

LAST UPDATED: **AUGUST 5, 2008, 14:00 • TBILISI****Georgia Denounces Russian Meddling, Calls for Direct Talks After Violence Leaves Several Dead in S. Ossetia; Urges Broader International Role****Tbilisi also aims to revive Abkhaz talks after separatists reject German peace plan; Estonia calls for EU peacekeepers in conflict zones, as US seeks more monitors**

The Government of Georgia sought to defuse tensions in the South Ossetia region and revive peace efforts after a weekend of violence left six separatist rebels dead and at least 13 others injured. Tbilisi called for direct talks with the separatists, while the head of the region's Provisional Administration, Dmitry Sanakoev, urged the international community to prevent further militarization of the conflict.

The OSCE's current chair-in-office, Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb, condemned the violence, as Estonian foreign minister Urmas Paet proposed sending EU peacekeepers to the region. "Peacekeeping there would be an appropriate task for the EU," Paet said. "States not directly linked to the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia should be involved in the peacekeeping mission." Russia, which has become a party to both conflicts, currently controls peacekeeping forces in both Georgian regions.

Meanwhile, Georgian Foreign Minister Eka Tkeshelashvili expressed concern that the fighting in the South Ossetia region fits a pattern of provocations guided by Russia. Last March, Moscow sharply escalated its confrontation with Georgia over the Abkhazia region, prompting intensified diplomacy by the international community. In July, the German Foreign Ministry proposed a peace plan that, while welcomed by the Government of Georgia, has been rejected by Moscow and the separatists.

"It cannot be a coincidence that violence has broken out in the South Ossetia region just as there appears to be progress in reviving the peace process," Tkeshelashvili said. "Russia apparently sees the conflicts as a way to exert control over Georgia and to thwart our NATO aspiration—it does not want the conflicts to end." She added that barring forceful intervention by the international community, Russia either would annex these regions of Georgia or continue to destabilize them indefinitely.

**Separatist Leaders Threaten Strikes on Georgian Cities**

The latest fighting began Friday night when separatist rebels fired on Government posts and nearby villages with machine guns and mortars. The episode marked a low point in a month of escalating violence in the South Ossetia region; the ministry of interior yesterday released a list of over a dozen violent attacks by the separatists since early July.

Among those incidents was a July 3 attempt on the life of Sanakoev, the Provisional Administration head, who escaped unscathed. Sanakoev, a former separatist defense minister, has emerged as a pivotal figure in efforts to resolve the conflict. He broke with the separatists to advocate peaceful reunification with Georgia, winning 80 percent of the vote in the November 2006 election held in the region's centrally controlled territories.

Yesterday, Sanakoev urged the international community to boost its monitoring capacity in the South Ossetia region, after separatist rebels there acknowledged they had violated international agreements by fortifying their border posts.

"The separatist rebels, backed by the Russian Federation, are creating the conditions for further violence in the region," Sanakoev said. "They are contributing to a precipitous deterioration in economic and social conditions, thus robbing ethnic Ossetians as well as all other inhabitants of the region of their future."

Edouard Kokoity, who heads of the separatist leadership, countered by warning that his armed rebels would attack the ministry of the interior's units. "We reserve the right to strike Georgian cities, we have the capability to reach them," he said.

Echoing Kokoity's warning, a leading Russian general asserted that "Russian paratroopers will be deployed in the South Ossetia region, to help the Russian peacekeepers there, if the situation requires them do to so." Such a move would directly violate peacekeeping agreements and norms. Georgia's Foreign Ministry yesterday condemned the general's statement as a "threat of aggression."

The OSCE currently monitors the South Ossetia region, but only sporadically and with limited capacity.

On July 9, four Russian fighter jets spent 40 minutes over the city of Tskhinvali, violating Georgian airspace in a move widely condemned internationally.

The United States yesterday, condemning the latest violence, called for greater vigilance by the international community.

"These incidents underscore the need for an immediate increase in the number of OSCE monitors in South Ossetia," said State Department spokesman Gonzalo Gallegos. He said the US also advocates joint Georgian-Russian monitoring of the Roki Tunnel, the primary channel through which illicit arms and ammunition flow to the region's armed groups.

### **Tbilisi Makes New Push for Peace in Both Conflict Zones**

Following the weekend hostilities, the Government made a new push for peace in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions.

"We need direct talks with the separatists to help put an end to this escalation," said Reintegration Minister Temur Yakobashvili. The Government last spring withdrew from the now-defunct JCC negotiation format, which had failed to produce progress for over a decade.

Georgia has proposed that talks should take place either directly between the separatist leaders and the central Government, or in a new "2+2+2 format" that would include the separatist rebels and the Provisional Administration of South Ossetia, together with Tbilisi and Moscow; the EU and the OSCE would represent the international community.

Meanwhile, the Government also sought to maintain momentum in resolving the conflict in the Abkhazia region, after the separatist leaders there rejected a peace plan proposed by the German Foreign Ministry.

Last month, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier traveled to the region to promote the peace initiative. Further talks on the plan were scheduled for mid-August in Berlin, with the Georgian government, the Russian Federation, and the separatist rebels meeting with the participation of the US, Germany, France, and Great Britain. On Monday, citing the clashes in the South Ossetia region, the separatists in Sukhumi announced they would not take part in the Berlin talks. The separatists on Monday also declared a state of emergency.

National Security Council Secretary Alexander Lomaia announced yesterday that by mid-September the Government of Georgia will unveil a comprehensive peace proposal for the Abkhazia region, elaborating on the plan first announced by President Saakashvili last March. The plan—also known as the "3-D" plan (de-escalation, demilitarization, development)—envisages demilitarization; unlimited autonomy for the region; the introduction of a vice-presidential post to be held by an ethnic Abkhaz representative who will wield veto power over policies affecting the region; broad regional representation in the central government; and a major economic rehabilitation program.

The Georgian plan would be guaranteed by the international community.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

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#### **President Saakashvili's proposed peace plan for Abkhazia**

[http://www.president.gov.ge/PDF/GU\\_E\\_2008-04-16\\_121577174551044.pdf](http://www.president.gov.ge/PDF/GU_E_2008-04-16_121577174551044.pdf)

#### **Timeline of violence in South Ossetia since July (Ministry of the Interior)**

Recent incidents in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone 3 July – 3 August

1. On July 3, 2008 at approximately 10:00, an escort car of the head of the South Ossetian provisional administration Dimitri Sanakoev exploded on a landmine planted by the Ossetian Separatists. This took place on the Eredvi-Kheiti bypass road, in the Tsveriakho mountain area of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone. As a result of the attack, three representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs were seriously wounded. Dimitri Sanakoev himself did not receive any body injuries. It should be noted that during this incident, an excursion bus carrying children was driving along this road.
2. On July 3, at approximately 23:30, separatist military units opened fire at Georgian villages with automatic rifles and grenade launchers. The villages hit by these attacks were Nikozi, Ergneti, Eredvi, Frisi, Vanati, Tamarasheni and Avnesi. At 23:40, the Georgian side opened fire in response to the aggression. On July 4 at 6:00, the Ossetian side tried to occupy the Georgian post located on the Eredvi-Kheiti road. As a result of the firing, one person died and three were wounded on the separatists' side.
3. On July 4, in Tskhinvali, separatist law enforcement officers threw a hand grenade into Dimitri Sanakoev's sister's house in an attempt to intimidate the family, and also fired on his parents' house with a grenade launcher. The houses were damaged as a result of these explosions.
4. On 7 July, at 01:30 in the village of Tseroni (Kareli district), four representatives of the Georgian Ministry of Defense – Col. Zviad Berikashvili, Corp. Nikoloz Megrelashvili, Sergeant Givi Alimbarashvili and Sergeant Ramaz Kulichishvili – were kidnapped by the Ossetian separatists. They were released after negotiations.
5. On July 7, on the southern outskirts of Tskhinvali, 14 years old youngster Andrey Petrachenko was taking photos of the Georgian police post. The youngster was detained and released after questioning on July 8.
6. On July 8, approximately at 20:00, Georgian airspace was violated by four "SU-24" Russian military aircraft. They circled around the Tskhinvali region for about 40 minutes, and then flew northwards. This fact was confirmed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.
7. On 14 July a landmine exploded in the woods around the village of Kemerti, in the Didi Liakhvi Gorge region. The woodcutters present at the site of the explosion survived without injuries.
8. On 20 July, a resident of Nikozi village, Teimuraz Goginashvili, was detained by the separatist special forces. He was released on 24 July.
9. On July 20, Georgian law enforcement personnel arrested four persons for the illegal carrying of fire arms and the use of drugs: Soslan Siukaev, Zaur Xubaev, Guram Sanakoev and Alixan Xubaev. Zaur Xubaev and Guram Sanakoev were released, as they were not found guilty, but Alixan Xubaev and Soslan Siukaev were only released after posting bail.
10. On July 22, Ossetian separatists in the village of Dmenisi, the Small Liakhvi gorge region, arrested Levan Jujniashvili, an employee at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia. He was released on July 24.
11. On July 25, a "Niva" car exploded close to a Russian peacekeeping post in Southern Tskhinvali. Valeri Jioev (26) died as a result of the explosion.
12. On July 26, in the village of Veliti (Znauri district), staff members of the separatist border guard savagely beat local man Murad Jioev and he was taken to hospital.
13. On 28 July, at approximately 16:00, members of a separatist military unit opened fire on joint peacekeeping forces and an OSCE observer group moving towards the village of Chorbauli (Znauri district) and thus interrupted their monitoring.
14. On 29 July, at 4:00, separatists opened fire on Georgian villages in the Didi Liakhvi gorge. The firing lasted approximately 40 minutes.
15. On 29 July, at 10:00, separatists opened fire on a group of observers working with the joint peacekeeping forces on their way to the village of Andisi.
16. On 29 July, at approximately 22:00, separatists opened fire on Georgian peacekeeping forces located in the region of the Sarabuki heights and the village of Eredri. One member of a separatist military unit was wounded in the firefight that ensued.

17. On 1 August, at 08:15, on the Eredvi-Khreiti bypass, a radio-controlled mine blew up a pickup van belonging to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia. Six Georgian policemen were injured, one of them severely.
18. In the evening of 1 August, Ossetian separatists opened fire in the direction of the Georgian villages of Kvemo, Zemo Nikozi, Avnevi, Ergneti and Eredvi using machine guns, and grenade launchers. The firing was directed at Georgian police and military checkpoints. Four individuals were wounded in Zemo and Kvemo Nikozi by the grenade explosions, during which several residential buildings and vehicles were also damaged. In the village of Nuli, one person was wounded and a few houses were damaged. In the village of Ergneti, one person was wounded, who was taken to the local hospital in Gori, and two houses were damaged. Six militants were killed and twelve wounded after the Georgian police opened fire in response.
19. In the period of 2, 3 and 4 August, the situation remained calm in the conflict zone. No incidents were reported.