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EU Monitors in New Standoff with Russia, as Moscow Continues to Violate Terms of the Six Point Ceasefire Agreement

Monitors denied access to conflict zones, face complete lack of cooperation from Moscow; EU members resist call for return to “business as usual” with Russia

In the latest face-off with Russia, the head of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia yesterday demanded access to the conflict zones. “The EU monitors have not been able to enter the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. We keep knocking on their doors, we are carrying out patrols near their checkpoints,” said Hans Jorg Haber, head of the EU Monitoring Mission, on Wednesday. “We want to make it clear for everyone that our mandate should cover the entire territory of Georgia.”

Late last month, the EU monitors had another pointed confrontation with Moscow, after Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused them of ignoring alleged Georgian violations outside the conflict zones. Haber retorted that the EU mission had been “pleasantly surprised” by the lack of serious incidents and called allegations from Georgia’s region of South Ossetia province of violations “overblown.”

“We don’t get any details from the Russians. We just get general allegations,” Haber said of the Lavrov’s assertions. He added that the mission currently had to communicate with the Russians via the Swiss embassy in Tbilisi. “We literally don’t have any telephone number on their side so far. We have been asking for it and I will ask for it again.”

Haber also said Moscow was distorting the role of Georgian special forces. “Georgian special forces are not what Moscow understands. They’re lightly armed police units, not travelling in armoured vehicles, and needed to restore law and order in adjacent areas,” he said.

The escalating tensions with Moscow come on the eve of an EU-Russia Summit in Nice later this month. The EU is set to decide whether to resume negotiations on a partnership pact with Russia. However, at their emergency summit on September 1 following Russia’s invasion of Georgia, EU leaders had agreed to resume negotiations only if the terms of the six point ceasefire agreement had been met.

Russia is defying the ceasefire agreement on numerous accounts. In addition to denying EU monitors access to the conflict zones, Russia has (1) introduced massive additional troops into both regions,; (2) announced plans to maintain and expand its military forces and bases in both of those regions; (3) seized areas that the Government of Georgia controlled prior to the invasion including the district of Akhagori, a predominantly ethnic Georgian town, just 60 km from Tbilisi, that has never been a part of the conflict zone, and (4) forcibly evicted the Georgian po from the newly seized areas (Kodori gorge). And it has failed to rescind its recognition of the independence of the two Georgian territories.

Meanwhile, Russia also is maintaining more than double the pre-conflict legal limit of troops in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Haber, the head of the EU monitors, has said that since the EU does not recognize the independence of the two breakaway provinces, “there is no legal foundation” for the stationing of an announced 3,800 Russian regular troops to replace the 500 peacekeepers.

Moscow’s intransigence has galvanized several EU leaders to call on their counterparts to refuse a return to business as usual with Russia.

“We reiterate that under the continued occupation of Georgian territories it would be too early to resume talks on a new partnership agreement with Russia,” the presidents of Poland and

Lithuanian said in a joint declaration last weekend. "We underline that negotiations on the EU and Russia agreement should be renewed only when Russia withdraws its troops from Georgia to the positions held prior to August 7th."

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

EU hits back at Russia over Georgia monitoring -
<http://www.reuters.com/article/asiaCrisis/idUSLO88440>

Strained relations between Russians, EU monitors in Georgia –
<http://euobserver.com/13/26993>

EU calls on Russia to substantiate claims of attacks -
<http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/238466.eu-calls-on-russia-to-substantiate-claims-of-attacks.html>

EU says most Russian cease-fire allegations overblown -
<http://www.pennlive.com/newsflash/index.ssf?/base/international-30/1224860650231110.xml&storylist=international>