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Pankisi Gorge – Teenagers Disappearance and IC Problem

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA

Unfortunately, as we previously predicted the situation in Pankisi Gorge is getting worse and the problem of the Islamic Caliphate (IC) recruiting volunteers there is being transformed into a dilemma. It is clear Georgian security forces and law enforcement agencies are not able to deal with this problem.

Two local teenagers, 16-year-old Muslim Kushtanashvili and 18-year-old Ramzan Bagakashvili, who probably

quired for this”, it said. Minister of Internal Affairs Vakhtang Gomelauri is treating the young men’s flight from Georgia as a “misunderstanding”, saying that the border guards at Tbilisi Airport did not recognize the teenagers and let them to go to Istanbul without any problem. This strange reaction from the Georgian authorities implies that the national government is not very well aware of the consequences which have already stemmed from IC activities and the proper structures are not equipped to respond to the challenges



disappeared on 2 April, emerged two days later in Syria and disseminated photos of themselves via social media. They had somehow managed to fly from Tbilisi to Istanbul, and then enter territories controlled by the IC forces, despite not having passports when they were in Georgia.

This event has driven the local population to hold a protest rally. The Kists, ethnic Chechens from Georgia’s Pankisi Gorge, have called on the authorities in Tbilisi to put measures in place to stop local youth being recruited to fight for the Islamic State (IS) in Syria, and The Council of Elders, Pankisi Gorge’s most popular and influential public structure, has appealed to the authorities to deny passports to some locals. However, the Georgian Justice Ministry has responded by stating that this would be unfeasible. “Every adult citizen has the right to obtain a passport, and no other documentation apart from an ID card or a birth certificate is re-

these present. As it is known, under the current arrangements between Georgia and Turkey Georgian citizens can cross the border into Turkey by presenting an electronic ID card. It is also still possible to cross from Turkey into Syria, despite claims to the contrary. A Russian-speaking pro-IS group has claimed on the VKontakte social network that “Recently, rumors have been spreading that the border between Syria and Turkey is closed, that it is not possible to make Hijra [an Arabic term used by IS to mean immigration to the lands under its control], that there is a chain of tanks along [the border] and that Muslims are allegedly spending months in Istanbul in stand-by mode, but these claims are false” the group said in a message intended for “brothers and sisters from the caliphate [the term used by IS for the lands under its control] first and foremost, and to those who are outside its borders.”

Moreover, Georgia is not

creating an appropriate legal environment to address this issue, or making suitable political declarations or adopting relevant readiness levels. The law enforcement structures have

not been reformed and the national security institutions are not equipped to counter IC attacks. Unfortunately all these structures (they include the Counter-Terrorist Department

of the MIA, both National Security Councils – that attached to the President and the other to the Prime Minister, the Crisis Reaction Centre of the Ministry of Defense, the State For-

eign Intelligence Service, etc.) have failed to address the most important aspect of any counter-terrorism strategy – prevention. Georgia can only implement operational provisions, after the horse has bolted, a very dangerous situation.

The sudden appearance of the two teenagers in Syria has raised some concrete questions, the answers to which are not yet visible:

- How did the teens get from Pankisi Gorge to Tbilisi?
- Who arranged their transport?
- Who recruited them and persuaded them to leave their homes and go to Syria to join the IC?
- Who provided them with money and probably forged documents?
- How did they get air tickets from Tbilisi to Istanbul?
- Who met them at Istanbul Airport, picked them up, escorted them to the Turkey-Syria border and got them across it?
- Who represents the IC network in Georgia and how many people are ready to begin operations, including military operations, on its behalf at any moment?

The “Georgian case” has demonstrated that the IC is already here and ready to act as it does in Syria with the support of its followers. Georgia may soon find the time it could have dealt with this threat has already passed.

NEWS

GEORGIAN PRESIDENT VISITS LATVIA



President Giorgi Margvelashvili, who is visiting Riga on April 15-17, will meet his Latvian counterpart Andris Berzins.

During the visit the Georgian President will also meet Latvian PM Laimdota Straujuma and parliament speaker Inara Murniece on Thursday.

State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Davit Bakradze, who is accompanying the President, said that the visit is important especially ahead of the EU’s Eastern Partnership summit in Riga in late May.

“It is a good opportunity to discuss Georgia’s progress on the European integration path and to also discuss how this progress will be reflected in Riga summit declaration,” said Bakradze, who before arriving in Riga visited Hungary.

The President is also accompanied by Foreign Minister Tamar Beruchashvili; Agriculture Minister Otar Danelia and Minister of Culture Mikheil Giorgadze.

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The Lausanne Treaty – Will Iran be Welcomed Back into the International Community?

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA

On April 2 a historic agreement was reached between Iran and the so-called P5+1 group of countries - the US, UK, France, China and Russia plus Germany, at Lausanne's Beau Rivage Palace hotel. Under this, Iran has promised to curb its nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief.

all limits to be lifted. The P5+1 says they should be removed progressively over the following five years.

- **Sanctions relief** - Iran wants the UN sanctions suspended soon after the agreement. The P5+1 says they should be eased in a phased manner, with restrictions on imports of nuclear-related technology remaining for several years.

which could produce nuclear warheads in the near future. Although Iran is now required to freeze its uranium enrichment programme for 10 years, it could simply prolong the duration of its nuclear weapons development projects and join the "Nuclear Club" at a later date.

Furthermore, certain elements which have been agreed provide continuing nuclear op-



This initial deal is designed to be a precursor to a full, wider agreement on this issue. The P5+1 is seeking to ensure that Iran cannot assemble a nuclear weapon in less than a year, although the Iranians insist they have no such ambition anyway. In return for its cooperation, the United States has agreed to provide Iran with 6 to 7 billion dollars in sanctions relief, roughly \$4.2 billion of which is Iran's own oil revenues which have been frozen in foreign banks. However, the US has expressed only modest enthusiasm for the accord, President Obama commenting in an interview with the Huffington Post published on 5 April that "They have not yet made the kind of concessions that are I think going to be needed for a final deal to get done. But they have moved, and so there's the possibility."

According to international media sources, the preliminary accord provides a concrete basic outline for a full agreement, which is due to be signed on June 30 this year. Iran will scale down its nuclear programme and subject it to rigorous inspection for at least 10 years, and there will be a concurrent easing, and eventual removal, of crippling UN, US and EU sanctions. But the issues yet to be resolved are thought to include:

- **Length of restrictions** - Iran's nuclear activities would be strictly limited for at least 10 years. After that, Iran wants

- **Non-compliance** - The US and its European allies want a mechanism that would allow suspended UN sanctions to be put back into effect rapidly if

tions for Iran. On the contentious issue of the heavy water reactor it is building near Arak, which could produce plutonium and therefore provide an-



Iran reneges on a deal. Russia reportedly accepts this, but wants to ensure its Security Council veto rights are protected.

- **Centrifuges** - Iran wants to develop advanced centrifuges that can enrich uranium faster and in greater quantities, a move the P5+1 is resisting.

In addition to these Iran is unwilling to dismantle its uranium enrichment facilities,

other path to a bomb, Iran has agreed not to produce fuel for the plant, install any additional reactor components or put the plant into operation. It is not required to dismantle the facility, however, or convert the plant into a light water reactor that would be less useful for military purposes. Regarding enrichment, Iran is now being allowed to increase its stockpile of low-enriched uranium to



about eight tones, from about seven tones currently. Tehran is required to reduce this stockpile to its current level by the end of the six-month agreement, but this would be done by installing equipment which would convert some of that stockpile into oxide. To guard against cheating, international monitors will be allowed to visit the Natanz enrichment facility and the underground nuclear enrichment plant at Fordow on a daily basis to check the film from

other world powers announced in Geneva that a similar landmark accord would temporarily freeze Iran's nuclear HYPERLINK "http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iran/nuclear_program/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier" programme and likewise lay the foundations for a more sweeping agreement. Hence, it is perfectly possible that Iran has accepted this latest first stage agreement just to

Barack Obama and his administration have backed themselves into a corner by committing "everyone around the world and back home to pass this agreement."

The interesting point however is why Iran has accepted the accord provisions at this particular time. It has had to take into account the following considerations in the reality of contemporary international politics:

- **The Islamic Caliphate (IC) is a real threat to Iran's national security, and signing this agreement may win Iran international support in confronting this threat. The USA and Iran are already working together to stop the IC's expansion, and both have been providing the Iraqi national government with military and financial support to destroy the IC at regional level. The IC has already opened an operational front inside Iranian territory, in Khorasan province, and has launched an expansion towards Lebanon;**

- **Iran wants to become an important energy provider but it has not been allowed to export its energy for 30 years. It will now be able to deliver energy deliver to international markets, and this will provide some buffer against any future re-imposition of sanctions.**

These arguments could explain why Iran has now agreed to sign another accord and reach a consensus with its opponents. However, time will show how optimistic we can now be about the prospects of a lasting agreement.

The Georgian Institute for Geostrategic and Euro-Atlantic Studies Institute, Chairman

cameras installed there, but what this will actually show by the time they conduct the monitoring is anyone's guess.

Iran has ignored the provisions of other putative nuclear agreements several times – accords have supposedly been reached only for them to be suspended and a new wave of negotiations begun. One Sunday morning in November 2013 the United States and five

buy time which it can use to complete its order uranium enrichment programme and attain its final mission of becoming the eighth member of the "Nuclear Club". This viewpoint has been reflected by former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who would rather see a peacefully negotiated end to Iran's nuclear threat. "There is no agreement, basically," he said, arguing that President



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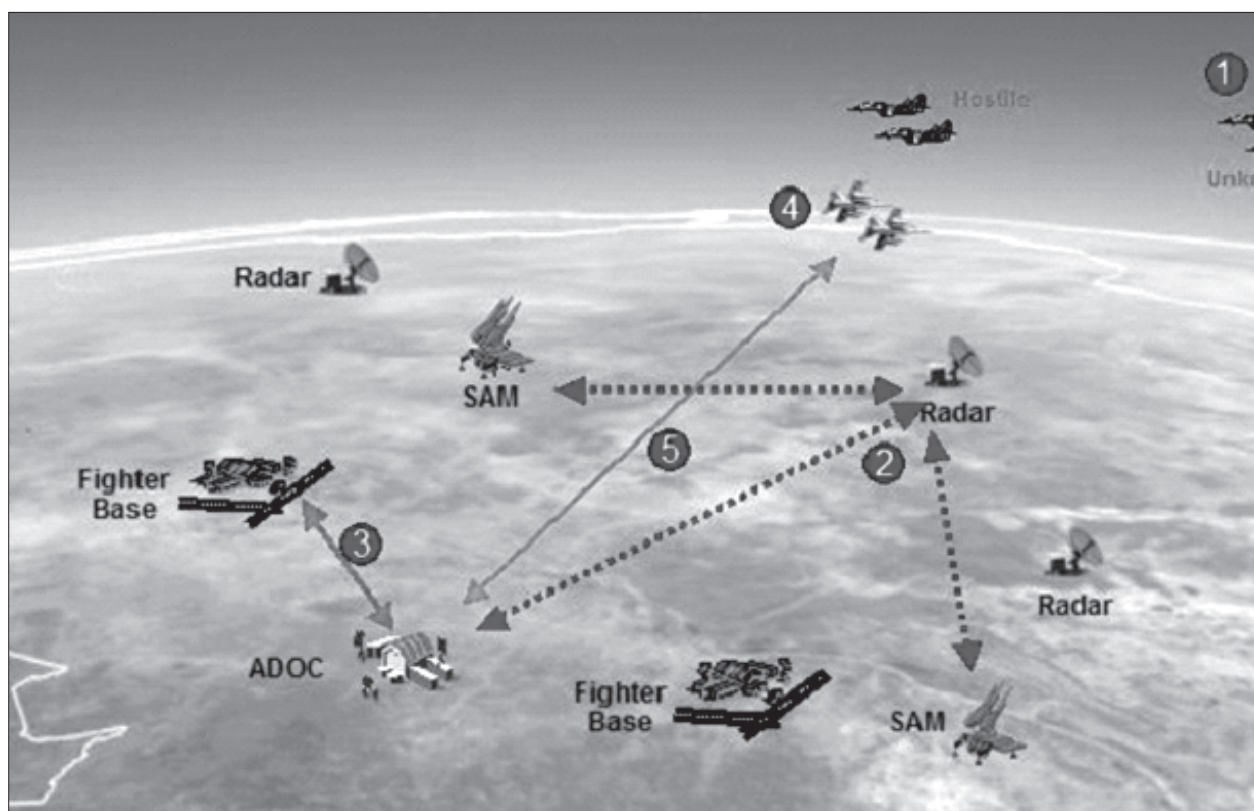
New Security Dilemma

By DR. VAKHTANG MAISAIA

Back in March 2014 a scandal erupted when Defense Minister Irakli Alasania was fired by Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili for “unethical political behavior” which was against the interests of the country. Alasania claimed then that the real reason for his sacking, which resulted in his party leaving the ruling coalition and going into opposition, was a French-Georgian agreement on air defense he had signed in Paris. He said that on March 27, 2014, he had received a phone call from the person who is now Defense Minister Mindia Janelidze, and asked to abandon this agreement but he refused. The following day six high-ranking military officers were arrested on embezzlement charges, in the so-called ‘Cables Case’, and Alasania was sacked.

Alasania says that the French-Georgian agreement would have put armaments on Georgian territory which would have given Georgia full control of its air space. According to him, the agreement was due to run until the end of March 2015 and launch cooperation with specific French arms and equipment manufacturers and the Ministry of Defense of France, which would have arranged the subsequent arms deals between the parties. These arms deals were supposed to plug a hole in Georgian national defense system by providing a credible air defense capacity and also help further Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic integration.

At the end of March 2015 Mindia Janelidze paid an official visit to Paris and held a face-to-face meeting with his French counterpart. Nothing seems to have emerged from this meeting, and it was ignored by the



national TV channels and electronic media. Alasania’s Free Democrat Party finds this highly suspicious. It has accused the ruling Georgian Dream coalition of deviating from the Euro-Atlantic Integration foreign policy orientation, citing a statement by Gogi Topadze, leader of Industry Will Save Georgia and another member of the coalition, that NATO integration is a mistake and the rival, Russian-led Eurasian Union represents a better option.

Granted a special hearing at a Parliamentary Defense and Security Committee session, Janelidze responded to tough questioning from opposition National Movement and Free Democrat MPs with non-committal, formal answers. The future of the “French Arms Deal” thus remains unclear. However, the verbal conflict between the previous and incumbent defense ministers has probably ruined any possibility of these impor-

tant armaments will be seen in Georgia. No third party would seriously consider selling even defensive weaponry systems to a country whose past and present ministers of the same government conduct “unfriendly dialogue” about such matters in public, regardless of national security. Moreover, already Georgia has a very bad record in arms dealings, stemming from its conduct during its arrangement with Israel in 2006-2008.

The “Defense Minister Duel” has revealed to the public one of the weaponry systems which would allegedly have been sold to Georgia. According to Georgian weekly newspaper “Kviris Palitra” the parties were negotiating over the SAMP/T system, which would protect Georgian territory from short-range missile attacks. A typical SAMP/T battery includes a command and control vehicle, Arabel radar and up to six transporter erector launcher (TEL) vehicles, each

with eight missiles and a store of reload missiles. The TEL vehicles are dispersed to launch sites located up to 10 km from the Arabel radar. The SAMP/T system uses MAGICS (modular architecture for graphics and image console systems) and MARA (modular architecture for real-time applications) computers.

The Aster 30 SAMP/T (sol-air moyenportée terrestre, or

surface-to-air medium range/land), the probable desired model, is effective against high-speed threats such as tactical ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, combat aircraft and UCAVs (unmanned combat air vehicles) which was developed by Eurosam, a company jointly owned by MBDA Missile Systems and Thales. The French Ministry of Defense ordered six SAMP/T systems for

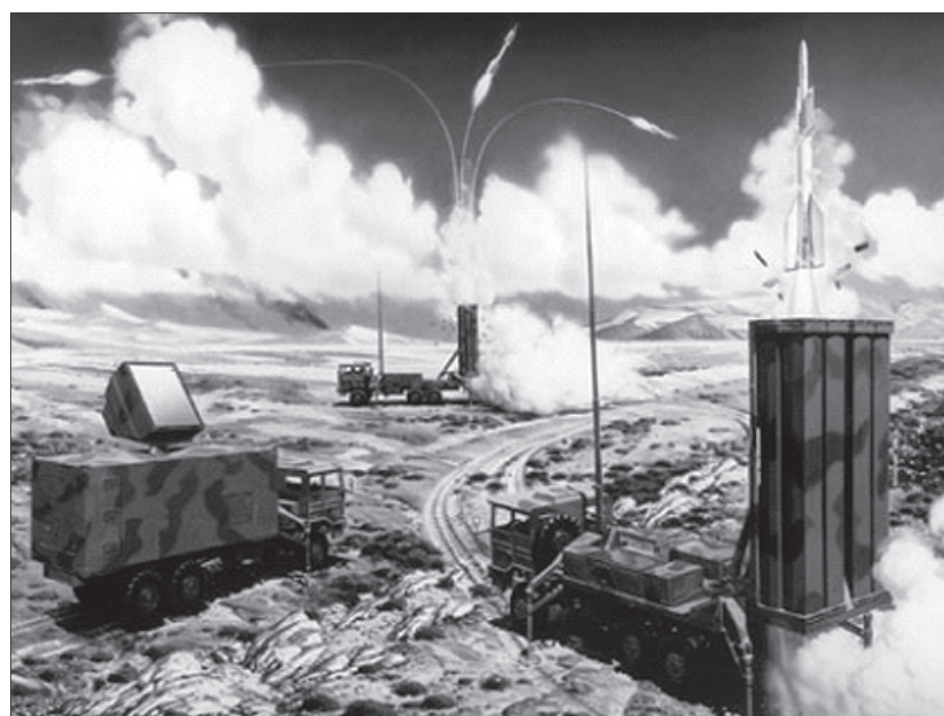
the French Army and another six for the French Air Force a few years ago, as did the Italian Army. Operational acceptance tests with the Italian Army and French Air Force were concluded in July 2008, and that December a successful firing test took place, incorporating software changes suggested by the technical evaluation, prior to the delivery of the first serial production system to the French Air Force. The SAMP/T systems in French service became operational in 2010. The average price of an SAMP/T battery is around \$20-30 million.

The Georgian side wishes to protect its strategic facilities and tactical arms units from the Russian short-range tactical missile system “ISKANDER-M”, about seven batteries of which are already deployed in the North Caucasus region. However, it is unclear how efficient the French system would be against such serious surface-to-surface tactical missile systems. The French system could easily deal with frontier combat jets, such as the Russian SU-34, SU-35 and MIG-31s also deployed in the North Caucasus Military HQ territories, but will this be enough? The Georgian government is now faced with a Shakespearean security dilemma: “to be or not to be”.

The Georgian Institute for Geostrategic and Euro-Atlantic Studies Institute, Chairman



ISKANDER-M



ASTER-30 Missile in operational phase

NEWS

REMITTANCES DOWN BY 22.8% IN Q1'15

Money transferred from abroad to Georgia in the first quarter of 2015 declined by 22.8% year-on-year to USD 249.6 million, according to data released by the Georgian central bank.

Money transfers from Russia, the largest source of remittances for Georgia, were down by 43.6% y/y in January-March 2015 to USD 88.3 million.

There was also decline in remittances from Greece and Italy by 17.8% and 9.4% y/y to USD 40.2 million and USD 26.3 million, respectively, in the first quarter of this year.

Remittances from the U.S. stood at USD 22.1 million in the first quarter, followed by Turkey – USD 17.2 million; Israel – USD 6.7 million; Spain – USD 5.9 million; Germany – USD 5.8 million; Ukraine – USD 4.9 million.

Remittances declined by 2.45% y/y in 2014 to USD 1.44 billion, accounting for about 8.7% of country's GDP.

INTERPOL DROPS 'RED NOTICE' FOR EX-JUSTICE MINISTER ADEISHVILI



Interpol has withdrawn 'red notice' for Georgia's ex-justice minister Zurab Adeishvili, who is wanted by Tbilisi for number of criminal charges, which his allies say are politically motivated.

"On April 9, 2015 the Georgian chief prosecutor's office was notified by Interpol general secretariat that it has revoked red notice against Zurab Adeishvili," the Georgian prosecutor's office said in a statement released on April 14 after it emerged that 'red notice' against Adeishvili was taken down from Interpol website and his name removed from its wanted list.

The Georgian prosecutor's office said that in its notification Interpol cited "granting of a refugee status to Adeishvili by one of the countries" as the reason behind its decision to revoke red notice against Georgia's ex-justice minister; prosecutor's office said it does not know which country it was.

It also said that Interpol took the decision without prior informing the Georgian side and therefore the prosecutor's office was not able "to present its additional arguments" in favor of keeping the red notice against Adeishvili.

Georgia requested Interpol to issue red notice against Adeishvili in January, 2013 after court in Tbilisi ordered pre-trial detention of the ex-justice minister in absentia in connection to charges involving allegations of "organizing inhuman treatment of inmates" in September, 2012. Other criminal charges

Interpol issued red notice against Adeishvili in November, 2013. Interpol uses red notices to notify its member states that an arrest warrant has been issued for an individual with a view to his or her arrest and extradition. But Interpol cannot demand individual nations make an arrest based on issued red notices.

At the time when the red notice was issued against Adeishvili, he was supposedly in Hungary, where he reportedly already had an asylum.

Recently he has been informally advising Ukrainian authorities on reforms, according to his close allies and former Georgian officials now working in the Ukrainian government.

In February the Georgian prosecutor's office said that Ukraine had refused Tbilisi's request to extradite Adeishvili.

Ukraine, whose deputy general prosecutor is a former Georgian lawmaker from UNM party and ex-deputy chief prosecutor of Georgia Davit Sakvarelidze, has also refused to extradite Georgia's former president Mikheil Saakashvili citing that charges against him were politically motivated.

The Georgian prosecutor's office has been seeking for more than a year, but in vain, for the Interpol red notice to be issued against Saakashvili.

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TBILISI, MOSCOW AGREE ON EXPANDING DIRECT REGULAR FLIGHTS



Georgian and Russian civil aviation authorities have agreed to expand direct regular flights between the two countries as a result of talks, which were concluded this week, the Georgian Economy Ministry said on Wednesday.

Russia cut regular direct air flights with Georgia in October, 2006, following spy row between the two countries. The flights were restored in late March, 2008, but were again suspended after the August war. In 2010 the Georgian Airways and Russia's Sibir Airlines launched flights, which were formally dubbed as "charter" flights, but were actually conducted on a regular basis. Regular direct flights were resumed in October 2014, but only on Tbilisi-Moscow route.

According to the new arrangement, the Georgian Economy Ministry said, in addition to Moscow, the Georgian air carriers will also be able to conduct flights on a regular basis to six other Russian cities – St. Petersburg; Samara; Yekaterinburg; Sochi; Rostov-on-Don and Mineralnye Vody. The Georgian Airways launched flights between Tbilisi and St. Petersburg from April 10.

Along with Tbilisi, Russian air carriers will also be able to conduct regular flights to Kutaisi and Batumi.

On frequency of flights, the Economy Ministry said, the agreement envisages 18 flights per week from each side on Tbilisi-Moscow route during the winter period and 21 in summer.

Number of flights between other cities will be unrestricted, as it was before the suspension of regular flights between the two countries.

The agreement was reached as a result of series of meetings between civil aviation authorities of the two countries, which were held in Tbilisi with participation of the Georgian Foreign

Ministry officials in presence of Swiss diplomats, according to the Economy Ministry. Switzerland acts as a diplomatic mediator between Russia and Georgia since the two countries have cut diplomatic relations after the August 2008 war.

According to the Economy Ministry number of airline passengers between Russia and Georgia has increased 49% year-on-year in a period between November, 2014 and February, 2015.

Georgian Airways, which has long been against of allowing Russian air carriers to carry out large number of flights, complains about the arrangement arguing that the agreement fits only the interests of the Russian airlines. Iase Zautashvili, general director of the Goergian Airways, claims that figures on airline passengers, released by the Economy Ministry, are overinflated and there is no need for 18 and 21 flights per week from each side. Georgian Airways fears that it won't be able to cope with competition with the Russian air carriers, which, it claims, will apply dumping practices.

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IN TBILISI DANISH, POLISH, SWEDISH FMS PLEDGE SUPPORT TO GEORGIA'S EUROPEAN PATH



From left to right: Danish Foreign Minister Martin Lidegaard; Georgian Foreign Minister Tamar Beruchashvili; Polish Foreign Minister Grzegorz Schetyna and Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström, Tbilisi, April 14, 2015. Photo: Georgian MFA

On their joint visit to Tbilisi foreign ministers of Denmark, Poland and Sweden reiterated support to Georgia's European integration process and stressed on the need to continue reforms.

Martin Lidegaard of Denmark, Grzegorz Schetyna of Poland and Margot Wallström of Sweden are holding talks with Georgian leadership, as well as parliamentary opposition and civil society representatives in Tbilisi on April 14.

The visit comes less than six weeks before the EU's Eastern Partnership summit in Riga, where Tbilisi wants the EU to pave the way for Georgia's visa-free travel with the Schengen area.

While the foreign ministers of the three countries voiced their countries' political support towards visa liberalisation with Georgia, they stressed that the final decision will depend on the European Commission's report, which is expected to be presented before the Riga summit and which will detail how Georgia is fulfilling its reform commitments under the visa liberalisation action plan – a set of detailed requirements that a country should meet in order to be granted short-term visa-free regime in the Schengen area.

Speaking at a joint news conference after meeting the Georgian counterpart Tamar Beruchashvili, Danish Foreign Minister, Martin Lidegaard, for whom it's third visit to Georgia since last April, said: "We know that you have a big desire to get the visa liberalisation done before the Riga summit."

"Today we cannot promise it will happen, but from our side we will do whatever we can to assist you in that process," he said.

"From the political point of view we are supportive for visa liberalisation," Lidegaard said, adding that the final decision should be made based on the European Commission's report.

Swedish Foreign Minister, Margot Wallström, said that her country supports visa liberalisation for Georgia, but said that there has to be "realistic expectations" from the Riga summit.

Wallström said that all the benchmarks set in Georgia's visa liberalisation action plan should be met.

"We understand from what we hear that there are still some reforms necessary in the judiciary and when it comes to migration; that's why we are signaling that there has to be realistic expectations, but we also appreciate the efforts that have been made," the Swedish Foreign Minister said.

Foreign Minister of Poland Grzegorz Schetyna said his country is supportive, but it's up to Georgia to implement its reforms. "We are optimistic," he said. "We hope that the Riga summit will be the milestone for the Eastern Partnership and for Georgia especially."

If Georgia's progress is assessed positively and the European Commission recommends the lifting of visa requirements, it must then be approved by the European Parliament and the EU-member states before it comes into force.

Speaking at the joint news conference after talks with the Georgian counterpart, the Swedish Foreign Minister said that while this visit is demonstration of "friendship and support", "we also come with some demands" when it comes to the EU integration process.

"We are hoping that your process and reforms for EU integration will mean that you look more to the future than to the past, that you will continue all your important efforts, that you create democratic, transparent institutions that are held accountable to the people and we ask for reform of judiciary as an example. But we also offer our cooperation... You can count on us in helping you to do whatever we ask you to do to come closer to the European Union," Margot Wallström said.

The Danish Foreign Minister said that this joint visit is a demonstration of support for Georgia's "journey" to the European integration.

"We acknowledge all the steps you have taken on your journey," Lidegaard said.

"It is also clear that there are still barriers on your journey –

some of them are put from outside," he said and condemned violation of Georgia's territorial integrity; he also noted the need for reforms, including in the judiciary.

The Georgian and Polish foreign ministers signed a bilateral memorandum on launching "Tbilisi Conference" – a platform for providing Warsaw's further support to Georgia and sharing Poland's experience of European integration. The Polish Foreign Minister said that this year the format will start by sharing experience in implementing the Association Agreement and deep and comprehensive free trade treaty with the EU and the focus will also be made on the justice system reform. Schetyna said that this format of sharing experience sends "a clear message of our support for Georgia's EU membership aspirations."

Asked about Georgia's EU membership perspective, the Danish Foreign Minister responded that Georgia should not expect it at the Riga summit.

"That's too early," Lidegaard said, adding that at this stage Georgia should fulfill the Association Agreement.

The Swedish Foreign Minister said: "I think it is extremely important that the European Union keeps membership option open... especially for the Eastern Partnership [countries]."

The foreign ministers of the three countries also met civil society representatives and leaders of opposition United National Movement and Free Democrats parties. They will also meet on President Giorgi Margvelashvili, PM Irakli Garibashvili and parliament speaker Davit Usupashvili.

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POPE FRANCIS MEETS GEORGIAN PRESIDENT



Pope Francis received on April 10 Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili and had a "cordial discussions" on development of bilateral relations, the Vatican said in a statement.

It said that "various themes of mutual interest, with particular reference to the positive contribution of the local Catholic community in the fields of charitable activity and education" in Georgia were discussed.

"Attention then turned to concerns regarding the tensions that affect the region and, with emphasis on the importance of full respect for international law, the hope was expressed that every solution may be sought through peaceful negotiation between the interested parties. Finally, mention was made of what has recently been achieved by Georgia regarding its own role in Europe," the Vatican said in the statement.

President Margvelashvili, who started his two-day visit on April 9, also met under-secretary for the Holy See's Relations with States Antoine Camilleri.

"It was noted that the Holy See remains an active supporter of Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty that is extremely important for Georgia," Georgian president's office said. "It was noted that artificially created barriers and dividing lines should not exist in the 21st century."

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MAN SUSPECTED OF KILLING TWO POLICEMEN ARRESTED

Police arrested on Friday morning a man suspected of killing two policemen and wounding two others in two separate shooting incidents in Borjomi and Tbilisi in January and April.

Shalva Abuladze, whom the prosecutor's office charged with murder of police officers and attempted murder, as well as illegal possession of arms, was arrested in Borjomi, the Interior Ministry said on Friday.

According to the Interior Ministry on January 23 Abuladze opened fire to the two police officers in the town of Borjomi, killing one and injuring another policeman. On April 4 when two police officers tried to "stop and check" a man in Varketili district of capital Tbilisi, he opened fire and fatally shot one and badly injured another policeman. The Interior Ministry said that the assailant was the same man, who was involved in the Borjomi shooting. Next morning, on April 5, when the police tried to apprehend the suspect in Tbilisi, he again opened fire and managed to escape, according to the police.

The Interior Ministry said that the police found two handguns and a hand grenade in a building in Borjomi where Abuladze was hiding.

Abuladze is a former convict, who spent over seven years, less than half of his lengthy prison term, in jail for attempted murder charges before being released in late November, 2013. His release was made possible, at first through halving of his prison term as a result of large-scale amnesty, which was enacted few months after the GD coalition came into power, and then through granting him a pre-term release by a special pardon commission.

After attending funeral ceremony of a policeman killed in Tbilisi on April 4, PM Irakli Garibashvili said that state will be "merciless" to those, who were released from jails as a result of large-scale amnesty or through pardon, but became repeat offenders and called on the police to "clean our society of such criminals."

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Russia Blames U.S. for Security Crises, Turmoil in Ukraine

(Reuters) - Top Russian officials accused the United States on Thursday of seeking political and military dominance in the world and sought to put blame on the West for international security crises, including the conflict in east Ukraine.

Evoking Cold War-style rhetoric, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said a drive by the United States and its allies to bring Kiev closer to the West was a threat to Moscow and had forced it to react.

"The United States and its allies have crossed all possible lines in their drive to bring Kiev into their orbit. That could not have failed to trigger our reaction," he told an annual security conference in Moscow.

Echoing his comments, General Valery Gerasimov, chief of the General Staff of the Russian

Armed Forces, told the meeting: "Considering themselves the winners of the Cold War, the United States decided to reshape the world to fit its needs.

"Aiming at complete dominance, Washington stopped taking into account the interests of other countries and respect international law."

Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine last March following what it says was an "unconstitutional coup" in which street protests toppled a Moscow-allied Ukrainian president in Kiev after he ditched a deal to move closer to the European Union.

Separatist unrest then spread to eastern, Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine where fighting between Kiev's troops and pro-Russian rebels killed more than 6,000 people. The West says Moscow drives the rebellion,

sends serving Russian troops there and provides the rebels with arms, training and intelligence.

President Vladimir Putin on Thursday repeated Moscow's denial, saying Russian military forces were not in Ukraine and denying that it was providing troops and support for pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine.

Shoigu blamed the violence on Kiev and sought to dismiss Western criticism that Russia was forcibly remaking European borders, pointing to Western military involvement in Serbia, Iraq and Libya.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told the conference, attended by envoys from China, Iran, Pakistan and some of Russia's allies, that Kiev had to deliver on its obligations under peace agreements reached in

Minsk to "safeguard unity of the Ukrainian state".

Both said Moscow saw the development of the U.S.-led missile shield in Europe as tilting the post-war balance of power and a threat to its strategic nuclear deterrent capability. Shoigu said Moscow was taking steps to counteract that.

Gerasimov told delegates the eastward expansion of NATO posed another major threat to Russia and criticized the alliance for boosting military exercises involving eastern members.

NATO says intensified drills are aimed at reassuring eastern members worried by Moscow.

"It's clear that measures taken by NATO to strengthen the bloc and increase its military capabilities are far from being defensive," he said.



How Vladimir Putin's Skewed View of World War Two Threatens His Neighbors and the West

(Reuters) - Russian President Vladimir Putin stands smiling between George W. Bush and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder as the U.S. president reaches out to shake hands with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. It was a photo-op that couldn't be missed: the military parade in Moscow on May 9, 2005, marking the 60th anniversary of the Nazis' capitulation. Despite widespread outrage over the U.S. invasion of Iraq, everybody could agree that the end of World War Two was worth celebrating together. Even Viktor Yushchenko, the first Ukrainian president who openly defied the Kremlin, came.

This May 9, Putin will be lucky if a couple of European presidents show up for the 70th anniversary. The annexation of Crimea and Russia's support for militants in eastern Ukraine have made Kremlin invitations toxic. Few Western leaders will want to be seen at a Victory Day parade featuring 15,000 soldiers and 200 military vehicles, including the BUK anti-aircraft missile system believed to have shot down Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine last summer.

Just five years ago, U.S. and other Allied troops marched in the Victory Day parade to commemorate the coalition that defeated Nazi Germany. Now Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov is blaming "the Americans and the European Union's aggressive core" for sabotaging the Kremlin's party plans. The foreign dignitary likely to attract the most attention this year is North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, who is expected to make his first official trip abroad to attend the Moscow parade.

A string of historic 70th anniversaries began in June of last year, when France remembered the Allies' D-Day landing in Normandy. German Chancellor Angela Merkel ably used the occasion to arrange Putin's first meeting with the freshly inaugurated Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko. But as the Kremlin



ramped up its involvement in eastern Ukraine, Putin became an increasingly unwanted guest at international gatherings.

In January, the Red Army's liberation of the Auschwitz death camp in Nazi-occupied Poland was remembered. The Polish government didn't send out formal invitations to the commemoration, thereby letting Putin know he wasn't welcome at a ceremony attended by dozens of world leaders. A couple of weeks later, the 70th anniversary of the Yalta Conference came and went. That summit — hosted by Stalin in the Crimean resort — extended the Kremlin's influence over much of Eastern Europe and helped set the stage for the Cold War. The next big awkward anniversary is April 25, 1945, when advancing Soviet and U.S. troops met on the Elbe River south of Berlin, sealing Adolf Hitler's fate.

World War Two was supposed to be history by now. Germany, once Europe's chief villain, had long atoned for its sins, building a model democracy, making peace with its neighbors, and becoming an anchor of the continent's unity. 2015 was meant to be a year of remembrance and celebration of how far Europeans had come in seven decades.

Instead, it has degenerated into a clash that says more about the present than the past, especially in Eastern Europe.

For most countries that emerged from the Soviet empire 25 years ago, independence from Moscow exposed messy, overlooked histories. The small nations of east central Europe had been pushed and pulled by the Nazi and Communist juggernauts surrounding them. From the Baltics to the Balkans, it was a story of collaboration and betrayal, resistance and subjugation. One and the same army could be viewed as liberator, conqueror and occupier. Loyalties were split, quartered and ground to pieces.

Complexity or inconvenient facts had no place in official Soviet historiography, where the Red Army was celebrated as the undisputed victor in the war against fascism. The 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that carved up Poland and ceded the Baltic nations to the Soviet Union was forgotten; the Holocaust downplayed; and the role of the Western Allies diminished. World War Two was remembered as the "Great Patriotic War" and didn't start until the Nazis' genocidal invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. There was no

mention that Hitler and Stalin were allies before the attack. The Pacific war was a sideshow that the Soviet Union didn't enter until Japan's defeat was imminent.

When Putin came to power in 2000, Russians were still reeling from a decade of nihilism that had followed the collapse of Communism. For a country that was beginning to pick itself up, the "Great Victory" against the Nazis presented itself as the ideal surrogate for a national idea to pull together Russia. Practically every family had suffered in the war, and the whole country knew the iconography from Soviet television and film. Putin couldn't buy Russia a new identity for all the petrodollars in the world, but he could make Victory Day the de facto national holiday, celebrated with ever more gargantuan military parades.

For Putin, the Soviet version of World War Two is a cornerstone of Russian prestige. In March, Putin called his ministers to a meeting in the Kremlin to check on preparations for this year's holiday.

"Today we unfortunately see not only attempts to misrepresent and distort events of the

war, but cynical, open lies and the brazen defamation of a whole generation who gave up everything for the victory," Putin said. "Their goal is clear: to undermine the power and moral authority of modern Russia and deprive it of the status of a victorious nation."

Putin was reacting to ridiculous — and transparently political — statements by Eastern European leaders that hardly warranted a response. In January, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk recalled the "Soviet invasion of Ukraine and Germany" on German TV, and Polish Foreign Minister Grzegorz Schetyna suggested in an interview that an ethnic Ukrainian unit of the Red Army had actually liberated Auschwitz.

Lavrov denounced his counterpart's comments as "sacrilegious." The word choice is revealing, as Russia's World War Two cult has taken on quasi-religious qualities. Leading up to the 65th anniversary of the war's end, the Kremlin even convened a special commission to combat the "falsification of history," evidently with unsatisfactory results.

The problem isn't an attempt to deny the sacrifice of tens of millions of Soviet civilians and Red Army soldiers. At issue is the dual nature of a liberation that turned into conquest as Stalin steamrolled across and then subjugated Eastern Europe.

In the Kremlin's cartoonish portrayal of history, the people who fought fascists were not Communists or democrats but simply "anti-fascists." In Russia, the term "fascist" has been stripped of ideology and is synonymous with "anybody we don't like." Given Putin's authoritarianism and his appeal among far-right parties in Europe, the Kremlin's concern about fascism is artifice. Putin is an opportunist, not an ideologue.

Yet remembering the Great Victory is more than an instrument to consolidate Russians: it has also become a way to prepare people for war.

The Kremlin cast the Ukraine conflict in Soviet tropes from the start, branding the pro-European interim government as "fascist" and spreading hysteria among Russian speakers about the coming wrath of the Banderovtsy — followers of the World War Two-era Ukrainian nationalist leader, Stepan Bander. The fear-mongering fell on fertile ground, as Ukraine had witnessed some of the fiercest fighting and worst massacres of the war. Pro-Russian militants in Crimea and eastern Ukraine convinced themselves they were reliving an epic struggle against fascism. Their symbol became the orange-and-black striped St. George's ribbon, a sign of remembrance of the Red Army's victory over Nazism.

For Putin, the main lesson of World War Two is that enemies are tirelessly plotting to encircle and enslave Russia. If 75 years ago it was the Third Reich, today it's the United States and its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. At the same time, President Barack Obama's decision to ignore his parade has infuriated Putin. In March the pro-Kremlin tabloid LifeNews started a Twitter campaign, #VictoryDayForObama, "to remind the president of one of the most important days of the 20th century."

Germany has championed good relations with Russia as a way of making up for World War Two and can't be as dismissive as the United States. German leftists proposed inviting Putin to Berlin to mark this year's anniversary. Merkel settled on a more diplomatic solution: skipping the military parade on May 9 yet paying her respects at the Kremlin's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier a day later.

Twenty years ago, Bill Clinton faced a similar dilemma. The U.S. president ended up traveling to Moscow for the 50th anniversary of the war's end, but he stayed away from the main military parade as a way of showing his disapproval of Russia's war in Chechnya.

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