



Today Defence

Defense minister attends NATO ministerial



The Slovak capital hosted the Informal Meeting of NATO Defense Ministers Oct. 22-23. NATO defense ministers gathered in Bratislava together with their counterparts from non-NATO ISAF-contributing nations and agreed on priorities for Afghanistan in late 2009 and early 2010. They also discussed a strategic concept on how to position the Afghan forces as the country's major security guarantor in the future.

Together with members of the Georgian delegation, Defense Minister Bacho Akhalaia arrived in Bratislava to take part in the NATO Defense Ministerial and hold talks with his counterparts. The meeting was chaired by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. Also in attendance were Admiral Giampaolo Di Paola, NATO Military Committee Chairman and Supreme Allied Commander Europe, Admiral James Stavridis and ISAF Commander, General Stanley McChrystal. ISAF Commander, General McChrystal briefed the participants on the situation in Afghanistan and his assessment of the mission.

Akhalaia delivered a speech on Georgia's forthcoming contribution to ISAF operations.

"My country fully realizes that ISAF is NATO's number-one priority and the most difficult mission in the history of alliance," he said. "The establishment of peace and security in Afghanistan remains our common challenge and we should join our efforts to ensure the successful accomplishment of the alliance mission in Afghanistan."

Akhalaia added that Georgia plans to deploy a company-sized unit under French command already in November and a battalion under U.S. command in

spring 2010. In addition, two liaison officers will be sent within a Turkish detachment in next spring.

"We are also continuing to deploy a Georgian military doctor in Afghanistan as part of the Lithuanian Provisional Reconstruction Team," he said. "We are ready to share our experience and provide the Afghan National Army with the appropriate training and support."

Akhalaia expressed his gratitude to France, Lithuania, Turkey and the U.S. for their continuous assistance to the Georgian armed forces to improve deployment capabilities and accelerate deployment processes in Afghanistan.

"Georgia has constantly demonstrated its strong will to contribute to global security and agrees that assisting the alliance in building a stable and secure Afghanistan is in the common interest of the international community," he said. "The Georgian nation as a member of this community stands ready to be an important contributor in main-

taining a secure world."

Rasmussen also noted his appreciation for Georgia's participation in the mission at the news conference.

"First of all, we appreciate very much the Georgian commitment, the Georgian contribution," he said. "It testifies to Georgia's strong engagement with our alliance. That is a very important signal. Of course, it is also a positive step in the framework of NATO-Georgia cooperation. And in addition to that, we welcome all contributions to our mission in Afghanistan because also from a military point of view we need these contributions. So the Georgian decision is highly appreciated. We welcome that."

In the framework of the Bratislava ministerial, Akhalaia held meetings with his Swedish, Slovak, Norwegian and Canadian counterparts. Bilateral cooperation prospects were discussed between the sides. The informal meeting of the defense ministers ended Oct. 23.

Thea Chonishvili



Georgian Defense Minister during official photo session

Training begins for peacekeeping mission

Military exercises commenced under the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) at the Vaziani Military Base to support Georgia's participation in peacekeeping operations. The two-week security exercises referred to as "Immediate Response" are conducted jointly by the U.S. and Georgian armed forces. The exercises are designed to promote interoperability of military forces in Georgia during the international security assistance mission in Afghanistan.

During the exercises, the training will focus on preparing the Georgian armed forces for holding counterterrorist operations with the U.S. military in Afghanistan.

"The U.S. expresses its gratitude to Georgia and the armed forces for contributing to the operations in Afghanistan," the U.S. Embassy to Georgia said in a statement.

Defense Minister Bacho

Akhalaia recently underscored the importance of Georgia's participation in the peacekeeping operations. During his speech at the NATO Defense Ministerial, Akhalaia said Georgia fully realizes "that the ISAF is NATO's number-one priority and the most difficult mission in the history of alliance." He added that establishing peace and security in Afghanistan remains a common challenge for the international community.

"We should join our efforts to ensure the successful accomplishment of the mission," he said.

The opening ceremony of the international "Immediate Response" training was held at military base Oct. 26. The ceremony opened to the Georgian and U.S. national anthems. The servicemen and invited guests observed a minute of silence in honor of fallen soldiers. A Georgian Orthodox priest and U.S. chaplain blessed the individuals

participating in the training.

Gen. Carter Ham also arrived in Georgia to get acquainted with the Georgian-U.S. military training operation Immediate Response 2009. As U.S. Fourth Army general and U.S.-European Command commander, Ham visited the Vaziani Military Base and attended the launch of the military exercises. Ham was hosted by Deputy Defense Minister Nodar Kharshiladze and Chief of the Joint Staff, Maj. Gen. Devi Tchankotadze.

Issues related to the defense cooperation between Georgia and the U.S. were widely discussed, including an assistance program in this field and cooperative activities implemented and planned by the U.S.-European Command. The parties also held talks on the participation of the Georgian contingent in the NATO-led operations in Afghanistan and Georgia's NATO integration.



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Georgia pushes new reservist concept

Georgia has developed a new reservist concept based on the "smaller is better" principle, which will be implemented in 2010. The new system will utilize the experiences of NATO member and other partner nations. The "National Guard Vision" document will outline priorities for creating new reserves, holding trainings and launching new military education programs.

Defense Today held an interview with National Guard Department head Zurab Arsoshvili to learn more about the initiative.

Defense Today: The Defense Ministry has already started working on the "National Guard Vision" document. What is the reason behind the new vision?

Zurab Arsoshvili: Georgians know that we did not call in our reservists after the 2008 August war. Our thorough analysis of the previous system's mistakes and shortcomings created the necessity for a new and more flexible vision for the national reserves.

Q: A major motivation for the new system was the shortcomings that were identified in the Georgian-Russian war. What were these shortcomings and what measures will be taken to avoid them in the future?

A: I absolutely agree that there were mistakes, but these were not the fault of the reservists. The reservists who we

called upon are all heroes. Most of the shortcomings concerned management, control, registration and orders. Reservist squad commanders, companies and battalions will no longer be reservists.

Commanders will be selected from the permanent personal of the National Guard. They must be highly skilled and well-prepared professionals. Another important issue is maintaining an accurate planning and accurate registration system, which will be based on territorial principles. It is important to establish an advanced program to prepare reservists.

Q: The "National Guard New Vision" has already been discussed with NGO representatives. What will be civil society's role in the working process?

A: We initiated the new plans after



discussions with NGOs. We submitted our vision to NGOs and asked them to share their thoughts, as their professional views are of very important to us. After their detailed analysis, we are waiting for their recommendations and questions.

Q: The new vision has become an issue of public discussion. What is the next phase?

A: The next step is to deal with infrastructure, which will help us prepare to receive reservists after the bill is affirmed.

Q: Does legislation also have to be amended?

A: It is essential to amend the law on reservists. There are many laws needing amendments. Every amendment will be presented by the Defense Ministry.

Q: What is needed for the reserve system to work properly? Where are you going to prepare reservists? Are you planning to use existing infrastructure, or are you going to build

new reservist bases?

A: We are planning to use existing infrastructure. We think the reservists should train in the field. The National Guard's permanent personal will ensure the reserve system works effectively.

Q: The Defense Ministry is drawing on experience from which countries while designing this new system?

A: We reviewed the reserve systems in many countries. We are not planning to copy one model. We are stressing aspects of the Israeli, Swiss and British systems.

Q: When will the new reserve system begin and what will you offer to future reservists?

A: It is very important to note that the new reservists will be paid. We are thinking of presenting the bill to parliament late this year. If everything goes well, we will receive first flow of reservists in 2010.

Q: How do you intend to moti-

vate personnel?

A: We think that the reserve system should be voluntary. Again I would like to stress that the reservists will receive a salary and social benefits.

Q: What will be the function of the reservists in ensuring national security issues?

A: The Joint Staff will identify the functions of the reservists after they receive military training.

Q: How will the new reserve system strengthen the country's defense potential and popularize the military?

A: The military must be popularized. The reserve system is considered as a transitional period for people who want a look at in the army's current life, armament and directions. The system aims to train new soldiers and retrain those who forgot their skills. It will help reservists become members of the regular army and serve there.

Irakli Gurgenidze



Sachkhere Mountain Training School awaits PfP status

Georgia is a mountainous region and considering its landscape, a major priority for the country is establishing a highly professional mountain unit. The first mountain battalion was established in 1991 upon the initiative of national hero Besik Kutateladze. In August 2006, the Sachkhere Mountain Training School was established on the base of the Sixteenth Mountain Battalion. Today, the mountain school fully meets international standards in terms of its infrastructure, equipment and instructors.

In the framework of the Partnership for Peace Program, the Sachkhere Mountain Training School provides trainings for international students. Besides international training courses, the school offers training for members of the Georgian armed forces in a range of specialties. It is difficult for any military unit to move in diverse terrains and conduct military operations without the appropriate knowledge, skills and necessary equipment. The Sachkhere Mountain Training School provides training in this direction to prepare as many military servicemen in mountain expertise as possible. In the future each brigade will have its mountain service responsible for leading the unit in mountainous terrains.

The Sachkhere Mountain Training School carried out summer and winter training courses. The summer courses last three to five weeks. The basic course is conducted on training sites in the Sa-

chkhkhere region. Longer courses are conducted in the Kazbegi settlement and envisage climbing the Mkinvartsveri glacier, which is 5,046 above sea level. Winter courses are carried out in the Bakuriani or Gudauri settlements. The military servicemen learn skiing, creating shelters in the snow and mountain-tactical fire exercises.

The complete training course of professional mountain instructors lasts three years. This means that if a military serviceman wants to become a professional mountaineer he must pass through a three-year preparation course including summer and winter trainings. Upon finishing the course military servicemen are granted the status of instructor and can train other soldiers.

Instructors at the school are professional mountaineers. With the support of their French colleagues, they passed various stages of training over three years.

The equipment at the school is French and Italian and includes all safety components.

As the management of the Sachkhere Mountain Training School explained, the facility can train 900 students in one year, or 100-150 persons during on each course. Mountain training courses are conducted on four sites prepared by French and Georgian instructors. On the natural training sites, it is possible to learn fixed rope climbing and river crossing simultaneously. The school has the resources to conduct courses in En-

glish, French, Turkish and Russian.

The school has not received PfP status yet, but it has already hosted various international trainings. The first international training was held in 2006 for military servicemen from Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and Armenia. They passed

through both summer and winter courses. The training was a great success and stirred immense interest. The Ukrainian military servicemen attended the training course in 2008.

The school is actively working to streamline the facility and enhance in-

ternational cooperation. The school has modernized the curriculum. Its material and technical base and infrastructure have also been updated. Artificial construction has been added to the school facilities where a training wall for mountain climbing of various difficulties is located.

In the framework of bilateral cooperation, representatives of various foreign countries are visiting the school. They all express interest to conduct trainings at the Sachkhere base.

In early October, Sachkhere Mountain Training School Commander Major Malkhaz Merlani paid an official visit to Austria. The Austrian city of Baden hosted the tenth conference of PfP educational center commanders.

The conference is held annually to improve coordination between PfP centers. During the meeting the participants shared their experience and developed a joint action plan. Participants come from both NATO member and partner countries. Georgian representatives took part in the conference for the first time. The commander of the Sachkhere Mountain Training School made a presentation about the school, curriculum, programs, training sites, material and technical base and equipment. Commander of the NATO School, Col. Baines positively evaluated the work of the Sachkhere Mountain Training school and promised to continue cooperation for further development of the school.

Eka Gakhokidze



NATO Days 2009

A NATO delegation traveled to Tbilisi for the "NATO Days 2009" event organized by the NATO Information Center Oct. 5-9.

Among the attendees were Special NATO Representative of the Secretary General to the South Caucasus and Central Asia Robert Simmons, Euro-Atlantic Integration and Partnership Directorate James Mackey, NATO Public Diplomacy Division representative Michel Duray, Information Officer for the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan Benedicte Borel, and NATO Defense Policy and Planning Division representative Dave Johnson.

This was the second such event organized with the support of the defense, foreign and European and Euro-Atlantic integration ministries, NATO Caucasus Liaison Office and Latvian Embassy. The goal was to inform the Georgian public about NATO and its future plans, and also to show the country's strong will to become a member of NATO.

At the opening ceremony at the Courtyard Marriott, Georgian governmental representatives, NGOs and different embassies welcomed the guests to Georgia. Information Center on NATO Director Tengiz Gogotishvili opened the event.

Different events were scheduled during the week, including a Tbilisi-Brussels video conference discussing the

importance of the NATO mission in Afghanistan.

Representatives of the government, diplomatic corps and experts discussed the issue with Crisis Management Policy Section head at the NATO Headquarters Mihai Carp.

Students from different universities were also involved in NATO Week. A lecture about NATO was delivered to students at Ivane Javakhsishvili Tbilisi State University by Dr. Dave Johnson who spoke about the new strategic concept of the alliance, international security challenges and NATO-Georgia relations.

Another event took place at the Tbilisi Art Academy. The Information Center on NATO opened a NATO Hall in which an exhibition of Soviet-era NATO cartoons was presented.

On Oct. 8, Robert Simmons arrived in Georgia to evaluate the implementation of the Annual National Plan. He met with representatives of the Georgian government, including Defense Minister Bachana Akhalaia, Foreign Affairs Minister Grigol Vashadze, Foreign Affairs Deputy Minister Giga Bokeria, and European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Minister Giorgi Baramidze.

As part of NATO Week, Simmons met parliamentary and non-parliamentary opposition representatives. The round-table meeting was attended by over 12 party leaders. The politicians

reiterated once again their support for Georgia's NATO aspirations. Simmons presented the alliance's position to participants. The meeting was attended by ambassadors and NGO representatives.

Besides meeting with the opposition, this was the first time Simmons and other guests from NATO held a conference with representatives of Georgia's diverse national communities. The participants discussed minority challenges related to the Georgian language and their freedom in political, cultural and educational issues.

In a personal interview, Simmons reiterated his support for Georgia and said that at the Bucharest Summit it was decided that Georgia will become a NATO member. According to Simmons, it is not right to politicize the issue of the country not receiving a Membership Action Plan. Georgia has its own tools, he said, such as the Annual National Plan and the NATO-Georgia Commission.

"According to our information, the international evaluation mission was satisfied with the steps Georgia implemented during the year within the Annual National Plan. This implies Georgia is getting closer to NATO standards," said Foreign Affairs Deputy Minister David Jalagania.

Tbilisi was not the only city that participated in NATO Week. In Kutaisi, a NATO delegation opened "NATO Cor-



Soldiers blessed before heading to Afghanistan

A ceremony dedicated to the completion of preparatory training for the ISAF-peacekeeping operation in Afghanistan was held at the Second Infantry Brigade in Senaki. Father Jioseb gave

his blessing to the soldiers and wished them every success in the accomplishment of their mission.

The military training was conducted in full observance of NATO standards.

Military servicemen from the Twenty-Third Battalion Company participated in the two-month training.

Toward the end of the ceremony, the soldiers observed a minute of silence to commemorate the servicemen who sacrificed their lives for Georgia's unity and integrity.

The ceremony was held in the presence of the Defense Ministry's leadership, Chief of Joint Staff Devi Chankodadze, Ground Forces Commander Shmagi Telia and Deputy Commander Aleksandre Kiknadze. Family members of servicemen also attended the event.

"Participation in the international peacekeeping operations is associated with securing peace in our country," Kiknadze said. "It is a matter of dignity to strive for the maintenance of peace throughout the world and what is more important, Georgian peacekeepers will undertake the fulfillment of the peace mission in Afghanistan properly trained and blessed."



ner" at Akaki Tsereteli Kutaisi State University, where a former Russian military base once stood. They also met students and discussed NATO-Georgia relations. The NATO Information Center also presented to Afghanistan-bound soldiers the new book, "10 Years of Georgian Units in International Peacekeeping Operations." NATO representative Michel Duray delivered a speech.

During a visit to Batumi, Adjarian students released balloons across the Turkish border to demonstrate the country's will to become a NATO member. NATO guests visited a new office of Information Center on NATO in the city. The delegation met students at the Naval Institute and discussed NATO's cur-

rent agenda and the Latvian experience with NATO membership.

NATO Week was also held in Gurjaani. Simmons and other delegates met students in the Shalikhvili Brothers Museum and discussed NATO-Georgia relations. NATO representatives had the opportunity to get a taste of Kakheti and its culture.

NATO Days 2009 was officially closed at the State Theater of Music and Drama. At the closing ceremony, Simmons addressed the audience and evaluated the week positively. NATO delegation representatives, Georgian government representatives, ambassadors and experts participated in the ceremony.

Sela Kasradze

Mine-clearing activities are over

Zemo Nikozi in the Shida Kartli village was transferred to the local authorities after de-mining. The Defense Ministry's leadership arrived in the village this week to inspect the diffused area of the village. The specialists exploded demonstratively the last mine on the territory in the presence of media representatives. Deputy Minister Nikoloz Dzimtseishvili and journalists attended. Due to the 2008 August war, the village was exposed to many threats endangering the local population.

"We did our best to take care of each resident," Dzimtseishvili said. "The ma-

majority of the area has already been cleared."

In the wake of the Georgia-Russian military conflict, the mines made Zemo Nikozi far too dangerous to be inhabited by the local population. Mine-clearing activities were carried out by Norwegian specialists from the international humanitarian organization Norwegian Peoples Aid in coordination with the Defense Ministry.

The ministry earlier concluded memorandums on "Supporting Humanitarian Clearing Activities" with international organizations one month after the end of the 2008 August war.



How do you get from offensive weapons to supporting agricultural development in Georgia?



Countering the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction is a popular topic for modern day diplomats. I used to think that this basically equalled high level negotiations at the UN, sanctions against rogue states, and in the worse case scenario the threat of military action. So I was surprised to be told that I'd be working on counter proliferation issues in Georgia, and supporting activity on the ground. I was also surprised at the level of interest in the UK, with our Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office paying close attention.

Georgia's Soviet past is no big secret, but the Institute of Plant Immunity (IPI) in Kobuleti was. Established in

1959, the Institute bypassed official structures and reported directly to Moscow. The Institute focussed on the development of plant pathogens that could be used in warfare. The Institute worked to develop that weapons could severely damage staple food crops such as wheat. As the Soviet Union collapsed, key resources and funding were removed from the Institute, and its scientists were left to fend for themselves, presenting a serious weapons expertise proliferation risk.

The International Science and Technology Centre (ITSC), a Moscow based international body tasked with preventing the proliferation of Weapons of Mass

Destruction expertise from the Former Soviet Union, recognised the Institute as an eligible candidate for scientist redirection programmes. Following this decision, the British Government undertook to support Institute and its scientists in the pursuit of peaceful science.

Initial support took place from 2004 to 2008. Laboratories were renovated, equipment provided, and building repairs took place. The scientists studied fungal diseases of cereals and other economically significant crops, established a national collection of microbiological crop pathogens, and established relations with regional counterparts. This has resulted in increased knowledge of common disease pathogens and strengthened disease surveillance capabilities.

For example, the Institute has recently been providing advice to the city authorities in Batumi, where there is a damaging caterpillar infestation of fruit (and other trees), causing complete destruction of this year's crop. Also, this summer a worrying new disease of potatoes has been discovered for the first time in Adjara – the Institute has been involved in identification of the problem and dialogue with international experts.

In September 2008 the Institute arranged the first plant pathogen conference to be hosted in the South Caucasus with scientists from 15 countries participating. In August 2009 a joint presentation was given at the United Nations in Geneva, by scientists from the Insti-

tute and the United Kingdom. Their presentation focussed on capacity building in the fields of disease surveillance, detection, and containment.

The British Government believes that the Institute can be of long term benefit to Georgia, and plans to support a second project that would run until 2011. This project aims to develop the Institute into a key centre for plant and crop health advice. Work would primarily focus on three crops: wheat, maize, and potatoes. The Institute will focus on plant disease, production constraints, and helping Georgian farmers to increase and improve yield quality.

The project will clearly have a direct impact on the sustainability of the Georgian Agriculture Sector. In addition, it will support Georgia's implementation of the European Neighbourhood Action Plan. The non-proliferation of weapons through scientist redirection forms part of the Action Plan. But of more relevance to Georgia is support in helping Georgia meet EU requirements for the control of plant diseases essential for the export of various crops, produce, and plant material.

*David Gale
Political Officer
British Embassy Tbilisi*



Georgian wrestling tournament held

The National Olympic Committee Cup was held in Georgian wrestling this month. Participants fought in six weight classes in the Badiauri village. The Defense Ministry team competed with contenders with nine regional squads. World-class professionals Zurab Zviaduri and Nestor Khergiani took part in the tournament.

The Gori team came away with the victory, with the Mtskheta-Mtianeti and Kakhetian and Sagarejo teams finishing in second and third place.

The National Cup's distributed 20,000 lari in prizes to the contenders.

The event was dedicated to the twentieth jubilee of the Georgian National Olympic Committee. The culture and sports ministries provided organizational support for the event.



Military signalmen celebrated Professional Day

Georgian military signalmen celebrated Professional Day Oct. 9. A solemn ceremony dedicated to the occasion and the completion of the Communications 2009 exercises was held at the Communications Battalion in Saguramo. Deputy Defense Minister Nikoloz Dzimtseishvili and Deputy Chief of Joint Staff, Brigadier General Davit Nairashvili attended.

Officers from the Georgian Ground Forces, National Guard Department, Special Operational Forces Staff and Training and Military Education Command participated in the exercises. The purpose of the training taken by 166 military servicemen was to enhance the

communication capacity of the active armed forces. During the training, the servicemen became acquainted with how to organize communication channels using radios and advanced communications systems. Communication 2009 launched Oct. 1 and ended Oct. 9.

"I would like to use this chance to congratulate Georgian signalmen on successfully completing the course, as well as on Professional Day," Dzimtseishvili said. "Without the use of a proper communication system in the military, the armed forces will not be able to perform their duties effectively."

Participating officers were granted special certificates after the exercises.



Captain's Career Course ends with solemn ceremony

A solemn graduation ceremony for the Captain Career Courses was held Oct 23. Fifty military servicemen received granted certificates after the completion of the course. Together with military servicemen, 14 officers from the Interior Ministry's Special Task Force participated.

The training was divided into company and battalion preparatory phases, covering maneuvering, artillery, engi-

neering and logistic specializations. Subunit management, warfare decision-making and combat preparatory skills were studied by the officers. The training process started June 1 and lasted 21 weeks.

Chief of the Joint Staff, Major General Devi Chankotadze, National Defense Academy head, Col. Roin Pailodze and other armed forces representatives attended the event.

Defense Ministry holds journalism contest with IWPR



The Defense Ministry arranged a competition for television journalists together with the Institute of War and

Peace Reporting (IWPR). The contest was held at the Vaziani Military Aerodrome Oct. 4.

Eight Georgian television companies and Armenian and Azerbaijani reporters participated.

The Georgian and foreign journalists took part in broadcasting simulated combat operations organized by the Strike Ball Federation. During the event, mock terrorists aimed to take hostage a prisoner. A two-hour battle ensued, and soldiers successfully conquered their enemies.

The journalists will prepare special reports about the combat operations. The top contestant will be chosen by a jury of experts and Georgian and foreign journalists and awarded prize money.

The idea for the competition was proposed by the IWPR.

The purpose of the contest is to determine the level of the journalists' professionalism and their emergency situations management skills during combat operations.