

# Deepening relations with Georgia

**R**elations between NATO and Georgia have deepened significantly over the years since dialogue and cooperation was first launched in the early 1990s. The “Rose Revolution” in 2003 and the push for democratic reforms were a strong catalyst for intensified partnership with the Alliance. Today, Georgia is an aspirant for NATO membership, actively contributes to NATO-led operations, and cooperates with the Allies and other partner countries in many other areas.

Georgia’s security policy is based on establishing a secure, democratic, and stable environment. To pursue this goal, it is establishing defence cooperation with partner countries and organizations. Cooperation with NATO, active participation in NATO’s Partnership for Peace programme, and eventual accession to the Alliance are central to this policy.

The Allies welcome Georgia’s ambition to join the Alliance and launched an Intensified Dialogue with the country about its membership aspirations in 2006. At the Bucharest Summit in April 2008, Allied leaders agreed that Georgia will become a member of NATO – a decision which Allied leaders reaffirmed at their summit meetings in Strasbourg/Kehl in April 2009 and in Lisbon in November 2010.

As an Alliance based on democratic values, NATO has high expectations of prospective new members and urges Georgia to continue to pursue wide-ranging reforms to achieve its goal of Euro-Atlantic integration. The Allies strongly encourage the Georgian government’s continued implementation of all necessary reforms, particularly democratic,



Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze speaks to NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at a meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission in Berlin on 15 April 2011. The Allies welcomed Georgia’s strong performance in defence reform and its valuable contribution to the NATO-led force in Afghanistan.



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## NATO's Special Representative to the Caucasus and Central Asia

The position of Special Representative to the Caucasus and Central Asia was established in June 2004 at the Istanbul Summit, when Allied leaders decided to make partnership with the Caucasus, as well as with Central Asia, a priority for the Alliance.



His role is to maintain high-level working contact with regional leaders to enhance cooperation with the Alliance as well as to promote understanding of NATO and security issues through engagement with the media and civil society. He provides advice on the processes of reform and how best to use NATO partnership tools. He also liaises with representatives of the international community and other international organizations engaged in the two regions to ensure coordination of assistance programmes. His work is supported by two liaison officers, one for each region.

The post of Special Representative is currently held by James Appathurai, since 2010.

electoral, media and judicial reforms, as well as defence and security-sector reforms. Advice and active support for the country's reform efforts are being channeled through the NATO-Georgia Commission, which was set up in September 2008, to supervise the process set in hand at the Bucharest Summit.

Beyond support for reform, an important area of cooperation is Georgia's support for NATO-led operations. It is commendable that Georgia's armed forces are contributing the second-largest contingent of non-NATO troops to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. There are no "caveats" (or restrictions) on the use of these forces, which is greatly appreciated by commanders in the field. Furthermore, Georgia is committed to increasing its contribution in 2012, possibly making it the largest non-NATO troop-contributing nation. The Allies welcome this demonstration of Georgia's continued determination to play an active role in promoting international peace and security.

Georgia also cooperates with Allies and other partner countries in a wide range of other areas, ranging from countering terrorism and tackling new security challenges, to improving preparedness and responses to natural or man-made disasters.

## Multilateral dimension of partnership

Partnership with NATO has an important multilateral dimension. Georgia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) in 1992, upon gaining independence with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The NACC was established after the end of the Cold War, as a forum for dialogue through which the Allies could reach out a hand of friendship to former adversaries which had been part of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.

In 1997, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) was created to replace the NACC and to build on its achievements, paving the way for the development of an enhanced and more operational partnership, which also included western European partners.

As a member of the 50-nation EAPC, Georgia regularly exchanges views and pursues practical cooperation on a wide range of security issues with NATO member countries and other Euro-Atlantic partners. Thanks to the new partnerships policy adopted in Berlin in April 2011 – aimed at making NATO’s dialogue and cooperation with partners more inclusive, flexible, meaningful and strategically oriented – Georgia will also have more opportunities to work and consult with partners beyond the Euro-Atlantic partnership framework, including NATO’s partners on the southern Mediterranean rim and in the Gulf region, as well as partners across the globe.

The EAPC provides the overall political framework for NATO’s cooperation with Euro-Atlantic partners and the bilateral relationships and practical cooperation developed between NATO and individual partner countries within the Partnership for Peace programme, which Georgia joined upon its launch in 1994.

The Euro-Atlantic partnership is about more than practical cooperation – it is also about values. When partner countries join the Partnership for Peace (PfP), they sign the PfP Framework Document. In doing so, partners commit to the preservation of democratic societies; to the maintenance of international law; to fulfil in good faith the obligations of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; to the Helsinki Final Act; and to the fulfilment of the commitments and obligations undertaken in international disarmament and arms control agreements. Notable principles to respect are to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state; to respect existing borders; and to settle disputes peacefully.

The purpose of these commitments and of the EAPC and the PfP programme as a whole is to build confidence and transparency, diminish threats to peace, and build stronger security relationships with the Allies and with other Euro-Atlantic partners.



Then Georgian Foreign Minister Alexander Chikvaдзе signs the Partnership for Peace Framework Document on 23 March 1994. This paved the way for practical bilateral cooperation between NATO and Georgia, as well as setting out key partnership values and commitments.



The then NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and Allied Ambassadors visit a camp in Gori on 16 September 2008, where some 2200 displaced people had found shelter after the August conflict.

## Security challenges in the southern Caucasus

Georgia is situated in the southern Caucasus and shares borders with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia – all three of which are NATO partners – as well as with Turkey, a NATO Ally. Stretching from the Black Sea in the west to the Caspian Sea in the east, the southern Caucasus region is a crossroads of peoples and cultures, which has been of considerable geostrategic importance throughout the ages and continues to be so today.

One important reason for the Alliance to promote dialogue and foster security in the region is that today's key security challenges – terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed states and regional conflicts – defy borders and can only be addressed through concerted international cooperation. NATO's partners in the southern Caucasus face the same threats as the Allies and also have a crucial role to play in addressing them, not least because they are in geographic proximity to areas of concern for NATO.

Energy security is another issue that affects both the Caucasus and the Allies. The region sits on key oil and gas transit routes, and Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea basin have significant oil and gas reserves. Promoting security in the region is in the interest of both energy-importing countries, which are looking to diversify their energy sources and supply routes, and energy-exporting and transit countries, which need to ensure the security of their industry and pipeline infrastructure.

The southern Caucasus is also a region currently undergoing rapid and significant change. Such transition periods are always complex and a potential source of instability. However, by supporting this process through partnership and cooperation with its partners in the region, NATO aims to contribute to stability and in this way improve prospects for economic and social development.

Another important security concern in the southern Caucasus is that all three of NATO's partners in the region are involved in protracted conflicts with breakaway regions. Nagorno-Karabakh, officially part of Azerbaijan, is the subject of a bitter dispute between Armenia and

Azerbaijan. In the case of Georgia, the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions have long been a source of tension, which erupted into armed conflict most recently in August 2008 (*see below*).

NATO does not seek a direct role in the resolution of these conflicts, but supports the efforts of other international organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the United Nations, which have specific mandates for mediation. However, the peaceful resolution of conflict is a core value of NATO and is at the heart of the commitments undertaken by all NATO's Euro-Atlantic partners when they joined the Partnership for Peace. Upholding such values is all the more important in a region, where tensions run high.

### Crisis in Georgia

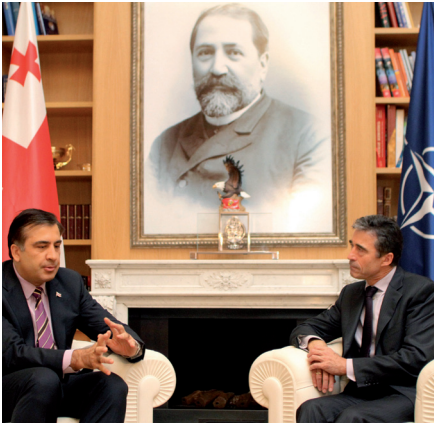
Regrettably, conflict broke out in August 2008 between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia and subsequently Abkhazia, with tragic consequences for local populations. The conflict, which erupted on 7 August, lasted five days before a cease-fire mediated by the European Union was agreed. It is estimated that about 850 people lost their lives and that more than 100 000 fled their homes.

The Allies called for a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict based on respect for Georgia's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. They deplored the use of force in the conflict, which was inconsistent with the commitments to the peaceful resolution of conflicts that both Georgia and Russia have made under the Partnership for Peace as well as other international agreements. Particular concern was expressed over Russia's disproportionate military action which was incompatible with its peacekeeping role in the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia was also called upon to take immediate action to withdraw its troops from the areas it had agreed to leave under the terms of the EU-brokered ceasefire.

The Allies agreed to support Georgia, upon its request, in a number of areas. These included assessing the damage to civilian infrastructure



The inaugural meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission takes place in Tbilisi on 15 September 2008, during a visit to Georgia of the North Atlantic Council, NATO's highest decision-making body.



NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen meets Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili in Tbilisi on 1 October 2010. He confirmed NATO's strong commitment to Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as the decisions taken at the Bucharest Summit.

and the state of the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces; supporting the re-establishment of the air traffic system; and advising on cyber defence issues.

Underlining the Allies' continued commitment to the decision taken at the Bucharest Summit a few months earlier, the NATO-Georgia Commission was established in September 2008 to supervise the process aimed at realizing Georgia's aspirations to join NATO. The new body was also tasked to oversee NATO's assistance to Georgia following the conflict.

The Georgian crisis had a significant impact on NATO's relations with Russia – formal meetings of the NATO-Russia Council and practical cooperation in some areas were suspended for over a year. In an address to the University of Chicago in May 2011, Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen acknowledged that NATO and Russia don't always see eye to eye and still have disagreements of principle on issues such as Georgia. "We must not shy away from discussing these disagreements. But neither must we allow them to paralyse our partnership," he explained.

NATO continues to support Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders, and to call on Russia to reverse its decision to recognize the independence of the two breakaway regions. The Secretary General has issued statements underlining that NATO does not recognize elections that have taken place in South Ossetia in 2009 and Abkhazia in 2011, and that the holding of such elections does not contribute to a peaceful and lasting settlement.

In the meantime, the Allies welcome the declaration by the Georgian president to seek a resolution to the crises with the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia through peaceful means. They strongly support Georgia's current strategy of engagement with the two breakaway regions, which envisions a constructive way forward through fostering economic ties and people-to-people contacts to build confidence.

## Framework for bilateral cooperation

The NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) provides a forum for consultation between the Allies and Georgia on the process of reforms in Georgia, NATO's assistance to that process, and on regional security issues of common concern. All NATO member states and Georgia are represented in the NGC, which meets regularly at the level of ambassadors and military representatives, as well as at the level of foreign and defence ministers, chiefs of staff and at summit level, as mutually agreed by NATO and Georgia.

Work under the NGC is developed through an Annual National Programme (ANP). These plans are based on the Georgian government's priorities and plans for reform, as well as recommendations from Allies. The ANP covers five key areas: political and economic issues, defence and military issues, resource issues, and security and legal issues. The first ANP was agreed in spring 2009, replacing and building upon the achievements of the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), which had guided NATO-Georgia cooperation on reform since 2004.

An important element of support for Georgia's reform and transformation process in the defence and security sector is the Planning and Review Process (PARP). The PARP provides a framework for partners to develop effective, affordable and sustainable armed forces as well as promoting wider defence reform efforts. Planning targets are negotiated every two years and extensive reviews measure progress annually (*see p. 9*).

Cooperation with NATO goes well beyond support for reforms. The NGC also keeps under review cooperative activities developed in the framework of Georgia's participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP), as well as in the military-to-military sphere. The PfP programme offers an extensive menu of activities from which partner countries can draw up programmes of cooperation according to the individual country's needs, abilities and ambitions. The activities on offer touch on virtually every field of NATO activity, including defence-related work, defence reform, defence policy and planning, civil-military relations, education



*(Left to right)* NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen opens the NATO Liaison Office in Tbilisi together with the Vice Prime Minister and State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Georgia, Giorgi Baramidze, and the then Head of the NATO Liaison Office in Georgia, Zbigniew Rybacki.



*(Front, left to right)* The Georgian Chief of Defence, Major General Devi Tchankotadze, talks to the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Giampaolo Di Paola, at a meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission on 4 May 2011.

and training, military-to-military cooperation and exercises, civil emergency planning and disaster-response, and cooperation on science and environmental issues.

A decision was taken in August 2010 to enhance NATO-Georgia relations through more effective military cooperation. The first Military Committee with Georgia Work Plan was developed and implemented in 2011. It details jointly agreed areas of cooperation and objectives, and defines priorities for the allocation of resources. A comprehensive set of activities aim to foster interoperability and to help sustain Georgia's contributions to NATO-led operations as well as to contribute to the implementation of defence reforms and the achievement of security and defence-related goals set out in the ANP.

To facilitate consultation and cooperation, Georgia established a permanent diplomatic mission to NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, in 1998. It is also represented at Allied Command Operations, which is based at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Mons, Belgium.

The NATO Liaison Office, which was formally opened by the NATO Secretary General in the capital Tbilisi in October 2010, is also a valuable tool for assisting and supporting the reform process in Georgia and further developing bilateral cooperation.

## Key areas of cooperation

In the early days of NATO-Georgia relations, partnership and cooperation focused on measures to promote transparency and build confidence. Over the years, cooperation has broadened and deepened. Key priorities today are: support for the wide-ranging reforms Georgia needs to pursue in order to realize its ambitions of Euro-Atlantic integration; tailored advice and assistance for defence and security-sector reforms; improving the ability of the country's armed forces to work with those of the Allies and other partner countries in peace-support and crisis-management operations; and practical cooperation



to address shared security challenges. Other important areas of cooperation are disaster-preparedness, science and the environment, and public information.

Under the NGC, political dialogue and the focus of cooperation on democratic, institutional and defence reforms has been strengthened. The ANP identifies key areas where Georgia needs to focus its reform efforts and where NATO-Georgia cooperation could be better targeted to facilitate progress. NATO officials provide feedback and tailored advice as needed.

Expectations of a prospective new NATO member include a functioning democratic political system based on a market economy; fair treatment of minority populations; a commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes; the ability and willingness to make a military contribution to the Alliance and to achieve interoperability with other members' forces; and a commitment to democratic civil-military relations and institutional structures.

### **Defence and security-sector reform**

Defence and security-sector reform is an area in which NATO and individual Allies have considerable experience that partners can draw upon. NATO's newest members have themselves been through a democratic transition process and can also share their experience of preparing for Alliance membership.

Allied support for such reforms is not about imposing a "NATO model", but rather about encouraging Georgia to think about its own needs and the best way to go about addressing them. Advisors ask the questions that need asking and encourage ministries to think strategically and systematically.

Georgia's participation in the PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP) since 1999 has helped develop the ability of its forces to work with NATO and is also providing planning targets that are key to security reform objectives in several areas. A biennial process, the PARP is

### **Boosting the role of civilians**

A six-year professional development programme, launched in May 2009, is strengthening civilian management and oversight in Georgia's defence and security sector. Such capacity building is important for the country's democratic development and will improve the ability of government to introduce and manage systemic changes in these institutions.

Four types of training are provided: educational opportunities abroad (provided by participating nations), such as language courses; internships, ranging from a week to several months, either at NATO Headquarters in Brussels or in the capitals of countries contributing to the programme; mobile training teams that provide courses in specific functional areas; and locally organized courses designed to provide training in more general fields.

In 2011, under Phase II of the programme, training is being extended beyond the Ministry of Defence to include personnel from the State Minister's Office for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, the National Security Council, the National Defence Academy, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Data Exchange Agency, and other institutions.

## Clearing unexploded munitions

Decades of regional strife have left explosive remnants of war strewn across the Georgian countryside. The problem was exacerbated by the conflict with Russia in August 2008. Another source of mines and unexploded ordnance are contaminated areas around former Soviet military bases. Such dangerous materials are a danger to the lives and limbs of local people (some 400 victims have been severely injured to date). Also, terrorists and criminals are increasingly using them to make improvised explosive devices.

Following a request for NATO assistance, a Trust Fund project with a total budget of EUR 2.87 million was launched in October 2010 to help build capacity in Georgia for the safe disposal of mines, shells, and other dangerous unexploded munitions. Over 60 members of the Georgian Military Engineers Brigade are receiving extensive training at the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action.

A special rehabilitation centre in the Gori military hospital is also being provided with specialized equipment and training to help victims who have been injured by explosions.

open to all partners on a voluntary basis, but participation is required of any country preparing for possible membership of the Alliance. The PARP helps identify, develop, and evaluate forces and capabilities which may be made available for NATO multinational training, exercises and operations. It also serves as the principal mechanism to guide and measure progress in defence and military reform.

Through PARP, NATO support has helped Georgia build deployable units according to NATO standards and interoperable with Allied forces. Georgia's defence reform objectives within the PARP have facilitated improved financial management in the Ministry of Defence, assisted in reforming the intelligence structure of the armed forces and ensured that a credible Strategic Defence Review was conducted.

Georgia, like some other partners, has chosen to extend the scope of the PARP's coverage beyond the defence sector to cover reforms in the wider security sector. This means that goals set under PARP also address development objectives for the border and security services of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, including the coast guard.

Strengthening democratic and civilian control over the security and defence structures, and improving the capacity of these structures is of fundamental importance to Georgia's democratic development. Georgia's participation in the Partnership Action Plan on Defence Institution Building (PAP-DIB) reinforces these efforts, such as by promoting effective judicial oversight and appropriate defence command and control arrangements through a range of measurable objectives within the ANP.

Following a request for assistance from the Georgian Ministry of Defence, a NATO-Georgia Professional Development Programme was launched in May 2009 to help develop the professional skills of civilian personnel working in the ministry and other security institutions (see box p.9).

Another priority in the area of defence and security-sector reform has been to support demilitarization projects in Georgia through the NATO/PfP Trust Fund mechanism which allows individual Allies and partner countries to provide financial support to key projects on a voluntary

basis. Two Trust Fund projects have helped to address problems posed by stockpiles of surplus and obsolete weapons and munitions, and led to the safe destruction of 530 missiles in 2006, as well as 1080 S-8 missiles, 5,724 Alazan and 1,976 Kristall rockets in 2009. A third Trust Fund project was launched in October 2010 to help build capacity in Georgia for the safe disposal of mines and other unexploded munitions, as well as for the rehabilitation of victims injured by explosions (see box p. 10).

### Security cooperation

Cooperation in peace-support operations and in tackling new security challenges is a significant focus of cooperation with Georgia.

Bilateral cooperation and multinational training and exercises help to develop the capacity of Georgia's forces to work alongside NATO forces. Georgia has hosted multinational PfP exercises in 2001, 2002 and 2007. Learning to speak a common language and developing interoperability in terms of standard procedures are essential. Thanks to such preparations within the PfP framework, personnel from Georgia have been deployed in support of various NATO-led operations.

As a part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, Georgia is currently providing a full infantry battalion serving with US forces, an infantry company serving with the French contingent in Kabul, medical personnel to assist ISAF within the Lithuanian Provincial Reconstruction Team, and some individual staff officers. At the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, Georgia announced further contributions to the training mission in Afghanistan and has committed to further significant troop contributions. With a total of around 950 military personnel, Georgia is currently the second-largest NATO partner contributor to ISAF. With additional contributions announced for 2012, the country could become the largest non-NATO troop-contributing nation.

Georgian troops also worked alongside NATO troops in the peacekeeping operation in Kosovo from 1999-2008, providing a company-sized unit to the Kosovo Force (KFOR) as part of the German brigade there, and an infantry platoon within a Turkish battalion task force.



A Georgian soldier observes an Afghan National Army soldier assemble an artillery tool at Camp Hero in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in July 2011.



A Georgian military doctor (*left*) works with a Ukrainian colleague to treat a young Afghan boy for burn wounds at the medical facilities of the multinational Provincial Reconstruction Team in Chaghcharan, Afghanistan.



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A Georgian KFOR soldier stands guard at the Airfield Camp Prizren in Kosovo.

NATO seeks to ensure that non-NATO troop contributors to its operations are involved in political consultations and decision-making, in operational planning and in command arrangements. As a troop contributor, Georgia regularly participates in high-level meetings between Allies and non-NATO troop contributors, and its personnel have access to the briefing and planning facilities of the International Coordination Centre at Allied Command Operations.

Security cooperation is not limited to contributing troops to operations. In the fight against terrorism, Georgia is supporting Operation Active Endeavour, NATO's counter-terrorist maritime surveillance operation in the Mediterranean, primarily through intelligence exchange. Cooperation under the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism, which was launched in the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, includes sharing intelligence, and training and exercises to improve counter-terrorist capabilities and border security as well as preparedness for managing the consequences of a possible terrorist attack.

Georgia is also working closely with NATO and other partners across a number of issues related to new security challenges, including cyber defence, energy security and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. The country regularly hosts conferences and seminars involving experts and officials from NATO and partner countries to share experience and best practice on how to address 21<sup>st</sup> century security challenges. In July 2011, a conference – jointly organized by the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme – was the first of its kind to focus on the interaction of several emerging security challenges.

### **Disaster-preparedness and response**

Georgia is also working with Allies and partners to improve preparedness and responses in the case of natural or man-made disasters, which can be overwhelming even for the best prepared countries. The repercussions of these disasters often cross borders and so can threaten the security and stability of entire regions. This is why cooperation with regard to effective disaster-preparedness and response (referred to in

NATO circles as “civil emergency planning”) is essential and an integral part of partnership activities.

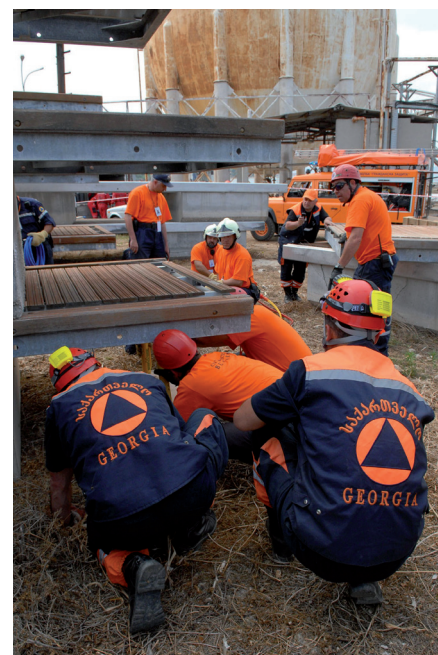
Georgia is enhancing its national civil emergency and disaster-management capabilities in cooperation with NATO and through participation in activities organized by the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC). The EADRCC was created in 1998 to coordinate disaster-relief efforts among NATO and partner countries. The Centre helped coordinate the delivery of hundreds of tonnes of relief items to Georgia in the wake of the August 2008 conflict. It also coordinated assistance to Georgia in 2005 when the country experienced some of the worst flooding in its history, in 2006 when forest fires broke out in southern Georgia, and after a major earthquake in 2009.

Georgia regularly participates in exercises with NATO and partner countries, which provide a valuable opportunity to assess capabilities in action and identify areas for greater cooperation in future. Most EADRCC activities, including a number of exercises, have been initiated, organized and conducted in partner countries, reflecting the high value that partners place on cooperation in civil emergency planning, which represents the largest non-military component of PfP activities.

### Science and environment

Scientists and researchers from Georgia benefit from opportunities offered under the NATO Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme, which promotes collaboration, networking and capacity building among scientists from NATO and partner countries. Activities supported include research, seminars, workshops and joint studies on security-related scientific issues and environmental concerns. NATO has two key priorities for scientific collaboration: defence against terrorism and countering other threats to security.

Georgia has been involved in NATO science activities since 1994. In total, scientists and experts from Georgia have had leading roles in 132 activities, and more have joined various cooperative activities as participants and key speakers. Many activities are aimed at aiding the country’s reform and



Georgian and Bulgarian rescue workers work together as a team responsible for equipment used for searching for casualties, during a disaster-response exercise in Croatia in May 2007.

## Lessening the effects of earthquakes

The Caucasus is a highly seismically active and hazardous region. In the last few decades alone, several major earthquakes of magnitude 6.5 to 7 have shaken the region. A NATO-sponsored project is helping to build capacity and promote cross-border cooperation in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to help lessen the effects of earthquakes in the region and encourage unimpeded access of response teams in case of a strong earthquake.

In addition to the heavy toll in terms of human life, earthquakes can also destroy economic and social infrastructures. Mitigating the loss of life and destruction of property caused by earthquakes requires a clear understanding of the expected earthquake-shaking character at various locations, and building and strengthening of structures according to expected impact.

With this in mind, a three-year project was launched in May 2009, funded under the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme, to improve seismic hazard and risk analysis and develop emergency response teams. Experts from eight NATO member and partner countries are involved in the project.

interoperability efforts, such as research and technology in air defence systems and data standardization, and reducing the environmental impact of military activities and munitions disposal. Other projects include collaboration on improving transboundary water quality and mitigating the risks posed by earthquakes in the southern Caucasus (see *box*).

The SPS Programme also seeks to strengthen the scientific and academic communities in the southern Caucasus countries. Georgia participated in the Virtual Silk Highway project, which has helped improve access to the internet for research facilities in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Afghanistan through a satellite-based network. Moreover, Networking Infrastructure Grants have assisted research institutions by providing equipment to improve the security level and quality of telecommunications facilities.

### Public information

It is important to explain the mutual benefits of partnership and what is required of a prospective NATO member to the Georgian people.

Work is ongoing to build networks with universities, non-governmental organizations, and the press and media, as well as to engage civil society in dialogue on wider Euro-Atlantic security issues. Numerous activities, such as seminars, conferences, workshops and publishing projects, are organized by local non-governmental organizations with the support of NATO and in cooperation with state authorities. "NATO Weeks" and summer schools are organized on an annual basis to reach out to youth audiences.

Groups of opinion leaders from Georgia are regularly invited to visit NATO Headquarters and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) for briefings about the Alliance, and NATO officials regularly travel to Georgia to speak at public events. High-level visits to Georgia of senior NATO officials – including Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and his Special Representative for the South Caucasus and Central Asia, James Appathurai – take place regularly. The North Atlantic Council, NATO's highest decision-making body, paid a two-day visit to the

country in September 2008, in the immediate aftermath of the Georgia crisis. Another visit of the Council is planned for November 2011.

Georgia has established an Information Center on NATO, which has its main office in Tbilisi and branches in Kutaisi and Zugdidi. Working in close cooperation with NATO's Public Diplomacy Division and with the NATO Liaison Office in Georgia, it is an important tool in raising public awareness about the Alliance in the country.

Georgia's drive towards NATO membership is widely supported in the country. A nationwide poll taken in March 2011 revealed that just over 70 per cent of Georgians support or somewhat support NATO membership (with a three per cent margin of error). This echoes the results of the non-binding advisory referendum on whether to join NATO, which was held in Georgia in January 2008. According to the official results of Georgia's Central Election Commission, 77 percent of voters were in favour, and 23 percent voted against it.

One key public diplomacy objective for both the Georgian government and NATO is to inform, educate and manage the expectations of the population about NATO membership, including rights and obligations. Georgia is on the right track and has made significant progress on a wide-ranging reform package. It needs to continue on this path, adopting and implementing further necessary reforms, to realize its membership aspirations.



A majority of Georgians support their country's aspirations to join the Alliance.



# milestones

- 1992** Georgia joins the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (now the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council).
- 1994** Georgia joins the Partnership for Peace (PfP).
- 1995** Georgia signs the PfP Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) - ratified by parliament in 1997.
- 1999** Georgia joins the PfP Planning and Review Process.  
Georgian peacekeepers deploy as part of the Kosovo Force (KFOR).
- 2002** Georgia is connected to the Virtual Silk Highway.  
Georgia declares its aspirations to NATO membership.
- 2003** Launch of a Trust Fund project to support the demilitarization of ground-to-air defence missiles.  
Georgia supports the election security force of the NATO-led operation in Afghanistan.
- 2004** At Istanbul, Allied leaders make partnership with the Caucasus and Central Asia, a priority.
- 2005** Georgia is the first country to agree an Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO.  
Georgia signs an agreement allowing supplies for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to be sent to Afghanistan through Georgian territory.  
Georgia opens an information centre on NATO.
- 2006** NATO offers an Intensified Dialogue to Georgia on its membership aspirations.
- 2008** At Bucharest, Allied leaders agree Georgia will become a member of NATO.  
The Allies call for a peaceful and lasting solution to the August armed conflict between Georgia and Russia in the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, based on respect for Georgia's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.  
The NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) is established.
- 2009** Georgia develops and implements its first Annual National Programme under the NGC.  
Launch of a Professional Development Programme for the civilian personnel of the Georgian defence ministry and other security institutions.
- 2010** Launch of a Trust Fund project to help safely dispose of explosive remnants of war.  
Georgia agrees to contribute to NATO's maritime counter-terrorist operation in the Mediterranean.  
The NATO Liaison Office in Tbilisi is inaugurated by NATO's Secretary General.  
At Lisbon, Allied leaders recall their agreement that Georgia will become a member of NATO, and their support for the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
- 2011** The first annual Military Committee with Georgia Work Plan is established.  
NGC Foreign Ministers meet in Berlin.  
NGC Chiefs of Defence discuss Georgia's contributions to operations and review defence reforms.  
The Supreme Allied Commander Europe visits Georgia in August.  
The North Atlantic Council visits Georgia in November.

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