



BLACK SEA NEWS UPDATE

EU – BLACK SEA OBSERVATORY

24 March 2009

No. 2

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I. ARMENIA

1.

Turkey was forced into establishment of relations with Armenia

10.03.2009, PanARMENIAN.Net

READ MORE: <http://www.panarmenian.net/news/eng/?nid=29328>

“Turkey doesn’t renounce its policy to enter AU, but is trying to conduct alternative policy to strengthen its position in Caucasus and Middle East,” Armen Ashotyan, member of the RA parliament and the Republican Party of Armenia stated.

2.

What were Armenian officials thinking, if they were thinking at all?

10.03.2009, The Armenian Weekly

READ MORE: <http://www.hairenik.com/weekly/2009/03/10/what-were-armenian-officials-thinking-if-they-were-thinking-at-all/>

Two shocking announcements made by Yerevan officials recently have deeply troubled Armenians worldwide. The first statement was made by Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian in Tsakhkadzor, Armenia, on Febr. 21 during an international economic forum (“Outlook for International Economic Cooperation: Problems and Solutions”) The conference was attended by high-ranking officials and businessmen from Russia, Bulgaria, Iran, and many other countries.

II. AZERBAIJAN

1.

Azeris end president's term limit

19.03.2009, BBC NEWS

READ MORE: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/europe/7949327.stm>

Voters in Azerbaijan have overwhelmingly approved proposals to lift the two-term limit for presidents, the election commission has announced. More than 90% of those who voted in Wednesday's referendum backed the change to the constitution, it said. President Ilham Aliyev, who had backed the amendment, will now be able to extend his presidency beyond 2013.

2.

Azerbaijan approves mass amnesty

18.03.2009, Hurriyet Daily News

READ MORE: http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/world/11230946_p.asp

Azerbaijan's parliament yesterday approved a mass amnesty of thousands of prisoners ahead of a referendum lifting presidential term limits in the oil-rich Caucasus state.

3.

Azerbaijan Opening Supply Route to Afghanistan

17.03.2009, Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34714&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=27&cHash=af805ebde2

As the United States prepares to increase its military deployment in Afghanistan, attention is being devoted to the question of supply routes for these and other coalition forces. The U.S. European Command (EUCOM) held a conference in Baku on March 9 and 10 aimed at exploring ways to diversify the supply routes to include the South Caucasus. Government officials from Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey attended, along with U.S military representatives from the Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, Transportation Command, Defense Logistics Agency, Department of Defense (DoD), and EUCOM, as well as private transport companies.

4.

Azerbaijan-Moscow meeting set

09.03.2009, New Europe

READ MORE: <http://www.neurope.eu/print.php?id=93380>

The Azerbaijan-Moscow Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Partnership recently declared that the session will be held in Moscow after the first 10 days of March. During this period, Azerbaijani delegation visits Moscow for participation in the CIS Economic Councils session, Trend news agency reported. Azerbaijani sources say that the governments of Azerbaijan and Moscow have coordinated the preliminary terms of holding regular sessions.

III GEORGIA

1.

Anti-government rallies mark start of protest season in Tbilisi

17.03.2009, Telegraph

READ MORE: http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/sarah_marcus/blog/2009/03/16/antigovernment_rallies_mark_start_of_prote

Tbilisi has been abuzz for some time with speculation as to how heated protests against President Saakashvili and the government might get this spring, and as to whether the authorities will manage to avoid an overheated response. Opposition parties have come together to call for peaceful street protests demanding Saakashvili's resignation to begin on April 9th and continue indefinitely.

2.

Georgia — positive developments despite instability

03.09, European Centre for Minority Issues NEWSLETTER

READ MORE: <http://www.ecmi.de/37/2009/03/16/Newsletter-available.php>

Despite the problems Georgia faced in 2008, activities to enhance good governance on minorities through support to government institutions as well as the activities in the minority regions of Georgia in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli were continued. The “Denmark’s Caucasus Programme 2005-07”, extended until June 2008, and dealing with government structures was successfully concluded.

IV. GEORGIA – RUSSIA

1.

Russia To Defend Abkhazia, South Ossetia Borders

20.03.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: <http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1514007.html>

President Dmitry Medvedev has given the go-ahead to agreements with Georgia's breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which would formally put them under Moscow's military umbrella. Russia last year unilaterally recognized the independence of the breakaway Georgian territories after repelling a Georgian attack on South Ossetia in a five-day war. Georgia claims sovereignty of both regions, which originally broke away in the early 1990s.

2.

Georgia Will Not Extradite Russian Army Deserter

17.03.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: http://www.rferl.org/Content/Georgia_Will_Not_Extradite_Russian_Army_Deserter/1511843.html

Georgia will not extradite Russian army deserter Sergeant Aleksandr Glukhov, RFE/RL's Russian

service reports. Shota Utiashvili, a spokesperson for Georgia's Interior Affairs Ministry, told RFE/RL that Glukhov would not be extradited until the issue of his political asylum is resolved.

3.

Flinging Russian Mud In Georgia

17.03.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: http://www.rferl.org/Content/Flinging_Russia_Mud_In_Georgia/1511819.html

As Georgia heads towards protest season, the mudslinging between opposition leaders and government officials has intensified -- and the motif is cooperation, or collusion, with Russian. Giorgi Khaindrava, former minister for conflict resolution and now an opposition leader, has openly threatened President Mikheil Saakashvili, saying he would make the president sorry for ever having been born

4.

Abkhazia has no plans to accede to Russia or any other state -Bagapsh

17.03.2009, ITAR TASS

READ MORE: <http://www.itar-tass.com/eng/prnt.html?NewsID=13687763>

Abkhazia has no plans to accede to Russia or any other state, President Sergei Bagapsh told a meeting with the vice-president of the International Crisis Group, Alain Delatroz, and the director of ICG Office for Caucasus, Lawrence Sheets on Tuesday. "We are building an independent, legal and democratic state and have no plans to sidetrack this path whatever efforts this would cost," he said.

5.

Georgia Separatists Say Russian Aid Has Dried Up

16.03.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: <http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1511106.html>

South Ossetia's separatist administration has said Russia was failing to honor a pledge to spend millions of dollars repairing the devastation from last year's war in the breakaway Georgian region. A separatist official said the economic slump -- which has hit Russia hard and forced it to rein in budget spending -- was slowing the reconstruction effort, but Russia's Finance Ministry said aid for the region was protected from spending cuts.

6.

Saakashvili Speaks of Need of Strong Army

16.03.2009, civil.ge

READ MORE: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=20563>

President Saakashvili said on March 15 that the country with occupied territories had no alternative other than to have strong army. "We should continue perfection of our readiness; we have obtained and will obtain new equipment; we will also improve training and social conditions [for servicemen]," he said at a meeting with the Georgian artilleryist.

7.

Wartime Approaching in the Caucasus

12.03.2009, Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34690&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=27&cHash=fbc6d957b2

It is early springtime and in the mountain passes separating Georgia from Russia, there is snowfall one day and wet snow or rain the next. Avalanches and mudslides caused by wet snow regularly close down the only road connecting Russia and the breakaway region of South Ossetia through the Roki Tunnel (RIA Novosti, March 9). Low clouds and fog in the mountains keep Russian helicopters and jets grounded for days and weeks. But in two months, the weather will be fine. In May the last snow will melt on the high mountain passes and it will be wartime again in the region.

8.

Humanitarian consequences of the conflict between Georgia and Russia

11.03.2009, Georgian Daily

READ MORE: http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=10445&Itemid=65

As part of the follow-up to Resolution 1648 (2009) on the humanitarian consequences of the war between Georgia and Russia, Corien Jonker (Netherlands, EPP/CD), Chair of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), will travel to Tskhinvali on 13-14 March and meet the de facto authorities of South Ossetia, together with the de facto Ombudsman David Sanakoev.

9.

Saakashvili welcomes Russian business

09.03.2009, NewEurope

READ MORE: <http://www.neurope.eu/print.php?id=93421>

On the anniversary of Georgias Occupation by the Soviet Union, Georgian President MIKheil Saakashvili delivered a lengthy speech dedicated to Georgian-Russian relations. He said that Georgia was ready for a dialogue with Russia, but on the condition that Moscow respects Georgias sovereignty and independence, The Messenger reported.

V. MOLDOVA

1.

Voronin-Medvedev Accord Demolishes Moldova's Negotiating Position on Transnistria

20.03.2009, Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34736&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=13&cHash=d86da32f1b

Apparently panicking in the run-up to the April 5 elections, Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin has hoisted the white flag of surrender on Transnistria in return for a pre-election endorsement from the Kremlin. The president can not run for a third term of office but his Communist Party hopes to profit from the Kremlin's televised accolades to Voronin.

2.

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly pays pre-election visit to Moldova

17.03.2009, OSCE

READ MORE: <http://www.osce.org/item/36837.html?print=1>

An OSCE PA delegation visited Chisinau from 15-17 March 2009 to prepare for the Assembly's election observation mission to the 5 April parliamentary elections in Moldova. The delegation was headed by Greek parliamentarian, Petros Efthymiou, chairman of the OSCE PA General Committee on Economic Affairs, Science, Technology and Environment. Mr. Efthymiou has been appointed by the OSCE Chair-in-Office as the Special Co-ordinator to lead the OSCE short-term observers and deliver the post-election statement on behalf of the OSCE at a press conference in Chisinau the day after the elections.

VI. RUSSIA

1.

Russia Presses Military Modernization, Despite Financial Crisis

10.03.2009, Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: <http://www.jamestown.org/single/>

?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34683

On March 4 Russian Deputy Defense Minister for Finance and Economic Affairs Lyubov Kudelina outlined defense spending plans in light of the global financial crisis, expressing confidence that although there would be some cuts in the overall budget of the Ministry of Defense (MoD), this would not damage the reform and modernization of the armed forces. Kudelina said that as part of the ongoing effort to modernize the military 1,500 billion rubles (\$42.1 billion) would be spent from 2009 through 2011 on acquisition and repair of armaments, research and development, and experimental design work. In 2009, according to Kudelina, the armed forces "should receive new aircraft of all types, helicopters, a significant amount of armored equipment and motor vehicles, surface-to-air missile systems, and ships and submarines"

VII. TURKEY

1.

Turkey To Launch Armenian-Language Radio Station

20.03.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: <http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1514028.html>

Turkey's state broadcaster plans to launch an Armenian-language radio station, Anatolian state news agency has said, amid tentative moves by Turkey and its neighbor Armenia toward restoring diplomatic ties. Relations between the two countries are haunted by the killing of Armenians by Ottoman Turks during World War One, which Armenia says amounted to genocide. Ankara accepts many Armenians were killed, but denies genocide was committed.

VIII. UKRAINE

1.

Ukraine Prime Minister to visit Russia

20.03.2009, BSANNA NEWS

READ MORE: <http://bsanna-news.ukrinform.ua/newsitem.php?id=8588&lang=en>

Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko will pay a visit to the Russian Federation on April 8. She said addressing the Cabinet of Ministers' meeting that the visit would take place within the framework of the Ukraine – Russia economic committee meeting.

2.

Ukraine President, Bulgaria Premier discuss cooperation in energy security

20.03.2009, BSANNA NEWS

READ MORE: <http://bsanna-news.ukrinform.ua/newsitem.php?id=8579&lang=en>

During his visit to Brussels, Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko met with Prime Minister of Bulgaria Sergei Stanishev, who took part in the European People's Party summit, the presidential press service told UKRINFORM. They discussed bilateral cooperation in the maintenance of energy security, as well as cooperation in the fields of culture, trade and development of gas transportation systems of the two countries.

3.

Engaging Ukraine in 2009

19.03.2009, Brookings Institution

READ MORE: http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/03_ukraine_pifer.aspx?rssid=caucasus

Ukraine and Ukrainians will be tested over the course of 2009. The global financial and economic crisis already has provoked a deep recession and falling living standards. Kyiv will need to make a real effort to strike a balance between integration into Europe and the Euro-Atlantic community and

maintaining stable relations with Russia. Doing so will not be easy, as Russia regards Ukraine's pro-Western policy as inimical to Russian interests, and Ukraine's politics are subject to influence from Moscow. In particular, Ukraine must address its energy security situation, where it remains vulnerable to Russian pressure.

4.

Romanian-Ukrainian Espionage Scandal Exacerbates Already Poor Relations

17.03.2009, Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34715&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=22a84a507e

NATO and European Union (EU) membership for Romania was meant to consign to history its penchant for territorial claims and its poor record on national minority rights, but this was not to be. Ukraine, the non-NATO member with the greatest level of cooperation with NATO, has expelled two diplomats of NATO-member Romania after accusing them of supporting separatists and discrediting the alliance's image of Ukraine.

5.

Putin to waive Ukraine gas fines

12.03.2009, Financial Times

READ MORE: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/262f332c-0f70-11de-ba10-0000779fd2ac.html>

Vladimir Putin, Russia's prime minister, on Thursday announced that Moscow would go easy on Ukraine in enforcing the terms of their bilateral gas deal, in a surprise sign of improving relations between Moscow and Kiev. The Russian leader said Gazprom, the Russian state-controlled group, would not impose penalties on Ukraine for failing to buy as much gas as it promised when the contract was signed in January, after a dispute that disrupted Russian gas supplies to the European Union.

IX. BSEC

1.

Energy ministers of BSEC member countries conduct their fifth meeting

20.03.2009, BSANNA NEWS

READ MORE: <http://bsanna-news.ukrinform.ua/actual-topic.php?id=0252&lang=en>

"Energy Security Challenges in Black Sea Region" topic was discussed today in Yerevan at the meeting of energy task groups of BSEC member countries. The discussions which kicked off March 18 are held chaired by the Republic of Armenia. Starting from May 1, 2007 Armenia with 2-year term is coordinating the works of the energy task groups of the BSEC and from November 1, 2008 it assumed the six-month chairmanship of BSEC.

2.

Pakistan meeting may hamper Babacan's Armenia visit plans

18.03.2009, Today's Zaman

READ MORE: <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=169898>

An obstacle to a planned visit by Foreign Minister Ali Babacan to Yerevan for a foreign ministerial meeting of Black Sea countries is another landmark meeting on Pakistan -- with which Turkey shares special relations -- that will be held in Japan on the same days.

3.

Turkish FM Babacan to pay relations boosting visit to Armenia

10.03.2009, Hurriyet Daily News

READ MORE: http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/world/11178182_p.asp

Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan decided to accept an invitation to attend a Black Sea Economic

Cooperation (BSEC) meeting in Yerevan next month, Hurriyet daily reported on Tuesday.

X. CIS

1.

Kazakh president: CIS fails to resolve some challenges

10.03.2009, Trend News

READ MORE: <http://news-en.trend.az/karabakh/1437502.html>

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev believes that EurAsEU is the most perspective integrated association in the post-Soviet territory. Nazarbayev said it is too early to bury the CIS. "Everyone talks about the CIS. Unfortunately, the CIS failed to resolve challenges within the organization," RIA Novosti quoted Nazarbayev as saying at the 11th meeting of the Eurasian Association of Universities in Astana. There are still unresolved conflicts in the Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

XI. NATO

1.

NATO-Russia Council to Resume Meetings in the Wake of April Summit

11.03.2009, Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34687

NATO has not invited Russia to the alliance's summit on April 3 and 4. The event to be held on both sides of the Franco-German border is billed as a family affair for NATO member countries. NATO has nevertheless initiated ahead of the summit a normalization of relations with Russia. The NATO-Russia Council and other political and consultative processes, which NATO had suspended after Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008, are to resume shortly after the summit (see article above).

2.

NATO Resumes Full-Fledged Relations with Russia After Nine-Month Suspension

11.03.2009, Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34686

The ministers of foreign affairs of NATO's 26 countries held an informal meeting on March 5 in Brussels, following the defense ministers' meeting in Cracow on February 19 and 20 (see *EDM*, February 23, 24). Both preparatory to NATO's April 3 and 4 summit. The Brussels meeting decided to resume full official relations with Russia, effective soon after the summit. NATO had largely suspended political relations and fully suspended military ones in the wake of Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008. That event challenged the post-1991 international order and continues to reverberate strongly in Europe and Eurasia, although its implications are not being fully addressed.

3.

Official: Russia hopes for cooperation with NATO

07.03.2009, xinhuanet.com

READ MORE: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/07/content_10959705.htm

Russia is ready to carry out practical cooperation with NATO on the platform of the Russia-NATO Council when confidence is restored, a spokesman for the Russian Foreign Ministry said Friday. "Russia and NATO members may have different views on events in Europe and the world. This is

normal," spokesman Andrei Nesterenko said in a statement on results of a meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels.

XII. OSCE

1.

OSCE Special Representative welcomes Moscow meeting on Transdniestria

18.03.2009, OSCE

[READ MORE: http://www.osce.org/item/36863.html?print=1](http://www.osce.org/item/36863.html?print=1)

The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office's Special Representative, Ambassador Charalampos Christopoulos, said he welcomed today's agreement in Moscow to accelerate the negotiations within the 5+2 format. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin and Transdniestria's leader Igor Smirnov signed a joint declaration today, in which they agree to continue efforts to renew work on the Transdniestrian settlement process in the 5+2 format. The declaration also mentioned a new peacekeeping operation under the aegis of the OSCE could be established after settlement of the Transdniestrian conflict.

2.

OSCE mission work in Georgia is crucial: OSCE chairperson

17.03.2009, TrendNews

[READ MORE: http://news-en.trend.az/print.shtml?newsid=1441852&lang=en](http://news-en.trend.az/print.shtml?newsid=1441852&lang=en)

In this time of crisis, the OSCE mission's work in Georgia is crucial, OSCE press release quoted OSCE chairperson Dora Bakoyannis as saying. "In this time of crisis, the Mission's work to promote stability in the region is more crucial than ever," Greek Foreign Minister Bakoyannis said at the end of the EU and OSCE Troika meeting in Brussels on March 16. "It is unfortunate that the OSCE Mission to Georgia finds itself in a process of discontinuation because of a lack of consensus on an extension of its mandate," she said. "Greek Chairmanship is intensively negotiating in an attempt to find consensus for a continued OSCE presence in Georgia."

3.

OSCE has been and remains Moldova's strategic partner

16.03.2009, TrendNews

[READ MORE: http://news-en.trend.az/cis/moldova/1441232.html](http://news-en.trend.az/cis/moldova/1441232.html)

The OSCE for years has been and remains a strategic partner to Moldova in the process of the society's democratisation, statehood's consolidation and Transnistrian conflict's settlement, promotion of the 5+2 format of negotiations, MOLDPRES reported. Parliament Speaker Marian Lupu made the statement at a today's meeting with a delegation of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, on a two-day pre-election visit to Chisinau, according to the parliament's mass media relations department.

4.

OSCE to fold its work in Georgia by June 2009

12.03.2009, RIAN

[READ MORE: http://en.rian.ru/world/20090312/120538117-print.html](http://en.rian.ru/world/20090312/120538117-print.html)

The office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Tbilisi will terminate its work by June 2009, the director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Center said Thursday. Herbert Salber told Ekho Moskvyy radio that the OSCE works on the principle of consensus, which means that decisions should be approved by all member states. The OSCE mission's mandate in Georgia expired on December 31, 2008, and the mission started shutting down January 1.

5.

No incident occurred during OSCE monitoring on Armenian-Azerbaijani contact line

11.03.2009, TrendNews

READ MORE: <http://news-en.trend.az/karabakh/1438154.html>

Monitoring was held on the contact line between Armenian and Azerbaijani armed forces after a mandate by the special envoy of the OSCE chairman. The monitoring near the Fuzuli-Goradiz Road proceeded without incident on March 11, the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry told Trend News. The monitoring was held on the Azerbaijani side by the OSCE chairman's personal representatives Imre Palatinus and Pieter Ki. The monitoring was held on the opposite side, which the international community recognizes as Azerbaijani territory, by the OSCE chairman's field assistants Irji Aberli and Vladimir Chountulov

6.

MONITORING MISSION CONDUCTED ALONG LINE OF CONTACT

11.03.2009, Panorama.am

READ MORE: <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2009/03/11/monitoring/>

Today the Organization on Security and Co-operation of Europe (OSCE) conducted a monitoring mission near Goradiz along the Line of Contact of Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan, reports the press service of the NKR Foreign Ministry.

XIII. BLACK SEA SYNERGY

1.

Adrian Severin: „Black Sea synergy is not a strategy, but points precisely to its absence

17.03.2009, Financiarul

READ MORE: <http://www.financiarul.ro/2009/03/17/adrian-severin-%E2%80%9Eblack-sea-synergy-is-not-a-strategy-but-points-precisely-to-its-absence/>

European socialists discussed on Monday in Bucharest about a European Union strategy on the Black Sea, at a conference called 'Designing a joint project for the Black Sea region'. The documents and ideas presented at the conference will be submitted to the Socialist Group of the European Parliament in order to become position documents and proposals of solutions to all those interested.

2.

Mircea Pascu: 'Improving Black Sea Synergy is needed, to maintain its credibility

13.03.2009, Financiarul

READ MORE: <http://www.financiarul.ro/2009/03/13/mircea-pascu-improving-black-sea-synergy-is-needed-to-maintain-its-credibility/>

Romanian MEP Ioan Mircea Pascu (Social Democratic Party, PSD, in power) on Thursday before the European Parliament's plenary sitting, approached the relation between the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy, and pointed out that improving the of the Synergy's substance for maintaining its credibility was necessary, especially in the context of several EU initiatives in the region, reads a release.

XIV. EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

1.

EU leaders reach out to ex-Soviet neighbors

20.03.2009, The Washington Post

READ MORE: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?node=admin/registration/register&destination=login&nextstep=gather&application=reg30-world&applicationURL=http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/20/AR2009032000804.html>

European Union leaders on Friday are expected to promise a hefty program of aid, trade and closer political ties for six ex-Soviet states where Moscow retains a strong influence nearly two decades after they won their independence. The EU's "Eastern Partnership" falls short of membership for Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Moldova and Belarus but offers significant economic integration and visa-free travel. Moscow views such attempts at closer integration with suspicion.

2.

Eastern partnership approved

20.03.2009, EuropeanVoice

READ MORE: <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/2009/03/eastern-partnership-approved/64368.aspx>

EU leaders give their backing to scheme to deepen the EU's relations with six eastern neighbours, including Ukraine and Belarus. European Union heads of state and government have approved a scheme to tie the EU's neighbours to the east – Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – closer to the Union. The scheme, which is known as the eastern partnership and is due to be launched on 7 May, will form an integral part of the EU's existing neighbourhood policy.

3.

Action is intended on energy and 'partners' to the East

19.03.2009, The Peninsula

READ MORE: http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/Display_news.asp?section=business_news&month=march2009&file=business_news2009031984618.xml

Rarely have the unstable lands that separate Russia from the European Union's eastern frontier captured the attention of its leaders as much as in the past 12 months. Russia's military defeat of Georgia in August ended in Moscow's de facto partition of the pro-western Caucasian state, an act viewed in Brussels as a sharp break with international conduct in post-cold war Europe. Five months later, a Russian-Ukrainian dispute led to the cut-off of Russian gas supplies delivered to the EU, producing severe midwinter disruption in member states such as Bulgaria and Slovakia.

4.

Cabinet Advisors Urge EU Accession Prospect for Former Soviet States

19.03.2009, nisnews

READ MORE: http://www.nisnews.nl/public/190309_1.htm

The European Union should offer former Soviet republics the prospect of EU membership, says the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV). It disagrees here with the cabinet. At the government's request, the AIV has issued an advisory letter in response to the proposals for an Eastern Partnership that the European Commission made in December 2008. "In developing a policy on its eastern neighbours, the European Union should not neglect two key regional players: Russia and Turkey," says the AIV.

5.

France Opposes Poland Plan For EUR600 Million Aid To Ex- Soviet States

19.03.2009, easybourse

READ MORE: <http://www.easybourse.com/bourse-actualite/marches/france-opposes-poland-plan-for-eur600-million-aid-to-ex-soviet-states-637182?PHPSESSID=4d82a0eb23292d5132fee355fef16505>

Poland and France were at odds Thursday over a European Union Commission plan to grant EUR600 million in aid to six ex-Soviet states, with Paris fearing it would lessen the pot for Mediterranean nations. The commission has proposed the funding to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine under the European Union's "Eastern Partnership" project, an initiative by Poland and Sweden to counterbalance the Mediterranean partnership plan championed last year by France. The Eastern Partnership was one of the issues being discussed at a two-day E.U. summit in Brussels, which got underway Thursday.

6.

Values to form core of EU 'Eastern Partnership'

18.03.2009, EUobserver

READ MORE: <http://euobserver.com/9/27799?print=1>

Promotion of human rights and rule of law in former Soviet states is to form the "core" of the EU's new Eastern Partnership policy, according to a draft EU summit declaration seen by EUobserver. "Shared values including democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights will be at its core, as well as the principles of market economy, sustainable development and good governance," the text says.

7.

The EU's Neighborhood Nightmare

18.03.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: http://www.rferl.org/content/The_EUs_Neighborhood_Nightmare/1512523.html

The European Union's most ambitious outreach effort to countries on the territory of the former Soviet Union, known as the Eastern Partnership, is in trouble. Officials in Brussels say Russia has launched a concerted counteroffensive to destroy or at least severely stymie the project targeting six ex-Soviet republics.

8.

Russia and the Eastern Partnership

17.03.2009, EU-Russia Centre

READ MORE: <http://www.eu-russiacentre.org/our-publications/column/russia-eastern-partnership.html>

The European Commission is on the way to launching an ambitious new programme based on a new multilateral cooperation framework: the Eastern Partnership. The concept will be finalised very shortly, and the preliminary date of the Eastern Partnership summit in Prague is set for 7 May. The six post-Soviet countries included are: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus (the participation of the latter will depend upon its general relations with the EU). The programme does not provide for universal relationships with every participating country. Most likely, there will be six different speeds of evolution for each country, depending on its readiness for further integration with the EU, up to the level of associate membership. The Eastern Partnership cannot be considered either as a preparatory step for full EU membership, or as a substitute for such membership. Rather, it is a continuation of the EU Neighborhood Economic Community programme.

9.

Speech of Ferrero-Waldner at European Parliament on EaP

12.03.2009, European Parliament

READ MORE: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/09/112&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Honourable Members,

I am glad to have this opportunity for a timely debate on the Eastern Partnership; a flagship of the Union's foreign policy.

Its strategic rationale is clear: more security, stability and prosperity in our Eastern neighbourhood.

The conflict in Georgia and the gas crisis in Ukraine are just two examples of the periodic crises and instability affecting this region. These have had a direct impact on the Union and its citizens.

To these two crises we now have to add the financial crisis which hits our Eastern neighbourhood particularly hard. While each crisis requires its own immediate

response, we also have to provide medium- and long term action to prevent new problems from arising.

10.

EU Commissioner's representative: Eastern Partnership does not offer a membership prospective
11.03.2009, REGNUM

READ MORE: <http://www.regnum.ru/english/1135634.html>

The Eastern Partnership aims at helping partner countries to address the challenges they face, told EU Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner's spokesperson, Christiane Hohmann in an interview to a REGNUM correspondent on March, 11.

11.

EU to pump extra €350 million to Eastern Partnership
10.03.2009, APA

READ MORE: <http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=98540>

The EU Commission has called on EU nations to provide more aid for ex-Soviet states of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia as part of a proposed "Eastern Partnership" program aimed at making the bloc's Eastern doorstep more stable. EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said on Monday, Feb. 23, that the European Union has a "crucial strategic interest" in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

12.

Economic crisis and the 'eastern partnership'
10.03.2009, Centre for European Reform

READ MORE: <http://centreforeuropeanreform.blogspot.com/2009/03/economic-crisis-and-eastern-partnership.html>

In two months, at a summit in Prague on May 7th, the European Union will launch a new policy for Eastern Europe – an 'eastern partnership'. It will increase EU assistance to the region, open the EU's markets to the neighbours' goods and gradually remove visa requirements, among other things. The idea is to give the neighbouring countries stronger incentives to adopt European norms and rules, to integrate their economies with the EU's, and thus to make the region more prosperous and stable. The concept is sound – but the initiative as well as the EU's overall policy for Eastern Europe will suffer unless the EU takes more visible steps to assist its neighbours through the economic crisis.

XV. BLACK SEA

1.

Four Fishing Ports to Be Constructed on Black Sea
16.03.2009, BSANNA NEWS

READ MORE: <http://bsanna-news.ukrinform.ua/newsitem.php?id=8522&lang=en>

Four fishing ports have to be either built or modernized along the Black Sea coast by 2013, Agriculture and Food Minister Valeri Tsvetanov said in Varna on Saturday. The ports are in Sozopol, Balchik, Nessebar and Varna and will be funded under the Operational Programme "Fisheries Sector Development 2007-2013".

2.

Black Sea Pollution Could Be Harnessed As Renewable Future Energy Source
17.03.2009, ScienceDaily

READ MORE: <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/03/090316075849.htm>

The Black Sea harbours vast quantities of hydrogen sulfide, the toxic gas associated with the smell of rotten eggs. This noxious gas could be used as a renewable source of hydrogen gas to fuel a future carbon-free economy, according to Turkish researchers writing in a forthcoming issue of the

International Journal of Nuclear Hydrogen Production and Applications.

3.

Environment Minister attends meeting on Black Sea

17.03.2009, financiarul.ro

READ MORE: <http://www.financiarul.ro/2009/03/17/environment-minister-attends-meeting-on-black-sea/>

Minister of the Environment Nicolae Nemirschi on Monday attends a meeting organized by the Socialist Group of the European Parliament dealing with the subject of modelling a joint project for the Black Sea region. The European Socialists proposed the project of a Black sea union as a political instrument specific for the development and implementation of the future strategy for this region.

4.

One small step for GÉANT, one giant leap for the Black Sea region

17.03.2009, eGovmonitor

READ MORE: <http://www.egovmonitor.com/node/24117/print>

The Commission today increased the internet capacity available across the Black Sea to researchers in the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) by switching on the region's largest computer network for research and education. The EU-funded regional research and education network Black Sea Interconnection (BSI) links the South Caucasus countries and connects them to the high bandwidth, world-leading, pan-European GÉANT network that already serves 30 million researchers. This new connection will enable researchers and students to collaborate with their European peers in 40 countries, by sharing large amounts of data over the network.

5.

European Union – the main importer of grains from the Black Sea region or its competitor on foreign markets

20.03.2009, AgriMarket.Info

READ MORE: <http://www.agrimarket.info/showart.php?id=72731>

The EU-27 is considered as one of the major participants of the world grain market. In the current MY, the European Union produced 312 mln tons of grains, and plans to export over 26 mln tons, including 19.5 mln tons of wheat, according to the data of the USDA. At the same time, the EU still remains one of the traditional consumers of Ukrainian grains. In the current MY (July-February), the markets of the European Union countries imported 3.71 mln tons of Ukrainian grains, including 3 mln tons of wheat, which totals nearly 50% (from the forecasted volumes of the USDA) of wheat imports to the EU.

XVI. ENERGY

1.

European Leaders Give Green Light To Nabucco

20.03.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: <http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1513712.html>

A summit of European Union leaders in Brussels has given final approval to 5 billion euros of investment in energy and telecom infrastructure projects, including the controversial Nabucco gas pipeline project. The investments are part of a larger EU economic stimulus program aimed at combating the global economic downturn. EU leaders agreed to provide 75 billion euros in new loans to the IMF and also to double the EU's crisis fund for member states struggling to cope with the economic downturn. EU members such as Latvia and Hungary have already dipped into that fund, which will double to 50 billion euros after the March 20 announcement in Brussels. Romania is also expected to seek aid. EU leaders also gave their blessing to a package of infrastructure investments

worth 5 billion euros. That includes 200 million euros for Nabucco and 1.5 billion euros for gas interconnectors. Czech Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra said the energy investments are a "clear reaction" to this winter's gas crisis. After the interruption of Russian gas deliveries via Ukraine in early January, the lack of interconnection between national networks in EU countries was identified as a major reason for the EU's vulnerability to delivery shortages.

2.

EU taking action to improve energy security

20.03.2009, European Voice

READ MORE: <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/2009/03/eu-taking-action-to-improve-energy-security/64367.aspx>

EU leaders have agreed to take further steps to improve energy security. At their summit in Brussels, the leaders of the national governments agreed that energy security should be enhanced by improving energy efficiency, diversifying suppliers, sources and supply routes and promoting the EU's energy interests with other countries.

3.

'Miracle' saved Balkans from blackout during gas crisis

19.03.2009, EurActiv.com

READ MORE: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/energy/miracle-saved-balkans-blackout-gas-crisis/article-180421?Ref=RSS>

Against all odds, South Eastern Europe's electricity grid was able to withstand soaring consumption during the January gas crisis between Russia and Ukraine. Collapse in any of the countries would have triggered a long-lasting regional blackout, experts told EurActiv.

4.

South Stream and Nabucco pipelines not rival projects

19.03.2009, eurotopics

READ MORE: <http://www.eurotopics.net/en/presseschau/archiv/article/ARTICLE47259-South-Stream-and-Nabucco-pipelines-not-rival-projects>

The left-liberal daily Népszabadság writes that the planned South Stream and Nabucco gas pipelines should not be portrayed as competing projects: "Anyone who has any sense can see that there is no rivalry between the projects: While the Russians can pump as much natural gas as they like into South Stream, it's still unclear where the gas for the Nabucco pipeline will come from. Iran is a good guess. But now the US, of all states, is getting ready to impose new sanctions on Tehran, which up to now has been a driving force behind Nabucco.

5.

Nabucco doubts have upside for Nord Stream and South Stream

18.03.2009, Russia Today

READ MORE: http://www.russiatoday.ru/Business/2009-03-18/Nabucco_doubts_have_upside_for_Nord_Stream_and_South_Stream.html

The EU commission has excluded the Nabucco pipeline from its list of priority projects. The change in mood by the European Union may speed up the construction of South and Nord stream pipelines. The Nabucco gas pipeline via the Caspian Sea to the west will not receive the necessary 250 million euro the EU had planned to invest, after a decision taken on Thursday. Members of the EU commission have questioned Nabucco's urgency amid low energy prices and economic recession.

6.

Nabucco removed from EU energy project list

17.03.2009, EurActiv

READ MORE: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/opinion/nabucco-removed-eu-energy-project-list/article-180336>

Mention of the Nabucco gas pipeline has been deleted from a list of projects to be financed by a five-billion euro EU stimulus plan, it emerged after a meeting of the bloc's foreign ministers yesterday (16 March).

7.

RosUkrEnergO says Ukraine stole gas meant for the EU

16.03.2009, New Europe

READ MORE: <http://www.neweurope.eu/articles/93520.php>

The CEO of Group DF, Robert Shetler- Jones, a member of the coordination committee at RosUkrEnergO, has repeated the Swiss gas distribution and trading company's claim that it owns 11 billion cubic metres of gas now in Ukrainian underground storage and has vowed to pursue its dispute with national stock company Naftogaz Ukrainy to the arbitration court in Stockholm.

8.

Estimating Historical Energy Security Costs

15.03.2009, The Centre for European Policy Studies

READ MORE: http://shop.ceps.eu/BookDetail.php?item_id=1816

Energy security is of increasing importance in today's world, yet little research has been carried out on the costs or benefits of energy security policies. This paper looks at the period after the 1970s to estimate the cost premium of electricity generation due to energy security policies. The cost premium is estimated for France, Germany, Italy and Spain for the period 1980-2000 by estimating actual versus hypothetical lowest cost generation mixes. The cost premium is estimated to be lowest for France, which had a clear energy security policy based on developing nuclear power and reducing reliance on oil and coal.

9.

Learning from the Crisis: A Market Approach to Securing European Natural Gas Supplies

15.03.2009, The Centre for European Policy Studies

READ MORE: http://shop.ceps.eu/BookDetail.php?item_id=1815

This Policy Brief looks at a concrete proposal on how to use markets to secure against risks in European gas supplies. Its aim is to come up with a crisis response mechanism to gas disruptions, which is still missing in the current Directive 2004/67/EC concerning measures to safeguard security of natural gas supply.

10.

Putin, Gazprom Bluffing to Hungarians on South Stream

13.03.2009, Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34700

On March 10 in Moscow, Gazprom and Hungary's Development Bank signed the initial documents for a joint venture to implement Gazprom's South Stream pipeline project on Hungarian territory. The respective chairmen, Alexei Miller and Janos Eros, signed the documents in the presence of Prime Ministers Vladimir Putin and Ferenc Gyurcsany.

11.

Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline on hold again

13.03.2009, FOCUS Information Agency

READ MORE: <http://www.focus-fen.net/print.php?id=n>

Valentin Kanev, Chairman of the Balkan and Black Sea Petroleum Association, told The Novinar Daily that the construction of the Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline will be postponed until 2011 and that it will be put in operation until 2013. There was a delay in the study of the pipeline route.

12.

MOL, Gazprom to Build Gas Storage Site in Hungary Independent of South Stream

12.03.2009, Jamestown Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34691

On March 10 in Moscow, Hungary's privately-owned MOL oil and gas company signed an agreement with Gazprom Export in Moscow to jointly establish a gas storage company in Hungary. Prime Ministers Vladimir Putin and Ferenc Gyurcsany witnessed the signing. This project is separate from and, in all probability, independent from Gazprom's South Stream pipeline project, one section of which is planned to traverse Hungary. MOL is not participating in South Stream.

13.

Melrose building its Black Sea oil and gas business

12.03.2009, Scotsman.com

READ MORE: <http://business.scotsman.com/energyutilities/Melrose-building-its-Black-Sea.5063402.jp>

MELROSE Resources moved closer to building a major business in the Black Sea yesterday, buying stakes in two projects in offshore Romania. The Edinburgh-based oil and gas company, which already has substantial assets in the Bulgarian region of the Black Sea, announced it had paid \$12 million (£8.7m) for a 32.5 per cent stake in the Ada and Doina gas fields in Romania.

14.

Sterling Resources announces signing of the offshore Romanian Farm-In Agreement

11.03.2009, Stockhouse.com

READ MORE: <http://www.stockhouse.com/News/CanadianReleasesDetail.aspx?n=7240392>

Sterling Resources Ltd. ("Sterling "or "the Company") (TSX-V:SLG) is pleased to announce today that it has executed a fully termed Farm-in Agreement with Melrose Resources plc (LSE: MRS: undefined, undefined, undefined%) a UK based oil and gas exploration, development and production company, under the terms of which Melrose will farm-into the Pelican XIII and Midia XV Blocks (the "Blocks") in the Black Sea, offshore Romania. The signing of the original Heads of Agreement with Melrose as previously announced December 5th, 2008.

15.

Russia, Hungary eye gas deals

10.03.2009, The Straits Times

READ MORE: http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/World/Story/STIStory_348393.html

THE prime ministers of Hungary and Russia on Tuesday discussed new ways to pump Russian gas to Central Europe following the winter gas crisis with Ukraine that cut off supplies of Russian gas. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said Russian energy giant Gazprom was ready to sign a cooperation accord with Hungary's development bank on the South Stream pipeline.

16.

EU lost without an adequate energy framework, says Bulgarian MEP

09.03.2009, New Europe

READ MORE: <http://www.neurope.eu/articles/93201.php>

The Russian-Ukraine gas crisis in the middle of the heavy winter put Bulgaria in the worse possible position. Bulgarian Socialist MEP Atanas Paparizov, a member of the European Parliament's Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, in a telephone interview with New Europe Energy and Russian Affairs Editor Kostis Geropoulos talked about EU Energy Security, the Third Energy Package, gas pipelines to Europe and the future of the controversial nuclear power in the member states.

17.

Toreador Resources sells interest in Black Sea assets to Petrol Ofisi

09.03.2009. Energy Business Review Oil Exploration

READ MORE: http://ebroilexploration.energy-business-review.com/news/toreador_resources_sells_interest_in_black_sea_assets_to_petrol_ofisi_090309

Toreador Resources has sold a 26.75% interest in the South Akcakoca Sub-Basin project and associated licenses located in the Black Sea offshore Turkey, to Petrol Ofisi for \$55m

18.

Georgia, Ukraine and energy security

03.2009, Centre for European Reform

READ MORE: http://www.cer.org.uk/articles/64_helm.html

In January 2006 Russia interrupted gas supplies to Ukraine and triggered a short, sharp shock to Europe in its ever-growing dependency on Russian gas. Later that year the EU produced a green paper, including plans for European electricity and gas grids, strategic gas storage, and measures to ensure greater co-operation and mutual support in the event of future crises.

XVII. FROZEN CONFLICTS

1.

Moscow Moves To Draw Moldova, Transdnister Leaders Back Into Fold

18.03.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: <http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1512603.html>

The leaders of Moldova and its separatist Transdnister region have agreed to jump-start efforts to resolve their decades-long dispute through a combination of bilateral contacts and international mediation. A Kremlin-brokered meeting in Moscow on March 18 was only the second direct contact between Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin and Transdnistriean leader Igor Smirnov in almost eight years.

2.

Azerbaijan blackmails Turkey over Armenian-Turkish border opening

18.03.2009, PanARMENIAN.

READ MORE: <http://www.panarmenian.net/news/eng/?nid=29576>

Turkey should think a lot before opening the border with Armenia, an Azeri expert said. "Azerbaijan is Turkey's fraternal state and strategic ally. Opening the border with Armenia, Turkey will lose Azerbaijan. It means that Turkey will lose the outlet to Central Asia and Caucasus," Arif Keskin said. If Turkey opens the border, Azerbaijan will re-direct its energy policy, according to him. "The Turkish route will lose significance for Azerbaijan, which will direct its energy flows through Georgia to Ukraine. Moreover, Azerbaijan will establish closer ties with Georgia to push Turkish business out of the country. The risk is great," he said.

3.

OSCE May Replace Russia Peacekeepers In Moldova

18.03.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: <http://www.rferl.org/content/>

[OSCE_May_Replace_Russia_Peacekeepers_In_Moldova/1512364.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/OSCE_May_Replace_Russia_Peacekeepers_In_Moldova/1512364.html)

Russia's peacekeeping force in Moldova's breakaway Transdnister region may be replaced by an international mission after a political solution to the crisis is found, Russia's foreign minister has said. He said Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin, and separatist leader Igor Smirnov signed a joint declaration after talks at the Kremlin leader's residence outside Moscow.

4.

Iran ready to help settle Nagorno-Karabakh dispute

16.03.2009. Teheran Times

READ MORE: <http://www.tehrantimes.com/NCms/2007.asp?code=191083>

Foreign Minister Manoucheher Mottaki said on Friday that Tehran is ready to mediate between Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan over settling the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh issue. "We talked to the Armenian foreign minister about Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and in the last days we also talked to the foreign minister of Azerbaijan in the framework of the ECO meeting," Mottaki told reporters in joint press conference with his Armenian counterpart Edward Nalbandyan in Yerevan.

5.

Armenian serviceman killed

16.03.2009, A1+

READ MORE: <http://www.a1plus.am/en/?page=issue&iid=70527>

According to the information of the NKR Defense Ministry, in the night of March 13, the Azerbaijan party again violated the cease-fire regime in the southeast direction of the Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijani armed forces' contact-line, as a result of which a serviceman of the NKR Defense Army, while having his duty, was killed by a sniper.

6.

"Sie sollten uns nicht mit der DDR verwechseln"

14.03.2009, spiegel.de

READ MORE: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,613231,00.html>

Igor Smirnow nennt sich "Präsident" - doch seine "Republik Transnistrien" wird international nicht anerkannt. Im Interview mit SPIEGEL ONLINE spricht er über den blutigen Krieg, in dem sich Transnistrien von Moldau abgespalten hat, über Moskaus Unterstützung - und behauptet, die USA hätten Angst vor ihm.

7.

AZERBAIJAN SAYS RUSSIA ARMING ENEMY ARMENIA

13.03.2009, Kyiv Post

READ MORE: <http://www.kyivpost.com/world/37368/print>

Azerbaijan accused Russia on Friday of supplying arms to Armenia, its foe in one of the most intractable conflicts arising from the Soviet Union's collapse. Azeri Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov denied his country's oil-financed military expansion meant it was planning war to take back the region of Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenians, and said there was "no miracle" in sight to resolve the dispute. "Armenia is being supplied by its military ally, Russia," Azimov, who is responsible for security issues at the foreign ministry, said in an interview with Reuters.

8.

ABKHAZIA'S DIASPORA: DREAMING OF HOME

09.03.2009, EurasiaNet Civil

READ MORE: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav030909b.shtml>

High atop a mountain chain in western Turkey stands Mezit village, a hamlet founded in the 19th century by Abkhaz rebels on the run from Tsarist Russian troops. More than 130 years later, Mezit's Abkhaz residents now have one goal -- to return to Abkhazia, where Russian troops are now a welcome presence. "We would like to see this place with our own eyes, a place where our language is spoken," said Nalan Uran, a middle-aged Mezit homemaker, as she indicated a black-and-white photograph of her great-grandfather in the Abkhaz capital, Sukhumi. That is a desire the de facto Abkhaz government would like to encourage. Promoting the return of Diaspora members is seen as one way to strengthen efforts to secure the territory's independence from Georgia.

XVIII. SECURITY

1.

Russia plans massive military investment

18.03.2009, Christian Science Monitor

READ MORE: <http://features.csmonitor.com/globalnews/2009/03/18/russia-plans-massive-military-investment/>

The diplomatic tone between Russia and the US may have sweetened since Barack Obama took office, but Russian leaders are adopting a tougher line than ever when addressing their domestic audience.

Speaking to a room of Russian Army brass on Tuesday, President Dmitry Medvedev pledged massive hikes in military spending and stepped-up procurement of nuclear missiles, tanks, fighter planes, and a new generation of deep-water warships, including aircraft carriers.

2.

Russia to rearm military as NATO expands, Medvedev says

17.03.2009, REUTERS

READ MORE: <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSTRE52G2VX20090317>

President Dmitry Medvedev, who seeks to improve chilly ties with the United States, on Tuesday said Russia would rearm its military and boost nuclear forces because US-led NATO is expanding toward Russia's borders. "Attempts to expand the military infrastructure of NATO near the borders of our country are continuing," Medvedev told an annual meeting with the Defense Ministry's staff.

3.

Expert: Russian Black Sea Fleet preparing to leave Crimea

12.03.2009, Kyiv Post

READ MORE: <http://www.kyivpost.com/nation/37242>

Russia has started preparations to withdraw its Black Sea Fleet from Crimea, a leading expert of the Institute for Foreign Policy of Diplomatic Academy of Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, Oleksandr Paliy, said in an interview with the Ukrainian service of German broadcaster Deutsche Welle.

XIX. TRANSPORT

1.

RUSSIA, ARMENIA DISAGREE OVER RAILROAD INVESTMENT

19.03.2009, eurasianet.org

READ MORE: http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/news/articles/eav031909b_pr.shtml

The Russian-controlled South Caucasus Railway has denied charges made by Armenian officials that the company failed to meet its 2008 investment targets. A wholly owned subsidiary of Russian Railway, the South Caucasus Railway announced earlier in March that it had invested \$100 million in overhauling the Armenian railway network. Armenian Transportation and Communications Minister Gurgun Sagsyan, however, said on March 17 that only 30 percent of the announced investment had actually been spent.

2.

Block Train Connects Europe, Central Asia

09.03.2009, Journal of Commerce

READ MORE: <http://www.joc.com/node/409959>

Polzug Intermodal launched its unit train project within the Caucasus Mountains connecting to central Asia. The container trains are made up of cars of the same type all going to the same destination. With no stopping for assembly and disassembly along the way, the unit trains, or block trains, offer high-volume customers an economical alternative to previous rail freight operations or

to truck transport. Polzug Intermodal runs the block railroad service along the TRACECA route, between the Georgian Black Sea port of Poti and Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan on the Caspian Sea. From Baku onward shipment is by feeder across the Caspian Sea to Aktau, Kazakhstan, for rail transport to Central Asia.

Black Sea News Update (BSNU) is a fortnightly brief of political and economic developments covering the Black Sea region. It is produced by the **ICBSS**, a think-tank aiming to foster regional cooperation in the Black Sea area.

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