



## New base opens for National Guard

President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili opened new premises for the National Guard of the Defense Ministry on Dec. 26. At the opening ceremony, Saakashvili spoke about maintaining peace and the reforms that had recently been implemented at the Georgian Defense Ministry. "We have managed to carry out a very precise regrouping of our Armed Forces. During the previous months, very important -but maybe painful- reforms had been carried out,

ours - each Georgian man and woman will be a fighter for Georgia; they should be ready to fight for Georgia," Saakashvili said. "Each Georgian family, each of our streets, regions, villages, cities, each settlement and neighborhood, each house and family should become a bastion, a fortress of resistance," he continued. Saakashvili also underlined that Georgia was preparing for peace. "We want peace as never before...We are winning peace

itary units had been restored. At the new three-building complex, the top brass of the National Guard will be deployed. The new base of the National Guard consists of three main buildings - an administration center, a command office and a dining facility. The infrastructure also includes a sports facility complete with a training hall and stadium. Under the reforms carried out by the Defense Ministry of Georgia, the minimum age of reserv-



including a serious assessment of personnel. The level of preparedness of each combatant and each officer has been considerably raised," declared the president. President Saakashvili continued, expressing that each and every citizen of Georgia should be ready for defense and each family and house should "become a fortress of resistance" in the case of enemy attack. Speaking at a meeting with National Guard personnel in Tbilisi, in the presence of Defense Minister Bacho Akhalaia and Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Devi Chankotadze, the president explained that, "war is ongoing against Georgia," and "every day, threats are made against our country." It will be "a tragic mistake" to ignore these threats, Saakashvili added. "But the enemy should not have any illusions either," he went on. "Any new wide-scale attack will cross the fierce resistance of each Georgian soldier, officer and the entirety of the Georgian people." He said that the protection of Georgia should not only be the responsibility of its armed forces. "If this moment comes - and we should do all our best to avoid this moment, but every country should be ready for that, especially those in a situation similar to

and this irritates our enemy - it threatens peace because we are winning it. Our enemy should know that although it is losing the peace, it will also lose the war and therefore it should not launch a war," he said. "During this period, we were analyzing those mistakes that had been committed, and therefore the first and the foremost task was to eradicate them. As a result, we have a conceptually different reserve system oriented on the performance of its tasks," commented Defense Minister Bacho Akhalaia. Reconstruction of a new base for the National Guard began two months ago, and the old building belonging to one of the mil-

ists has risen to 27. Reservists will be divided into two categories - voluntary and compulsory. In a concept paper presented in October by the National Guard, the building of a new system of Georgia's reserve troops should be "oriented on quality, instead of quantity." The target of the first stage will be to have 3,000 well-trained reservists in four years, according to the document. The new vision of the Reserve Service has already been submitted to the public for discussion. After taking into account all the remarks made by the different sides, discussions will move into the next phase of the development of the draft law on the reserve system.



## Donating accommodations



Family members of the Georgian soldiers killed in the 2008 South Ossetia War were given accommodations in a multi-storied block of flats. The keys were handed over to 192 families. Defense Minister Bacho Akhalaia, accompanied by the family members, went to see the "Military Town" in the Isani-Samgori district of Tbilisi City. All the accommodations donated by the Ministry are of com-

parable space and consist of two rooms. The "Military Town" is completely finished and ready for families to move in. The quarters are provided with all the necessary equipment, meters and communications. The bathrooms and kitchens are supplied with all the required furnishings, including heating devices and stoves. "Construction of this 'Military Town' was first initiated for the officers, and a lot of things re-

main to be arranged yet, such as squares, gardens, a trading center... but we have managed to hand over apartments to each family of the deceased for their permanent possession. The house is ready, and the final step left in this process is to start settling people there," declared the Minister. The distribution of quarters was made on the basis of Lototron results with participation of family members.

## Defense conference in Gudauri

The Georgian Defense Ministry hosted the Defense Conference in Gudauri on December 16-17. Such conferences, which happen once or twice a year in Georgia, are imperative because they bring representatives of civil society and Georgian political leadership together in order to discuss ongoing defense reforms and perspectives on the future. The conference has been deemed a great example of the transparency of the Defense Ministry. Among the participants

of the conference were not only representatives of the Defense Ministry and Joint Staff, but also members of different governmental and non-governmental organizations, delegates of opposition parties, as well as diplomatic corps accredited to Georgia and the International Staff of NATO. "It is essential to get all those people together now and then to discuss where we are going, Georgian reforms, Georgia's relationship with NATO, Georgian

participation in Afghanistan, and so forth. We are having a very good conference and a very good exchange of views," mentioned Director of Georgian Security Analysis Center David Smith. The conference was composed of three panels, which were related to Georgia-NATO Relations, reforms in the defense sphere, strategic and conceptual documents, and the process of the National Security Review (NSR).

*Continued on p.4*

### INSIDE

- ▶ Interview with Deputy Defense Minister Nodar Kharshiladze
- ▶ Georgia and the new Afghanistan strategy
- ▶ Demining complete
- ▶ U.S. commander visits Defense Ministry
- ▶ New Base for Artillery Brigade
- ▶ Conflict reporting school

# Interview with Deputy Defense Minister Nodar Kharshiladze



**According to the Minister's order, the Manual of Planning, Programming and Budgeting System (PPBS) has been approved. What is the main purpose of elaboration of this strategic level document and what does it consider?**

As you already mentioned, this is a strategic level document that is mainly intended for the leadership of Defense Ministry of Georgia and generally describes the Planning, Programming and Budgeting System (PPBS). The manual largely explains the considerable importance of the Planning, Programming and Budgeting System and its main stages. The main goal of the document is to assist the leadership of the Defense Ministry in effective management and execution of the PPBS process. In general, the Planning, Programming and Budgeting process is very important for the Defense System, as it is a very effective tool for the decision-making process in planning and budgeting issues. This facilitates the precise identification of the priorities of the defense system, correct allocation of resources, and its effective execution.

**Since the war in August 2008, almost all conceptual documents have been revised. The first version of the PPBS Manual was developed in 2007. Had any amendments been made to this document?**

The Defense Ministry of Georgia launched implementation of the model – PPBS – for the first time in 2007, although the establishment of this system and the elaboration of its basics started

in 2006. Correspondingly, in 2007, the Defense Ministry already began to be guided by this document. Simultaneously, we were observing and permanently studying the pros and cons that emerged in the process and shared the experience of NATO member states in this field. Based on the comprehensive analysis of all aspects in 2009, the Defense Ministry started revision of the manual that incorporates accumulated practice and analysis, and maximally adjusted it to our reality.

The major difference between the manual that was adopted in 2007 and other documents that are under revision right now is the purpose of effective institutionalization of PPBS process. Namely, the new document gives concrete timeframes, describes the processes in the details, identifies the responsibilities of each structural unit, and defines the product that should be generated by each of them in a certain period of time. So, it applies the "input-output" approach. At the same time, the novelty of new PPBS manuals is that the concrete format will be indicated on requested information for each structural unit.

Thus, the new documents will be result-oriented, and they will really provide the guidelines for the personnel involved in PPBS process at all levels. The new manual will help us with the institutionalization of PPBS and its effective functioning. That will contribute to the proper reflection of the Georgian Armed Forces' priorities in the main development programs, appropriate allocation of resources and make the budgeting

process more transparent.

**How long have you been working on this document, and what stages have you passed through?**

We were working on development of the PPBS Manual from May to July of 2009. From July until October of 2009, the document passed through the necessary procedures for approval.

After analyzing the manual that was approved in 2007, we started the elaboration of the PPBS Manual and to analyze the experience received in the practical process of PPBS at the same time. We were attentively studying the experiences of partner countries. It should be mentioned that the process of working on the document was very intensive and it involved all the relevant structural units.

**Did you consider the experience of any partner nation in the process of Planning, Programming and Budgeting System development?**

In the process of the elaboration of the document, the Defense Ministry was actively cooperating with NATO member countries. I'd particularly mention the cooperation of Dutch, American, Romanian, British and Baltic colleagues. Consultations with NATO experts were also very important. Although, I want to stress here that our purpose was not just to copy the concrete examples unconsciously, but to establish the system based on valuable experience shared by our colleagues, considering our own resources and existing realities.

**The purpose of the Planning, Programming and Budgeting System**

**Manual is to support the institutionalization of mid and long term defense planning systems. The process is cyclical in nature and it is very interesting. What phases does it include?**

The Planning Programming and Budgeting System is cyclical, and therefore consists of three main phases: planning, programming and budgeting. The planning phase implies the revision of existing national and internal strategic documents aimed at setting the concrete tasks and development of the priorities for the Armed Forces. During the programming phase, the priorities are reflected in the main development programs, which are followed by the final stage of drafting the defense budget/annual procedures of resumption. The budget is drawn up mostly according to existing development programs. The cyclical nature of the process means that during the three-year cycle of PPBS, the first year is dedicated to planning, the second year to the development of programs for the next budget year, and additionally for the next three years. During the same year, after working out the programs, the draft version of the budget is drawn up. The budget is performed during the last, third year. As I have already mentioned, the process is recurring.

**How will the Planning, Programming and Budgeting System assist the implementation of the Defense Ministry's priorities and achieve interoperability of the Georgian Armed Forces with NATO?**

The philosophy of the mentioned model is that in case of effective functioning, the mechanisms of management, resource allocation, decision making and execution processes are well organized. This would mean that the organization performs its obligations effectively. Introducing this model, the Defense Ministry strives to create the management system that will guarantee the proper identification and reflection of priorities, planning of its terms and stages and its implementation according to the schedules in order to get the desired result. This is the method of organization that considerably diminishes risks of spontaneous and impulsive decisions and minimizes the chances of inefficient exploitation of resources. Institutionalization of PPBS will strengthen the defense system of Georgia, increasing its efficiency and transparency, which leads to full compliance with NATO standards and their recommendations.

**Who is in charge of managing and controlling the process, and who is re-**

**sponsible for its effective implementation?**

At the strategic level, the general coordination of the Planning, Programming and Budgeting System is provided by the highest management body of the Defense Ministry – the Decision Making Board, chaired by the Deputy Defense Minister. As to the strategic-operational level, the responsible body for effective implementation and control of PPBS is the Management Team chaired by the Head of Policy and Planning Department, which also includes the heads of various structural units. These two bodies serve as the forum for discussions on development programs and concrete issues, which provide the efficiency of decision making and the Planning, Programming and Budgeting System.

**One of the principles of the Budgeting phase is transparency. To what extent will the budget discussions be available to the public, and against who will be the participating structural units accountable?**

Budget discussion procedures should be maximally transparent for the public and media. Information – except for classified information – about the approved budget will be published and therefore will be available for society. At the same time, the major guarantor for the transparency of the defense budget is the Georgian Parliament, which considers and approves the budget. The Parliament has the effective mechanisms of the control of the defense budget in the framework of the Defense and Security Committee Trust Group.

**As we are aware, the Defense Budget for 2010 will be reduced. In your opinion, what kind of impact will it have on the defense reformation process?**

Reduction of the budget will not hinder the reformation process at the Defense Ministry. Considering the fact that during the previous years the sums that were allocated for defense system were spent on creation/reconstruction of military infrastructure – and that requires lots of financial resources – and currently all long-term investment projects are completed, it is natural that the budget for the next year does not include these expenses. So, in the conditions of limited resources, more focus will be made on improvement of financial management. Bearing in mind all the above mentioned facts, the reforms will continue in the directions like: civilian and military personnel management systems, a resource management system, combat readiness and the development of critically important capabilities.

## Demining complete

Mine-clearing activities are complete in Shida Kartli region. The village area of Megvrekisi was rid of dangerous and hazardous explosives. The demining work on the last village was carried out by international humanitarian organization The HALO Trust in coordination with the Defense Ministry of Georgia. Specialists cleared the village territory of about 270.6 hectares from 282 explosive materials. All cleared villages were officially assigned to the local authorities. In total, 18 villages were completely cleared of various hazardous explosives.

The now safe area of the village was personally inspected by Defense Minister Nodar Kharshiladze and the Ambassador of the U.S. to Georgia, John R.

Bass. The official event was also attended by Shida Kartli Governor Lado Vardzelashvili.

"In the aftermath of the war in August 2008, the local population of the village became exposed to many threats directly related to the unexploded materials discovered onsite. We have invested every effort to take care of each villager, minimizing the danger as much as possible. The majority of territory is completely demined," declared Kharshiladze.

Demining activities were finished in Shindisi in the region of Gori as well. The specialists from The HALO Trust removed the remnants of cluster bombs from the affected area of 95.5 hectares of the village. The demined territory was

officially transferred to Defense Ministry leadership.

It should be noted that the International Organization Information Management and Mine Action Programs (IMMAP, U.S.) operating in Georgia has ensured monitoring of humanitarian demining activities in different villages of Shida Kartli.

Mine-removing operations in Shida Kartli were carried out thanks to funds from the U.S. Since August of 2008, the U.S. has earmarked roughly \$6.7 million for The HALO Trust-led program in Georgia, out of which \$4.3 million was disbursed for clearing the entire territory of Shida Kartli affected by the war last year.



# Georgia and the new Afghanistan strategy

*“Now we are proud to stand - and fight - alongside you” – Michael Saakashvili*

As it is often mentioned, after Sept. 11, 2001, the world -and particularly how we wage war - changed. Conventional warfare has been replaced by terrorism and asymmetric, local battles. Terrorism is a potential threat of security not only for concrete states including the United States and European countries; it presents danger for the whole of international society. Georgia, as a part of the civilized world community, participates with all its available resources in every initiative aiming to strengthen world peace.

The U.S. and Georgia are partners at the front lines, fighting against extremism worldwide. Now, the most important ground of this battle is Afghanistan, where the U.S. -both independently and in accordance to the NATO-led ISAF program- operates to reduce Taliban influence in the country. Last week, President Barack Obama announced that he would send 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan in coming months, in hopes that he could “bring this war to a successful conclusion.” He laid out a strategy that would seek to finally defeat Taliban insurgents and provide stability for the region. In the frameworks of his new approach, Obama appealed to the allies for deeper participation and fur-

ther contribution, declaring, “This is not just America’s war.”

Among those who have enthusiastically reacted to Obama’s call was Georgia. Sending troops to Afghanistan is often seen by Western politicians and influential media sources as another declaration of Georgia’s NATO aspirations, and a show of its commitment to join the alliance. In numerous articles of popular American and European publications, Georgia’s involvement in the new Afghan strategy is always highlighted. Of the 1,000 soldiers Georgia plans to send to Afghanistan, 800 of them will be deployed into Helmand Province with U.S. Marines, where some of the most intense fighting has occurred. This contribution makes Georgia the highest per-capita troop contributor to NATO’s operation in Afghanistan. This deed is praised by NATO and U.S. officials as a courageous and generous decision. Georgia is participating in other ways as well. American military experts have concluded that Georgia is a safe and cost-effective transit route, and so the U.S. and NATO have already started using Georgian ports, rail lines and roads to transport nonlethal supplies to Afghanistan.

A letter by the president of Georgia was recently published in various overseas publications, including the Daily Telegraph and the Wall Street Journal,



Georgian military servicemen in Afghanistan

which clearly identified and answered common questions about Georgia’s impetus to join in the efforts in Afghanistan. Citing the words of Obama, President Mikheil Saakashvili explained in his letter that violent extremism endangers all nations that subscribe to the principles of liberal democracy, tolerance, gender equality, and the rule of law. He writes, “Those principles made America the target on 9/11. Spain was hit on March 11, 2004, and Britain on July 7, 2005. Any of our countries could be next. So we have a shared interest in preventing Afghanistan from again becoming a safe haven for extremists and terrorists who might target any of our states.”

Expressing gratefulness for the U.S. and Europe’s support to our country, President Saakashvili believes that

Georgia has the ability to support the effort in Afghanistan not only by deploying troops, but by providing post-war assistance as well. He noted that the fight against extremism and terrorism cannot be won by military means alone. Building institutions, strengthening democracy and raising the standard of education of the country are equally - if not more - important. Here, given recent experience, Georgia has something to contribute. “Our experience gives us confidence that success is possible on the political and civil fronts in Afghanistan, and Georgia will do everything possible to help strengthen Afghanistan’s institutions. Our reform know-how could help in training Afghanistan’s police forces and other civil servants,” declares Mr. Saakashvili. He supposes that this effort is crucial for achieving a trans-

parent government, providing long-term stability for Afghanistan and the entire region.

“Even though Georgia is not yet a NATO member—and while we know our path to membership may be long—we see ourselves as firmly allied in purpose and values with the U.S. and the transatlantic community. But this cannot just be rhetoric or an empty affiliation. Being part of such a community, even as a small country, we feel obliged and honored to contribute to our common security,” writes Saakashvili. These words explain why this small nation - having recently survived invasion, still continuing the struggle against annexation, and ethnically cleansed of tens of thousands of its citizens - is still going to fight in Afghanistan.

Ana Alania



Chaplain blesses the Georgian soldiers before deployment to Afghanistan

## New Base for Artillery Brigade

The new location of the First Artillery Brigade of the Georgian Armed Forces (GAF) was opened in the beginning of December. President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili, Defense Minister Bacho Akhalaia, and Chief of Joint Staff of the GAF Major General Devi Chankotadze attended the opening ceremony. Saakashvili congratulated sol-

diers with the opening of the new base and spoke about ongoing modifications in the defense system. He emphasized the strategic importance of the participation of Georgian troops in the NATO peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan. Through participation in such missions, Georgian servicemen will be given the opportunity to gain valuable experience.

“There is no doubt that this operation contains risks, and there are no illusions about this, but all of you present here are courageous and are ready to take these risks. We know that after the Russian aggression, more volunteers expressed the desire to serve than before the violence. We are proud of those who have battled and made the ultimate sacrifice for the homeland,” the president said.

Saakashvili stressed the fact that members of the GAF must familiarize themselves with new military practices, stating, “The Georgian Armed Forces must be well-prepared, know much about new technologies and have a good command of foreign languages ... without having these skills it is impossible to perform modern warfare, as the modern battle field contains advanced technologies.”

“It is important that we were able to rebuild infrastructure ruined during the war. This is a new base for the First Artillery Brigade, which was created when the old artillery brigade was divided into two new brigades after the war,” the Defense Minister said.

The new base was built in compliance with international standards in the course of eight months. The complex of the base includes barracks, a canteen, a training centre, a gym, a stadium, a medical centre and an administrative building. The infrastructure buildings are equipped with cutting edge technologies.



## U.S. commander visits Defense Ministry



Georgian Minister of Defense Bacho Akhalaia met with the Commander of the U.S. Air Force in Europe, General Roger A. Brady. At the meeting, they highlighted in depth the cooperation priorities during 2010 and 2011 between the U.S. and Georgia. The assistance provided by the U.S. in the development of the Georgian air force was particularly emphasized. As Brady stated during his visit, “Georgia is one of the closest and most reliable partners the United States has, and the incredible support demonstrated by the Georgian Armed Forces over the years in Iraq and its participation in the ISAF operation in Afghanistan deserves the highest appreciation. Partnership and friendship be-

tween the two countries makes us more powerful and effective in resolving the challenges faced by all of us.”

“Air defense is significant for the security of Georgia, with a particular emphasis on military technical equipment. We welcome all the trends determined as a result of ongoing bilateral consultations. One of the priority issues specified by both Georgia and the U.S. is the professional military education and training of the Georgian Armed Forces,” declared Bacho Akhalaia.

The 2010 Cooperation Plan discusses the possibility of reforming the National Defense Academy, as well as the prospective involvement of the Georgian Armed Forces in U.S. educational programs.

# Conflict reporting school



The first course of the trainings conducted by the Conflict Reporting School has finished. The journalists participating in the course were granted with certificates. By the decision of an evaluation committee, recognition for Best Coverage went to journalists Giorgi Tukhareli and Aleksandre Gabelia from TV Company Sakartvelo, along with journalists Levan Tabidze and Davit Zautashvili from Imedi Media Holding. They were given money as an award. The award ceremony was attended by representatives of the Defense Ministry and the Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), as well as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to Georgia, H.E. Denis Keefe.

Unfortunately, many journalists died in the course of reporting in the 2008 Russia-Georgian war. The school was conceived after the Russian military aggression in August of 2008. The Conflict Reporting School was opened on December 5<sup>th</sup>, through a joint initiative of the Ministry of Defense of Georgia and the Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR). At the first stage, TV groups were chosen from 6 broadcasting companies such as Sakartvelo, Ime-

di, Rustavi 2, Public Broadcasting, Adjara and Alania. Journalists and cameramen from the aforementioned companies attended trainings at Sachkhere Mountain-Training School. Participants of the project tried to get accustomed to the life of a typical soldier at the military base.

At 06:00 the Georgian song "Arkhoti" was played to wake up the journalists, but without success. Sergeant Balakhadze had to wake them up. For an hour, participants went marching and performed their morning exercises. Though the rigorous day was a challenge for the journalists, by the end, all of the attendees better understood the necessity of resilience and strong physical readiness for their profession.

The journalists were also instructed how to operate in crisis situations. They studied how to work with cameras, prepare topics and complete other tasks in a crisis environment. Nino Ivanishvili and cameraman Davit Chkhikvishvili from international news agency Reuters trained the course attendees in drafting all the necessary material according to international journalism standards. The journalists were given lessons by the psychologist Jana Javakhishvili on how

to maintain their professionalism even in times of great stress.

At the same time, media representatives were trained in a number of military disciplines such as the classification of military ranks and weapons, Medical Self Aid in the battlefield, mine differentiation and security rules. Special attention was given to media security, stability operations, as well as conventional and non-conventional ways of fighting.

At the end of the training course, Sachkhere Mountain-training School Commander, Major Malkhaz Merlan, staged a simulated rescue operation with his personnel. In the scenario, a foreigner was kidnapped by terrorists and the military had to liberate him. The course participants had an opportunity to apply the knowledge they acquired during the month-long period of trainings. On the basis of the demonstrative operation, the winner of the project was finally revealed.

During the trainings at the school, journalists had an opportunity to meet and converse with high-level officials from the Ministry of Defense and Joint Staff. Bilateral conversation proceeded in a friendly environment, discussing

topics pertaining to cooperation between media and military institutions. They agreed that mutual support and coordination in a crisis environment was particularly important.

Living at the military base was an arduous undertaking for the journalists, but they became better aware of the demanding life of a soldier and made many new friends. "It was a very important seminar for me, and it was a very realistic experience. We now know how to work safely and professionally at the same time," declared one of the winners of the project, Imedi journalist Levan Tabidze.

"Although I'm the winner of this competition, I think I can still improve. We adopted many useful skills to apply during emergency and crisis situations, and became familiar with international journalistic standards," stated another project winner, journalist from TV Company "Sakartvelo", Giorgi Tukhareli.

"This is the first course of its kind, and it appears to have been quite informative and useful for journalists. Of course, we could not give them comprehensive knowledge, but we managed to provide the basic material indispensable for the efficiency of their profession," declared Reuters senior producer Nino Ivanishvili.

The Embassy of Great Britain in Georgia paid particular attention to the Conflict Reporting School. In the course of the training, Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Great Britain in Conflict Issues, Kate White, visited the

school to meet the students. Even Denis Keefe, UK Ambassador to Georgia, took part in the simulated operation staged by the course attendees. Keefe agreed that this kind of course is very crucial for journalists in order to be perfectly ready for reacting in crisis environment.

"According to the comments and reactions of journalists, the school has proven to be quite successful. They have acquired knowledge here that is not taught in any of the educational establishments," mentioned Institute for War and Peace Reporting director in the Caucasus region Shoren Ratiani.

Salome Makharadze, the Head of Public Affairs Department of the Defense Ministry, commented regarding the importance of the school, saying that the goal of the training has ultimately been achieved. "We made some sample coverage in advance, but the coverage prepared following the course turned out to be much better according to the experts' evaluation," Makharadze commented. "Still, there are many nuances which should be taken into consideration. We, the course organizers, will deal with the good and the bad of the course, and prepare another course according to what experience we gain next summer."

The review process was complete on Dec. 13. The project was implemented thanks to the joint funds of the Defense Ministry of Georgia and the MFA of Great Britain.

*Eka Gakhokidze*



## Defense conference in Gudauri

The discussion of NATO-Georgia relations and a dialogue about Georgia's participation in the ISAF peacekeeping mission were on the top of the agenda of the conference. Chief of Military Education and Combat Training Department of the Joint Staff MJR, Zezva Liparteliani, informed participants about the current situation and plans related to the participation of the Georgian military contingent in the Afghanistan mission. Defense Attaché of the Federal Republic of Germany LTC Christian Farkhondze talked about the importance of detailed information regarding the preparation of the Georgian Battalion that will be deployed in Afghanistan.

"For me as a defense attaché, it is very important to have details about the exercising, training and preparation of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, which together with the marines will be deployed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March next year in Afghanistan in a dangerous environment in the province of Helmand. We saw very good preparation of the U.S. comrades of arms and we are pretty convinced that this battalion, together with the battalion that is already with the French contingent in



Kabul, is very well prepared for the mission in Afghanistan," declared the defense attaché.

Deputy Minister Nikoloz Vashakidze informed the participants of the conference about the existing NATO-Georgia relationship, the Annual National Program and the importance of the NATO-Georgia Commission. One of the topics of discussion was the reduced budget of Defense Ministry. Deputy Minister Ni-

koloz Vashakidze gave details to the public about the plans of Defense Ministry in the conditions of limited financial resources.

"The maintenance of combat readiness and the continuation of the reform process are very important. We should underline several cases. During recent years, the government allocated important financial resources for implementing fundamental reforms of defense. Our

organization has utilized this money to build strategic infrastructure and put it in long-term investments that are already finished," stated the Deputy Minister. With effective financial management, Vashakidze is convinced that even given the budgets cuts, the Defense Ministry will not have to slow down the process of reforms as the Ministry will not have the big expenditures of recent years.

Participants reviewed the process of reforms related to the institutional development of the defense system and the improvement of defense capabilities. The most interesting subject for the guests was the new Reserve System.

The event was also open to the opposition parties, which was of particular importance. As Mr. Nika Laliashvili, member of Christian Democratic Movement of Georgia mentioned, the organized event was very significant, because it is now obvious that the Georgian Defense Ministry introduces political will for transparency. "Today's discussion includes not only the Defense Ministry but also NGOs, international representatives, diplomatic corps and so on. I think that this meeting displayed some positive signs of reform within the Defense Ministry," said the Member of Parliament. He further spoke about the effectiveness of the Georgian Armed Forces, mentioning that if all the issues currently drafted on paper move into action and are reflected in the everyday works of the Defense Ministry, Georgia will have satisfied the NATO standards for armed forces.