as soon as some measure of law and order may be restored. All the humanitarian aid projects are, however, for the time being suspended or discontinued. Obviously, under the current circumstances the AG is not in a position to guarantee a fair distribution of humanitarian aid among the Chechen IDPs in Chechnya. The AG might, however, be able to bring some assistance, through the temporary presence of its local staff in Ingushetia, to the Chechen IDPs there. Such

an involvement would, however, require further instructions from our superiors and the advance approval of the Russian federal authorities.

The renewed hostilities may also bring *political* implications. Since the presidential and parliamentary elections that were held under the auspices of the OSCE in January/February 1997, the Russian federal government as well as the OSCE have recognized the legitimacy of Chechen president Maskhadov and the Chechen Parliament. However, with Russian federal forces now apparently effectively in control of one-third of the territory over which they previously did not exercise any control, a new *de facto* situation has occurred. Thus, on Friday 15 October president Yeltsin appointed a new deputy prime minister (Nikolai Koshman) with the task of setting up civilian structures to administer the part of Chechnya controlled by federal forces. Also, prime minister Putin has previously indicated that the until now defunct Parliament which was elected during the military occupation of Grozny in June 1996, could be re-instated.

#### **4. The road ahead -**

For Chechnya the AG has been important as a channel of contact with the outside world. For the OSCE, the AG fulfils the functions of carrying out objective observations, analyses, assessments and reporting on general political and economic developments in the region. A case in point could be the recent reporting covering various aspects of the conflict following the armed incursion from Chechnya into Dagestan of Islamist militants and separatist fighters in August 1999. The AG is, at the same time, fully aware of the requirement that such functions are fulfilled in close cooperation and with the good guidance of our host country, with due consideration to the AG's mandate.

Thus, the OSCE maintains a presence which enables the organization to monitor on a continuous basis developments relevant to its policy requirements.

In the present, short-term perspective, the possibilities for the AG to fulfil its mandate are severely restricted. We trust that the long-term usefulness of its assignments outweighs the current short-term disadvantages, and that the AG can indeed - as in the past - make a difference. In this context, I am pleased to let you know that the AG appreciates the continuous assurances and expressions of support that it has received from all quarters, including Russian Federal as well as Chechen authorities.