

# UN Representative Says Abkhazia Dialogue Is Positive

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Heidi Tagliavini (center)

Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, who is UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's special representative in Georgia, will soon be finishing her four-year term in office.

Tagliavini, a Swiss native, spoke with RFE/RL's Georgian Service correspondent Nino Gelashvili about the successes and failures and how she sees the future of the conflict shaping up.

**RFE/RL:** What are the achievements you would like to emphasize during your four years' term as the UN secretary-general's special representative to Georgia?

**Heidi Tagliavini:** Well, I believe, certainly one of the most important achievements, in my opinion, is the fact, that we kept stability on the ground. You remember that we had in previous years [instability], in 1998 there were clashes, in 2001 there had been difficulties, including in the Kodori Valley. In 2002, we again had a fight in the Kodori Valley and we were very often very narrow[minded] to an overtaking of, I would say, just the readiness not to keep the stability. So, I believe this is a very important achievement. The second thing I think, maybe this is not me who should actually judge this, but I really understand that the relations between the interlocutors on both sides have dramatically changed. It is a very positive relationship with all the differences they have in their approach, but dialogue has never been really interrupted. Even when it was interrupted, it was with the clear intention to let the situation clarify and to come back to the negotiation table. So, there is a good atmosphere, which I think in part I am the reason for.

The other things are all these practical achievements that we have actually produced such as economic rehabilitation, such as the shuttle bus over the Inguri River, which I believe is an important, even symbolic element in the peace process because it is over the cease-fire line. It is a bridge to cross the cease-fire line. I would also say that we are not so far from a perspective that maybe the two presidents -- -- de facto [Abkhaz] President [Sergei] Bagapsh and [Georgian] President [Mikheil] Saakashvili -- would meet. We are not so far from a possible signature of a declaration on nonresumption of hostilities, nonuse of force, and the return of [internally displaced persons] and refugees. So, I believe this is a basket full of things to develop and to pursue. [The] thing is now to pursue them and not to let time pass because time may deteriorate the situation at any moment. There is also a will to cooperate -- which is one of my concerns all the time -- against crime between the two sides on the Inguri. We have appointed regional coordinators. We will have a fact-finding mission now, which

tries to enhance the security. And this is really a bone of contention -- the security in the Gali district -- which whenever we have a possibility to make some progress, comes in and puts the relationship in a bad light.

**RFE/RL:** You have explained what the stability is based upon. Is there anything that could ruin the stability and the whole peace process at the moment?

**Tagliavini:** Stability for me is something which you need to pursue daily -- that's what we do -- where direct contacts are extremely important and that's what we have created. We have really enhanced this mechanism, which is the quadri-partite mechanism the sides meet together with the CIS peacekeeping force and UNOMIG [United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia] every week, every Thursday and discuss the situation. And whenever it was not enough -- we had such situations -- then we convened a high-level meeting engaging Tbilisi and Sukhumi, and every time we came out of the most difficult situation -- this was done three or four times. We have now revitalized the coordinating council.... There is a joint fact-finding group that should investigate jointly crimes and [look into] allegations and assess whether they are political or criminal. And up to now most of the cases are criminal, just simply criminal.

**RFE/RL:** The Georgian parliament is going to discuss the issue of the CIS peacekeepers acting in Abkhazia very soon. The expectation is that the evaluation of the CIS peacekeepers will be negative, which may cause political tension between the parties. We know that the UN "Group of Friends" assesses the role of the peacekeepers as positive and stabilizing. What would be your advice to the Georgian government in this concern?

**Tagliavini:** I believe, there is of course heightened tension around this question, also clearly, on the side that provides this CIS peacekeeping force. But, on the other hand, we see very hopeful signs with meetings at the highest level between the president of Georgia and the president of Russia with follow-up meetings, with real open discussion on the table, and in my opinion this could help to somehow also clarify some misunderstandings. And also, it is about the improvement or the assessment of the performance and it could simply help also to improve the performance. So, I would personally hope that no harsh movement is made in this sense from any side, because the fragility is on the ground...

**RFE/RL:** Will you be following the events in Georgia after you return home to Switzerland?

**Tagliavini:** Can you imagine somebody that has been so much involved, so deeply, will not follow up? That would be very strange.

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