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Armenia, Azerbaijan exchange artillery fire, sides blame each other for firing

Clashes on Armenia-Azerbaijan border



Photo: France24

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Three Azerbaijani servicemen were killed in a clash on the border between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Eurasianet reported it as the heaviest fighting in years between them. The parties blame each other for starting the shooting. Both sides used artillery, mortars and tanks during the incident, which took place along the north-eastern bor-

der of Armenia and the western border of Azerbaijan, near the Armenian village of Tavush.

According to a spokesman for the Armenian army, which was the first to report the clash, the shooting began on the afternoon of July 12th. "During the incident in the north-eastern part of Armenia, after being warned by the Armenian side, the enemy troops left the vehicle and returned to their position; Less than an

hour later, Azerbaijani soldiers tried to occupy our position using artillery fire, but were repulsed and lost soldiers," Stepanian said.

According to the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan, the Armenian side started firing to occupy a strategic position.

"The Armenian Armed Forces tried to use artillery to occupy our position in the direction of Tovuz on the state border between Azerbaijan and Armenia," the ministry said in a statement. "As a result of the retaliatory steps of our units, the enemy was defeated and retreated with losses. During the clash, 2 Azerbaijani servicemen were killed and 5 were wounded," writes the Ministry of Defence of Azerbaijan.

On the night of July 13th, also in the morning, there were reports of shootings again. According to a reviewer for the Nagorno Karabakh Observer, the shooting took place in an area where Azerbaijan occupies more elevated territory. According to Eurasianet, the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan released a video on July 13th, where it should be seen that they are attacking the Armenian checkpoint. According to the Nagorno Karabakh Observer, this is the only Armenian checkpoint in the area that is elevated.

The Armenian Foreign Ministry said that artillery fire from Azerbaijan 'retreated' late on July 13th, and that Yerevan was in full control of the situation.

"The political and military leadership of Armenia bears full responsibility for the provocation," Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said on July 13th. Armenian



President Zorabishvili publishes a statement on armed confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

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TURKEY AND GEORGIA: RESILIENT PARTNERSHIP AND SOLIDARITY IN WAR, COUP ATTEMPT AND PANDEMIC

The Covid-19 pandemic and extraordinary circumstances it brought about globally have been a test of resilience in many terms for Governments and Nations.

Solidarity, good neighborly relations and partnership have become more than just words of diplomatic speech writing.

Indeed, this pandemic and socio-economic consequences have also put the international and transborder cooperation to test. Turkey and Georgia have been loyal to their mutual responsibilities not only bilaterally, but also as regional actors, as good neighbors and strategic partners.

In fact, while unprecedented, the Covid-19 pandemic is not the first time that Georgia and Turkey have been reminded of the importance of one another for each other. Nor, it is the first time that the resilience of our countries have been put to test.

On 14th August 2008, now President then the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Tbilisi right after the war in August 2008, and in very clear terms declared in a joint press meeting the solid support of Turkey to “Georgia’s independence, sovereignty and protection of Georgia’s territorial integrity, which is recognized by UN Security Council and international law”.

7 years later, on 19 July 2016, Georgian delegation headed by then Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili became the first high level guest in Ankara, only 4 days after the sinister FETO cult terrorized Turkish people with a coup attempt killing 251 civilians, members of police and military who came in defence of democracy.

It does not take one to be an expert in international relations to understand that these high level visits that took place in the aftermath of most traumatic days of our nations were beyond symbolic gestures of diplomacy.

These visits were initiated by genuine concern for the stability, security and well being of one another. They were tangible acts of solidarity between two good neighbors.

Weather

Wednesday, July 15

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 33°C
Night 🌙 Clear
Low: 20°C

Thursday, July 16

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 32°C
Night 🌙 Clear
Low: 21°C



Fatma Ceren YAZGAN - Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey

4 years later, the Government and people of Turkey still remember that emotional moment when the Georgian delegation laid flowers to the place where Turkish citizens were murdered by helicopter fire under the command of pilots who turned out to be FETO militants. We remember how hard it was to tell our Georgian friends that our Parliament was bombed while in session under the instruction of FETO civilian cadres who were later on apprehended in the military air base, which was the headquarters of the coup plot.

When the Georgian delegation visited Ankara and Istanbul 4 days after the coup attempt, the bodies of 55 police officers who were bombed by FETO at the Police Special Operations Center, were still not put to eternal rest.

The evidence which revealed the role of the FETO structures in this unprecedented betrayal and the extent of their global network behind this plot was established in the months that followed that horrible night.

We now know from surveillance cameras, international cooperation, witness testimonies and confessions that the crimes committed on 15th July were just the tip of an iceberg.

The iceberg was a network of schools, businesspersons, media power and charities which evolved for a benign education movement to a secretive opera-

tional structure aiming to transform the society by taking control of the Turkish State from within. As its strength grew, the organization began to claim a global messianic mission, depicting its founder and leader Fetullah Gulen as the “Imam of the Universe”. It became a network which began meddling in business transactions; government tender processes, mass scale exam cheating to capture civil and military bureaucracy; laundering enormous sums of money, arranging illegal transfer of cash.

In the course of the past 4 years, Turkey shared its findings about this very complex and secretive network with its allies, friends and partners, including Georgia. This was done not only because Turkey is determined to ensure that this criminal network is stripped of all capabilities to hurt Turkey again. What Turkish police, prosecutors and courts found a lot about this structure was shared with friendly governments also because FETO, where present in any form or structure works pretty much like Covid-19 virus, not revealing symptoms in the early stages, but becomes fatal as it attacks the immunity system by corrupting social, economic and administrative tissues of any state and nation. In this spirit the 4 political parties, including 2 main opposition parties represented in the Turkish

Parliament made a joint statement on August 9, 2019 to the USA, and all friends and partners to cooperate with Turkey with a view to extraditing Fetullah Gulen and other FETO members.

While the painful memory of the 15 July 2016 still lingers, Turkey has overcome the trauma and proved its resilience as a sovereign, secular, democratic and capable state.

On August 24, 2016, Turkey launched the Operation Euphrates Shield against DAESH and PKK/YPG terrorist organizations in Syria. On January 2018, Turkey ventured another counter-terrorism operation in Afrin against PKK/YPG threat to its security. These operations revealed that despite the FETO infiltration and betrayal, Turkish military has recovered its operation capabilities in defending the country from threats outside of its borders.

The recovery from the coup attempt and trauma was not only achieved in the military-security field.

Turkey fulfilled all its commitments in strategic projects such as TANAP, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, Marmaray (railway under the Bosphorus); the Turkish exports swelled by %10 in 2017 and in 2019 crossed the 180 billion USD threshold. Major infrastructure projects including the new Istanbul Airport have been completed and Turkey

continues to host more than 3.5 million of Syrians and Iraqi citizens who fled the civil war.

Turkey remembers the solidarity of her good neighbor Georgia during and after the 15th July coup attempt. As such, in the past 4 years, for Turkish governments bilateral cooperation with Georgia has remained as a priority item on the agenda, despite many challenges to national security and regional peace and stability, Turkey has remained a staunch supporter of Georgia’s membership to NATO and continued to support projects and investments that enhance Georgia’s resilience. Turkey continues to support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia as well as the security and stability of the Black Sea region. The Military Financial Cooperation Agreement signed in December 2019, by which Turkey committed to grant 15 million USD for capacity building of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia, has been the most recent result of that support.

In economy and trade relations, Turkey remains Georgia’s first trade partner since 2007 and one of the leading foreign investors. The 1.6 million USD worth of renovation and rehabilitation works of Batumi Infectious Diseases Hospital which was completed in 2019 by TIKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) is a concrete example of development cooperation.

The Covid-19 pandemic with its global socio-economic consequences surely require the cooperation between Turkey and Georgia to be further enhanced and to remember that as we have stood together in solidarity through wars, attacks on our democracies and national security we shall stand together resiliently.

Thus, the words of great Georgian Statesman Ilia Chavchavadze will continue to guide us: **“When a nation remembers this liturgy of its common soul, those great natured men and stories of great deeds, it is revamped, encouraged and inspired and is self assured every way in joy and in sorrow.”**

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External trade turnover decreased by 16.3%



Jan-June 2020 Georgian external trade amounts to \$5.072 billion

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The preliminary data was published by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) this week. According to the statistics, Georgia's external trade turnover amounted to \$5.072 billion in January-June 2020, which is a decrease of 16.3% compared to the same period of last year.

The value of exports decreased by 15.6% reaching \$1.50 billion, while imports decreased 16.5% and amounted to \$3.56 billion.

The negative trade balance equaled \$2.06 billion and its share in trade turnover constituted 40.7%.

In June, the volume of goods imported by Georgia decreased by 17.2% and amounted to \$ 576.3 million. This is \$ 120.1 million less than in 2019. As for exports, it was \$ 266.9 million, which was \$ 40.3 million (13.1%) less than in the previous year.

Geostat will publish detailed data on foreign trade on July 20th.

During the pandemic, the Tbilisi real estate market shrank sharply. According to a report published by Colliers, the total value of apartments sold in Tbilisi in April-June amounted

to \$141 million, which is 66% or \$ 272 million less than in 2019.

According to individual months, the decline was most pronounced in April, when the country imposed the strictest restrictions in terms of the state of emergency. In April, a total of 203 apartments were sold in Tbilisi with a total volume of \$10 million.

In May, apartment sales recovered relatively well, and the public registry recorded the sale of 841 apartments with a total value of \$38 million, although



The total value of apartments sold in Tbilisi in April-June amounted to \$ 141 million, which is a 66% decrease compared to the same period of 2019.

this figure was reduced by 74% year-on-year.

In June, 2 117 apartments were traded in Tbilisi, which was almost 2.5 times more than in the previous month. On an annual basis, this figure was reduced by 37%.

According to Colliers, the market recovery trend will continue in July, which will be partly due to the state subsidy program launched in July.

It has been more than a week since the banks started issuing subsidized mortgages. According to the budget, the financing of this program will be ₾ 70 million and the co-financing of the loans will last for 5 years.

The state subsidizes 4% of the mortgage interest rate; The state terminates the subsidy if the refinancing rate falls below 5% (resumes or exceeds); Subsidy is issued for loans not exceeding ₾ 200,000; The subsidy applies only to those who will take a mortgage loan in the period 01/06/2020 - 01/01/2021 to buy a newly built apartment.

The state issues a loan guarantee in the amount of 20% of the loan. The guarantee applies to loans where the co-payment is less than 10%. The budget for this program is 14 million.

Georgian businesses seek opportunities despite pandemic losses

EU and UNDP survey provides insights to guide packaging companies in Georgia

TBILISI. 14 July 2020 – As Georgia's economy struggles to restart after pandemic shutdowns, private-sector companies are seeking analytical insights to help them assess challenges, recognise emerging opportunities and find ways out of the economic and business crisis caused by the health emergency. To address this need for the packaging sector, the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) today released a survey that assesses the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns and advises on next steps.

"The EU is committed to assisting Georgia in its economic recovery and helping to put Georgian companies back in business," said Vincent Rey, Head of Cooperation of the EU Delegation to Georgia. "To this end we work with promising value chains in Georgia, including packaging. Understanding what is happening in the sector is key to helping it recover in this crisis and save jobs. With the EU's engagement in the sector, we promote a green and innovative climate recovery, in line with the circular economy concept. Waste and resource use are minimised, and when a product reaches the end of its life, it is used again to create further value."

"As our survey makes clear, Georgia's economy has taken a big hit during the pandemic, with half of the companies in the packaging sector losing at least half of their income," said UNDP Head Louisa Vinton. "But it is heartening to see that 70 percent of the same group of companies are exploring new business opportunities."

Based on interviews with over 500 companies, the new research reveals that over half of the enterprises that make up Georgia's packaging value chain lost more than 50 percent of their income to lockdown and 83 percent consider the pandemic a significant threat to their continued operation. 88 percent of companies had no business-continuity insurance, and 58 percent say they lack the financial resources needed to survive the crisis.

Company workforces have also been hurt, but 54 percent of packaging companies managed to avoid firing or laying off staff. 17 percent put staff on unpaid leave while 17 percent temporarily laid off their employees.

Yet, despite these sobering results, more than 70 percent of packaging companies see business opportunities emerging alongside pandemic challenges. Most of them aim to develop new products and services, enter new markets and explore online business tools to modernise their operations. Some have already taken bold steps to repurpose their business on short notice, adapting products and services to the emerging market needs.

The assessment of the pandemic impacts on the packaging supply chain in Georgia was commissioned by the EU and UNDP and carried out in May 2020 by the Georgian research agency ACT.

The packaging value chain is one of the business fields supported by the EU and UN as part of the wider EU4Business programme, which promotes private sector development in Georgia.

Armenia, Azerbaijan exchange artillery fire, sides blame each other for firing

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Prime Minister Nikol Fashinyan has accused Azerbaijan of 'provocation that will not go unanswered.'

The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry said that several officers, including a general and a colonel, were killed while repelling an attack by the Armenian Armed Forces in the Tovuz region, on the border with Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan's Deputy Defense Minister Karim Valiyev told reporters that intense fighting took place overnight between July 13th and 14th. "About a hundred warriors, numerous military equipment and critical objects have been destroyed," he said. One civilian was also reported killed in an artillery attack by Armenian troops in the Tovuz district.

Less than a week before the clash,

Aliyev strongly criticized diplomatic talks with Armenia. The purpose of this negotiation is to end the 30-year-old conflict between the two sides.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry immediately issued a statement condemning the Armenian attack.

Armenia, a member of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization, has appealed to the organization. Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan called the organization's secretary general, Stanislav Zas, and told him that Azerbaijan had violated the ceasefire and that such an action against a member of the treaty was unacceptable, Eurasianet reported.

The President of Georgia Salome Zurbishvili expressed her concern over the armed confrontation that took place on the border between Azerbaijan and

Armenia.

"Today, as we all fight together against an invisible enemy, international solidarity and the maintenance of global stability are of paramount importance. The peace and security of our region is important for the future development and prosperity of Georgia as well as of our friend and partner states - Azerbaijan and Armenia," Zurbishvili said, expressing hope that the necessary measures will be taken in a timely manner and that further escalation of the situation will be avoided through peaceful negotiations.

The US State Department has called on Armenia and Azerbaijan to adhere to the ceasefire. The United States strongly condemns the violence on the internationally recognized border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the State Department said in a statement.

"We urge the parties to immediately cease the use of force and use the means of direct communication available to prevent further escalation and to adhere strictly to the ceasefire agreement," said State Department spokesman Morgan Ortagus.

According to the statement, as Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, the United States remains committed to assisting the parties in the long-term, peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The European Union, the United States and Russia have called for restraint in a series of July 13th statements.

Baku and Yerevan have been in conflict for years over Nagorno-Karabakh, an internationally recognized region of Azerbaijan. Armenian-backed separatists gained control of this predominantly Armenian-populated region of Azerbaijan during the war in the early 1990s. The war killed up to 30,000 people. Diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict have not made significant progress.