



BLACK SEA NEWS UPDATE

EU – BLACK SEA OBSERVATORY

16 December 2009

No. 19

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I. ABKHAZIA

1.

Abkhaz President to Keep Government 'Backbone' after Elections

11.12.2009, RIA Novosti

[READ MORE: http://en.rian.ru/world/20091211/157207116.html](http://en.rian.ru/world/20091211/157207116.html)

The incumbent president of the former Georgian republic of Abkhazia will retain the "backbone" of the government if he is reelected on Saturday. "I think there should be a rotation [in the new government] and there should be young staff members. I believe the backbone of the government, which has worked pretty well over the last five years, will remain, but there will be a staff rotation," Sergei Bagapsh said on the republic's state television on Friday.

2.

Abkhazia Prepares for Presidential Election

11.12.2009, BBC

READ MORE: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8407446.stm>

Six months after Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin offered Abkhazia major military support, the BBC's Tom Esslemont reports from the breakaway territory as it prepares to go to the polls for its first presidential election since Russia recognised its independence from Georgia.

3.

Russia to Start Patrolling Abkhazia's Sea Border

09.12.2009, RIA Novosti

READ MORE: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20091209/157175159.html>

Russian patrol boats will begin guarding the maritime border of the former Georgian republic of Abkhazia in December, the Russian Federal Security Service said on Wednesday. "These patrol boats will guard the state borders and sea areas that fall under the sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction of the republic of Abkhazia, and will also ensure that shipping rights... are protected," the statement said.

4.

Ecuador to Consider Recognition of Abkhazia

03.12.2009, RIA Novosti

READ MORE: <http://en.rian.ru/world/20091203/157082433.html>

The Abkhaz Foreign Ministry said on Thursday Ecuador would consider the recognition of the former Georgian republic as an independent state. The Abkhaz delegation headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Maxim Gvindzhiya is currently paying a visit to the Latin American state.

5.

Abkhazia Sees Tourism Boom

26.11.2009, IWPR

READ MORE: <http://www.iwpr.net/EN-crs-f-357779>

Abkhazia, which was recognised as independent by Russia a year ago, is hailing its best ever year for tourism since the territory broke away from Georgia after defeating its army in 1993. Official figures show 88,865 tourists stayed in Abkhazian hotels and resorts in the first nine months of the year, up from 68,905 in all of 2008. More than 700,000 trips and excursions were organised by travel agencies for the visitors, who were overwhelmingly Russian. "Our tourists are not rich, in the main they were people of the middle class," said Vyacheslav Bartsits, deputy tourism minister in the Abkhazian government.

II. ARMENIA

1.

Controversy Surrounds Uranium Mine

01.12.2009, EurasiaNet

READ MORE: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav120109.shtml>

A protest movement against a planned Russian-Armenian uranium mine in southern Armenia appears to be picking up steam, with discussions underway with three political parties about a partnership. The mine, a 50-50 joint venture between Armenia and Russia, will be located in the mineral-rich region of Syunik, already the home to two copper and molybdenum mining operations. Soviet-era studies indicated that Armenia could contain up to approximately 60,000 tons of uranium. With uranium prices at roughly \$97 per kilogram, that means the Syunik mine could create considerable revenue for Armenian state coffers.

2.

Armenia Surprised by Anti-Russian Agitation

24.11.2009, IWPR

READ MORE: <http://www.iwpr.net/EN-crs-f-357768>

A burst of anti-Russian emails and text messages, supposedly sent from an Armenian activist group, has left Armenians baffled as to who's behind it and what their motives are. The emails and text messages originate from an organisation calling itself Hayastanci: Anti-Russia, and thousands of Armenians have received them. "I got an email with the subject www.antirusia.org. It linked to various anti-Russian materials saying that the presence of a Russian military base in Armenia takes away our sovereignty and makes it impossible for Armenia to enter other alliances and groups, like the European Union," said Vardan Papikian, a Yerevan resident and one of the many contacted by the group.

III. AZERBAIJAN

1.

Baku Needs Diverse Gas Deals

11.12.2009, UPI

READ MORE: http://www.upi.com/Science_News/Resource-Wars/2009/12/11/Baku-needs-diverse-gas-deals-executive/UPI-59801260548859/

Baku includes the European Union in its potential customer base for gas but needs to explore all economic opportunities, energy executives said. Europe aims to diversify an energy sector that depends on Russian resources by courting potential suppliers in the Middle East and in the Caspian region.

2.

More Armenian Officials Join Ruling Party

29.11.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: http://www.rferl.org/content/More_Armenian_Officials_Join_Ruling_Party/1890433.html

Two ministers and seven other senior government officials close to Prime Minister Tigran Sarkisian have recently applied for membership in the governing Republican Party of Armenia (HHK), RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports. Eduard Sharmazanov, the chief HHK spokesman, told RFE/RL that Finance Minister Tigran Davtian, Economy Minister Nerses Yeritsian, and the other officials would likely be handed membership cards during a November 28 congress of the party led by President Serzh Sarkisian.

3.

In Azerbaijan, International Forum States Restrictions on NGOs

10.12.2009, Caucasian Knot

READ MORE: <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/11956>

The two-day international conference, opened on December 10 in the Baku "Europe" Hotel, is on development of the civil society in Azerbaijan. Officers from power agencies are not taking part. The "Caucasian Knot" correspondent reports that the forum was organized by the World Movement for Democracy at the support of the US National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in cooperation with Azerbaijani Institute for Peace and Democracy and other civil society entities.

4.

Azerbaijan President Meets his French Counterpart

09.12.2009, Trend News

READ MORE: <http://en.trend.az/news/official/chronicle/1597116.html>

On Dec. 9, President of France Nicolas Sarkozy has met with visiting President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev at the Elysee Palace, AzerTAJ state news agency reported.

5.

Iran to lift Visa Regime for Azerbaijanis

07.12.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: http://www.rferl.org/content/Iran_To_Lift_Visa_Regime_For_Azerbaijanis/1897369.html

Iran plans to unilaterally cancel its visa regime with Azerbaijan, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. Iranian Ambassador to Azerbaijan Mammad Bagir Bahrami told a press conference in Baku today that any Azerbaijani citizen will be able to travel to Iran without a visa and stay there for one month.

6.

UNICEF, OSCE, Council of Europe Consider Adoption of Law on Prevention Domestic Violence in Azerbaijan Important

03.12.2009, Trend News

READ MORE: <http://en.trend.az/news/society/rights/1592132.html>

The UNICEF, the OSCE and the Council of Europe consider adoption of the special law to prevent domestic violence in Azerbaijan important. "A bill is being developed in Azerbaijan on this regards. The bill will promote to prevent domestic violence," head of the OSCE Office in Baku Ali Bilge Jankorel told Trend News at a parliamentary hearing on 'No violence'.

7.

Former British Prime Minister Blair Visits Azerbaijan

02.12.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: http://www.rferl.org/content/Former_British_Prime_Minister_Blair_Visits_Azerbaijan/1893464.html

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair has held talks with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in Baku as part of a private visit, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. Blair was invited by Azerbaijan's Methanol Company (AzMeCo) for a signing ceremony on December 1 of a \$120 million loan from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to help finance a plant to convert natural gas into methanol.

8.

Azerbaijan Registers Opposition Party

25.11.2009, Trend News

READ MORE: <http://en.trend.az/news/politics/movements/1587914.html>

Azerbaijan has registered the opposition party Aydinlar, party deputy chairman Qabil Ibrahimli told Trend News today. Aydinlar was established on Dec.14, 2008.

9.

Ethnic Azeri Immigrants in Rights Struggle

24.11.2009, IWPR

READ MORE: <http://www.iwpr.net/EN-crs-f-357770>

Families caught up in the requirements of Azerbaijan's tough new law on immigration say they are trapped in an endless bureaucratic maze. The new requirements, which came into force in stages between 2006 and 2008, have particularly affected couples where one partner is an Azeri from Georgia – like the majority of so-called mixed families in the country. Ethnic Azeris from neighbouring countries used to find it easy to gain permanent residence permits and could enter and leave Georgia with identity cards. After the changes, they were subject to the same restrictions as other foreigners and required a passport to travel.

IV. BULGARIA

1.

Ukraine to Open Consulate in Plovdiv

09.11.2009, BSANNA News

READ MORE: <http://bsanna-news.ukrinform.ua/newsitem.php?id=11369&lang=en>

The Bulgarian government has given consent for the opening of Ukraine's consulate in Plovdiv. Dimitr Georgiev will be the honorary consul, UKRINFORM's own correspondent has reported.

2.

Bulgaria to Boost Energy Efficiency, Renewables

24.11.2009, EurActiv

READ MORE: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/energy-efficiency/bulgaria-boost-energy-efficiency-renewables/article-187586>

Bulgaria plans to boost its power efficiency and support green energy to fight climate change and achieve European Union environment targets, Economy and Energy Minister Traicho Traikov said on Monday.

V. GEORGIA

1.

Will Georgia's Afghan 'Surge' Pay Off?

10.12.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: http://www.rferl.org/content/Will_Georgias_Afghan_Surge_Pay_Off/1900458.html

For the past year, Georgia has been desperately trying to attract the attention of U.S. President Barack Obama's White House. It may finally have succeeded. Georgian officials announced last week that they will contribute two light companies and a heavy battalion -- nearly 1,000 troops -- to the NATO mission in Afghanistan next spring. Those troops will join 170 Georgian soldiers already on the ground, making the tiny South Caucasus nation the Afghan mission's largest per capita contributor.

2.

S. Korea-led Consortium in Power Plant Deal with Georgia

08.12.2009, Civil.ge

READ MORE: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21763>

A consortium led by the South Korean state-run Korea Electric Power Corp. (KEPCO) signed a memorandum of understanding with the Georgian government on December 8 to build three hydro power plants in western Georgia, the Georgian Energy Ministry and KEPCO said.

3.

Saakashvili: 'Georgia Number 1 Corruption Fighter in World'

08.12.2009, Civil.ge

READ MORE: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21762>

President Saakashvili said that Transparency International's (TI) estimations on level of corruption in Georgia were not objective enough, as it failed to fully reflect the progress Georgia had done in fight against corruption.

4.

Former TV Tycoon Plans New Channel to Challenge Government

03.12.2009, EurasiaNet

READ MORE: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav120309a.shtml>

Erosi Kitsmarishvili, the man who changed Georgian television and who helped spark the 2003 revolution that brought President Mikheil Saakashvili to power, now claims he can unseat

Saakashvili with the help of a tiny Tbilisi television channel. On November 21, the forty-something Kitsmarishvili, the former co-owner of the Rustavi-2 channel, took over management of Tbilisi's Maestro television. He immediately expressed the intent to turn Maestro into a 24-hour Fox News-style national news outlet, and a one-stop shop for supposedly spin-free news.

5.

Media Tunes Out Mukhrovani Mutiny Trial

30.11.2009, EurasiaNet

READ MORE: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav113009c.shtml>

A trial of 41 high-ranking officers, soldiers and civilians for an alleged mutiny and attempted government overthrow might seem like a prime candidate for saturation television coverage. But so far Georgia's Mukhrovani mutiny trial is generating little media interest. Some local journalists and analysts claim that the lack of coverage speaks volumes about the health of Georgian media.

6.

US, Georgia Discuss Partnership Charter

29.11.2009, NewEurope

READ MORE: <http://www.neurope.eu/articles/97912.php>

A US Department of State delegation led by Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Michael Posner, recently participated in a meeting of a bilateral working group on democracy with the Georgian authorities as part of the US-Georgian Strategic Partnership Charter.

7.

Georgia Concerned by 'Link between Gambling and Drugs'

28.11.2009, BBC

READ MORE: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8382337.stm>

With just weeks to go until a controversial new law on casinos takes effect in Georgia, health workers in the capital, Tbilisi, say they have uncovered a worrying link between gambling and drug addiction.

8.

Saakashvili: Revolution Continues

23.11.2009, Civil.ge

READ MORE: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21706>

On the sixth anniversary of the Rose Revolution, President Saakashvili said Georgia's achievements since 2003 were "refutation of the Kremlin propaganda" and for that reason Russia "cannot bear us." "The real revolution in our country has not ended on November 23, 2003; it started [six years ago] and it continues today with more momentum than ever before," he said at a meeting with a group of students, also attended by visiting former Spanish PM Jose Maria Aznar.

VI. GEORGIA-RUSSIA

1.

EU Calls on Russia to Pull Out of Disputed Georgian Village

11.12.2009, EUBusiness

READ MORE: <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/georgia-russia.1x3>

European ceasefire monitors in Georgia on Friday called on Russia to withdraw from a disputed village on the de-facto border with the Moscow-backed rebel South Ossetia region. The European Union Monitoring Mission said Russia was violating a truce deal that ended last year's Georgia-Russia war by keeping troops at a checkpoint in Perevi, a mainly ethnic Georgian village on South Ossetia's western border.

2.

Georgia Ready to Restore Direct Flights with Russia

10.12.2009, RIA Novosti

READ MORE: <http://en.rian.ru/world/20091210/157186167.html>

Georgia is ready to restore air links with Russia, a spokeswoman for the Georgian president said on Thursday. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said on Wednesday at a European and Asian media forum held in Moscow that he hoped a time would come when Russia and Georgia would end mutual visa requirements and direct flights between the countries would be restored.

3.

Russian 'Spies' Barred from Georgia Entry – Official

03.12.2009, Civil.ge

READ MORE: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21743>

Georgia is open for Russian tourists and business, but not for Russian spies, President Saakashvili's spokesperson said while commenting on Georgia's refusal to give entry visas to two Russian scholars.

4.

Georgia Releases Three Russian Citizens

24.11.2009, Civil.ge

READ MORE: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21708>

Georgia handed over three Russian citizens arrested at the South Ossetian administrative border to the Russian side on November 24. Three Russians construction workers were arrested close to the village of Nikozi on the Georgian side of the administrative border on November 23 for illegally entering the Georgian territory from Russia into South Ossetia.

5.

Russia-Georgia Relations

23.11.2009, ISN

READ MORE: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Policy-Briefs/Detail/?lng=en&id=109833>

This paper looks at the state of Georgian-Russian relations one year after the end of both countries' conflict. It reviews the findings of the EU war report, discusses Georgia's policy toward Russia and the disputed regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and examines the Georgians' attitudes to Russia. Subsequently, it presents the findings of related opinion polls.

VII. MOLDOVA

1.

Lupu Falls Short and Leaves Moldova in Limbo

10.12.2009, European Voice

READ MORE: <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/lupu-falls-short-and-leaves-moldova-in-limbo/66673.aspx>

Political uncertainty to continue as Moldova again fails to elect a president. Moldova's parliament has failed for a second time to elect a president, a failure that will extend into next year the political uncertainty that has gripped the country for the past eight months.

2.

Medvedev Concerned over Situation with Russian Language in Moldova

09.12.2009, BSANNA News

READ MORE: <http://bsanna-news.ukrinform.ua/newsitem.php?id=11365&lang=en>

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has expressed concern over the situation with the Russian language in Moldova. "The Russian language space shrank during the period of parliamentary election," Medvedev stated at the European and Asian mass media forum.

3.

Moldova on Automatic Pilot After the Presidential Election Fails Again...

08.12.2009, Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35814&cHash=3e0d04d4c2](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35814&cHash=3e0d04d4c2)

On December 7 Moldova failed in its fifth attempt this year to elect a head of state in parliament. The Communist Party, which governed from 2001 to September 2009 and retains 48 seats in this parliament, blocked the election of Marian Lupu, presidential candidate of the now-governing Alliance for European Integration (AEI) of four parties. Lupu, who leads the Democratic Party within the AEI, received all of the AEI's 53 votes. Under Moldova's constitution, however, the president is elected with at least 61 votes in favor in the 101-seat parliament (Moldpres, December 7).

4.

Russia Tries to Build Political Influence in Moldova From Scratch

01.12.2009, Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35784&cHash=40e5ae0685](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35784&cHash=40e5ae0685)

Moldova's parliament, a product of repeat elections in July and deadlocked since then, has scheduled its fourth official attempt this year (technically the fifth attempt) to elect a head of state for December 7.

5.

Waldner Address to Members of Parliament of the Republic of Moldova Parliament of the Republic of Moldova Chisinau

27.11.2009, EU

READ MORE: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/09/563>

Mr. President,

Honourable Members,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank President Ghimpu and the leaders of the parliamentary parties for their invitation to address this distinguished assembly. It gives me great pleasure to be back in Chisinau and to discuss with you the great opportunities ahead in the EU-Moldova relationship.

VIII. ROMANIA

1.

Romania Court Orders Recount of Voided Ballots

11.12.2009, Wall Street Journal

READ MORE: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB126053655825287307.html>

Romania's Constitutional Court on Friday called for a recount of votes annulled in Sunday's presidential election runoff, a ruling that could overturn incumbent Traian Basescu's narrow victory. The roughly 138,000 votes to be re-examined outnumber Mr. Basescu's knife-edge 70,000 vote margin of victory over opposition Social Democrat leader Mircea Geoana, who contested the result at the court, alleging "deliberately organized massive fraud."

2.

Romania's Presidential Election - Against All Odds

10.12.2009, The Economist

READ MORE: http://www.economist.com/world/europe/displaystory.cfm?story_id=15066014

It seemed like a safe bet. Mircea Geoana, the centre-left challenger in Romania's presidential election, had the money, media and political backing that he needed to win. Sleek and Western-

educated, he portrayed himself as the safe consensus candidate against Traian Basescu, the lively but exasperating former sea-captain (and once mayor of Bucharest) who has been the country's president since 2004.

IX. RUSSIA

1.

Russia Removes Constitutional Constraints on Military Intervention Abroad

10.12.2009, Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35815&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=27&cHash=5f374f9946](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35815&tx_ttnews[backPid]=27&cHash=5f374f9946)

Last August, while celebrating the anniversary of the successful invasion of Georgia in August 2008, President Dmitry Medvedev introduced amendments to the 1996 Law on Defense aimed at allowing the use of Russian forces abroad "to defend Russian soldiers and citizens, fight piracy and defend foreign nations against threats." Medvedev directly connected the legislation to the war with Georgia: "so that in the future these questions will be clearly regulated" (www.kremlin.ru, August 10). Medvedev, in effect, acknowledged that Russia did not have the legal right to invade Georgia in 2008, since its territorial integrity was not under threat and it did not have any defense treaties with South Ossetia or Abkhazia. The Federation Council (the upper house of parliament) did not vote to send troops into battle inside Georgia, as the constitution demands (Kommersant, August 11). Medvedev, a former lawyer, definitely believed that this legal problem must be straightened out.

2.

Putin Says no Plans to Leave Power

03.12.2009, Reuters

READ MORE: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5B21GS20091203>

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, in power for over 10 years, ruled out a departure from politics on Thursday, telling a questioner: "Don't hold your breath." The country's most powerful leader made the comment with a smile when asked on his annual televised question and answer session with the Russian people if he would like to leave politics and start a quiet life.

3.

Terrorism in Russia - Bombings Away

03.12.2009, The Economist

READ MORE: http://www.economist.com/world/europe/displaystory.cfm?story_id=15019904

A terrorist attack fuels worries about the police and security services. A few years ago an explosion of a packed train a few hundred miles from Moscow would have caused shock and outrage right across Russia. Yet when a train from Moscow to St Petersburg was blown up on November 27th, killing at least 26 people and injuring nearly 100, it was met with fatalistic acceptance.

4.

An Old Grudge Revived

02.12.2009, Russia Profile

READ MORE: <http://www.russiaprofile.org/page.php?pageid=Business&articleid=a1259777525>

The Russian Government Has Much More to Fear from Strasbourg than from the Hague. The ruling by an ad-hoc arbitration tribunal in the Hague on Monday, stating that Russia is bound by the European Energy Charter Treaty, opened the way for Yukos shareholders to sue the Russian government over the state's takeover of the once-powerful oil company. Group MENATEP Ltd. (GML), the holding company that owned Yukos, called it victory and plans to sue the Russian government for \$100 billion.

5.

Russia's Military Reform Still Faces Major Problems

02.12.2009, RIA Novosti

READ MORE: <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20091202/157071046.html>

The first phase of the ongoing military reform to overhaul the structure of the Russian Armed Forces as well as its troop control and recruitment processes officially ended by December 1, 2009. The reform, which covers all fighting services, remains controversial in terms of necessity and effectiveness. The army is the first service to be overhauled.

6.

Russia's Medvedev Arrives in Rome for Bilateral Talks

02.12.2009, RIA Novosti

READ MORE: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20091202/157074816.html>

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has arrived in Rome to discuss bilateral economic cooperation with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and meet with Pope Benedict XVI in the Vatican. Medvedev will visit the Italian capital for the sixth round of broad intergovernmental consultations at the highest level, presidential aide Sergei Prikhodko said earlier on Wednesday, adding the Russian delegation will include a team of ministers and other top officials.

7.

Putin, Tymoshenko Agree on Gas and Deride Yushchenko, Saakashvili

01.12.2009, Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=%0B35785&cHash=b065d670f9](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=%0B35785&cHash=b065d670f9)

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and his Ukrainian counterpart Yulia Tymoshenko met in Yalta on November 19 and reached a number of agreements, confirming once again that their relationship is of a special character. Putin reiterated that Naftohaz Ukrainy, the debt-ridden state-controlled oil and gas behemoth, will not be fined for its failure to buy as much gas as stipulated by the January 2009 contracts between Naftohaz and Gazprom. The two rejected Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko's calls for an urgent revision of the contracts and derided Yushchenko and Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili who were meeting in Kyiv simultaneously.

8.

Draft Treaty on European Security Proposed by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev

30.11.2009, Carnegie Moscow Center

READ MORE: <http://www.carnegie.ru/en/news/83451.htm>

Dmitri Trenin believes that the goal set forth in the draft Treaty on European Security, published on November 29, 2009, on the Russian president's website, is correct and should be commended, yet believes that rather than working on the legal architecture, we need to get to the heart of the matter. The two salient security issues in the Euro-Atlantic area today, according to Trenin, "are Moscow's suspicions of U.S. intentions and motives vis-a-vis Russia (e.g., NATO enlargement, Washington's support for Georgia, Ukraine, et al., Bush administration's proposed BMD deployments in Central Europe and the like), and Russia's neighbors' equally dark suspicions regarding Russia. Both sets of suspicions are real, if largely baseless, but each deserves hard thinking and a realistic strategy before it can be put to rest."

9.

The North Caucasus Remains Russia's Perpetual Problem Region

30.11.2009, Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35781&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=13&cHash=774576b84d](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35781&tx_ttnews[backPid]=13&cHash=774576b84d)

The resounding speech made by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in his annual address to the

country's parliament had no impact whatsoever on the situation in the North Caucasus (www.kremlin.ru, November 12). While local officials are left guessing who will become the Kremlin's man in charge in the North Caucasus (www.kp.md, November 12), reports of shootings and special security operations targeting members of the armed resistance keep arriving from the region.

10.

Russia Launches Eutelsat Satellite

24.11.2009, RIAN Novosti

READ MORE: <http://en.rian.ru/science/20091124/156972429.html>

After a one-day delay, Russia on Tuesday finally launched a Proton-M rocket carrying the European Eutelsat W7 satellite, the Federal Space Agency said. The launch was delayed over serious disagreements between Russia and Kazakhstan, which owns the Baikonur space center used by Russia under a long-term contract.

X. SOUTH OSSETIA

1.

Jailed Teens Sour Georgia/S. Ossetia Relations

03.12.2009, Euro News

READ MORE: <http://www.euronews.net/2009/12/03/jailed-teens-sour-georgiasossetia-relations/>

A prisoner swap between Georgia and South Ossetia has turned sour after the rebel region jailed two Georgian teenagers for explosives offences.

2.

Unexploded Munitions a Reminder of Ossetian War

25.11.2009, Russia Today

READ MORE: http://rt.com/Top_News/2009-11-25/mines-abkhazia-ossetian-war.html

It has been more than a year since the conflict with Georgia, but many areas in South Ossetia are still riddled with unexploded ordnance.

3.

Russia to Reply to Georgia's Claims over South Ossetia

24.11.2009, RIA Novosti

READ MORE: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20091124/156971710.html>

Russia is preparing an answer to an interstate claim brought by Georgia to the Strasbourg Court against Russia's actions in South Ossetia last August, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Tuesday.

XI. TURKEY

1.

Turkey Seeks New EU Accession Push

24.11.2009, EurActiv

READ MORE: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/turkey-seeks-new-eu-accession-push/article-187585>

Turkish EU Affairs Minister and chief negotiator Egemen Bagış said his country will pursue a strong communication strategy aimed at opening six new negotiation chapters during the coming year, EurActiv Turkey reported on 23 November.

2.

EU to Grant Visa Flexibility in Return for Readmission Agreement

24.11.2009, Hurriyet Daily News

READ MORE: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=eu-to-bring-visa-flexibility-if-turkey-signs-readmission-agreement-2009-11-24>

The European Union is reportedly ready to introduce some visa flexibility if Turkey signs a readmission agreement to tackle the flow of illegal immigrants to Europe. The European Union and Turkey will discuss the readmission agreement again Dec. 4. Visa flexibility will be introduced once Ankara agrees to sign the agreement to deal with illegal immigration to Europe, a high-ranked official from the European Commission in Brussels has revealed.

XII. CAUCASUS

1.

Mediating Powers Make New Push for Karabakh Peace

11.12.2009, Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35828&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=93bbb55f79](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35828&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=93bbb55f79)

The United States, Russia and France have again stepped up their efforts to broker a solution to the Karabakh conflict. Top diplomats from the three mediating powers urged Armenia and Azerbaijan to hammer out a framework peace accord “as soon as possible” after intensive Armenian-Azerbaijani peace talks held on the sidelines of the OSCE’s December 1-2 ministerial meeting in Athens. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner was reportedly confident that a deal could be reached in the coming months. His optimism was called into question, however, by the conflicting parties’ continuing different public interpretations of peace proposals made by the American, French and Russian co-chairs of the OSCE’s so-called Minsk Group on Karabakh.

2.

Turkey, Azerbaijan Re-Synchronize Conflict Resolution and Border Opening

11.12.2009, Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35827&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=c6a60a83fe](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35827&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=c6a60a83fe)

Under the protocols signed in Zurich, Switzerland on October 10, Turkey should establish full diplomatic relations with Armenia and re-open the land border between them. The United States, main driver of this initiative, insists that the protocols should be ratified and implemented “without preconditions and within a reasonable time-frame.” President Barack Obama reaffirmed this position most recently in the run-up to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s December 7-8 Washington visit. Such reminders are being addressed equally to Ankara, Yerevan, and Armenian advocacy groups in the United States (Anatolia news agency, PanArmenian.Net, December 7, 8).

3.

Armenian Children Forced to Read in the Dark in Turkey

11.12.2009, Hurriyet Daily News

READ MORE: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=forced-to-read-in-the-dark-2009-12-10>

Children from Armenia are attending classes and reading smuggled textbooks at an illegal school in the basement of a building in Istanbul. Forbidden to attend Armenian minority schools under the Lausanne Treaty and the Special Education Law, these children could not go to school even if the Turkish-Armenian border is opened, unless the law is changed.

4.

Russia Foresees Breakthrough On Nagorno-Karabakh

10.12.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: http://www.rferl.org/content/Russia_Says_Sees_Breakthrough_On_Karabakh/1900601.html

Azerbaijan and Armenia are close to a deal to end the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia has said, two decades after fighting broke out in one of the bloodiest conflicts of the former Soviet Union.

5.

Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict is Important Itself Independently of Any Other Issue - Assistant Secretary of State

10.12.2009, Trend News

READ MORE: <http://en.trend.az/news/karabakh/1597193.html>

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is important itself independently of any other issue, stated Philip H. Gordon, assistant secretary of State for Europe and Eurasian affairs, answering TREND's correspondent's question on a short briefing for Caucasus journalists under the "US-Europe partnership" discussion at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington DC.

6.

Armenia Threatens to Annul Turkey Deal Over Karabakh

10.12.2009, Hurriyet Daily News

READ MORE: <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/n.php?n=armenia-threatens-to-annul-deal-on-turkey-ties-2009-12-10>

Armenia on Thursday threatened to walk away from a landmark deal to establish ties with Turkey if Ankara continues to link the agreement with the dispute over Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region. "Armenia is prepared to honor its international commitments and we expect the same from Turkey," President Serge Sarkisian said during a press conference with his Latvian counterpart, Valdis Zatlers.

7.

Public of Abkhazia Concerned of Situation in Kabardino-Balkaria

08.12.2009, Caucasian Knot

READ MORE: <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/11933>

Representatives of the public of Abkhazia express their concern of the recent situation in Kabardino-Balkaria and demand to stop attacks on the leaders of Adyg organizations. Veterans of the Patriotic War of the people of Abkhazia, members of the public chamber of Abkhazia, faculty of the Abkhazian State University, MPs and the Centre of Humanitarian Programmes have adopted an appeal to the public of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic (KBR).

8.

Baku Upset Over Lack of Karabakh Progress, Steps up Anti-Western Rhetoric

04.12.2009, EurasiaNet

READ MORE: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav120409a.shtml>

Azerbaijani officials have taken aim at the West in recent weeks, in what some analysts believe could be an attempt to secure Russia's support for a Baku-friendly settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. The most surprising proposal in recent days to come out of Baku was a call for Russia to reestablish a military presence in Azerbaijan; Russian troops departed the country in 1993, and no mention had been made, until now, about their possible return.

9.

Azerbaijan Insists On 'Self-Rule' For Karabakh

02.12.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: http://www.rferl.org/content/Azerbaijan_Insists_On_SelfRule_For_Karabakh

[_/1893635.html](#)

Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov says Baku insists on restoring control over Nagorno-Karabakh despite accepting the right to self-determination as a core principle for resolving the Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute over the territory, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reports. Mammadyarov said today in a speech at a Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe conference in Athens that "Providing self-governance for Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijan will be a just and durable solution, and it can dramatically reduce tensions and challenges for peace and stability in the region."

10.

Participants of the Forum "Caucasus: Tradition and Modernization" Discuss Issues of Interethnic Dialogue in Mass Media

01.12.2009, Caucasian Knot

READ MORE: <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/11876>

Workers of mass media, authorities and the public took part in the section "Inter-Confessional and Interethnic Dialogue in Media Space" of the forum "Caucasus: Tradition and Modernization", held on November 30, 2009, in Nalchik. At the forum, debates were held on six topics: youth policy, education, non-commercial organizations and municipal formations, business, family and public health, and inter-confessional and interethnic dialogue in the media space.

11.

Karabakh Tension Escalates with Yerevan Threat of Recognition

25.11.2009. Today's Zaman

READ MORE: <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=193920>

Armenia has said it could recognize the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region as an independent state if Azerbaijan carries out its threat of military action to take back the mountain territory, raising tensions in the long-drawn-out conflict following the latest round of talks between leaders of the two countries.

XIII. EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

1.

Russia 'Could Join EU Eastern Partnership'

25.11.2009, EUBusiness

READ MORE: <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/russia-diplomacy.1mp>

Russia does not rule out joining the EU's Eastern Partnership programme, which the bloc forged with six ex-Soviet states earlier this year, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Wednesday. "Of course we will study the proposals on our joining some projects or others within the framework of the Eastern Partnership," Lavrov said.

XIV. ENERGY

1.

Romania: Ratification of Nabucco project Agreement, in Government meeting

09.12.2009, BSANNA News

READ MORE: <http://bsanna-news.ukrinform.ua/newsitem.php?id=11364&lang=en>

The interim Government is to ratify in its Wednesday meeting the Agreement between the Republic of Austria, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Hungary, Romania and the Republic of Turkey on Nabucco Project, signed in Ankara, on July 13, 2009.

2.

Gazprom Agrees Not to Penalize Naftohaz, Gas Price to Grow in 2010

09.12.2009, Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35821&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=27&cHash=fec79a8347](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35821&tx_ttnews[backPid]=27&cHash=fec79a8347)

Gazprom and Naftohaz Ukrainy on November 24 signed addenda to their earlier contracts according to which Naftohaz will not pay fines for buying less gas in 2009 than stipulated by the contracts. Gazprom also allowed Naftohaz to buy less gas in 2010, 33.75 billion cubic meters (bcm) rather than 52 bcm. Naftohaz in 2009 will import far less than the 33 bcm of gas stipulated by the January 2009 contracts, and consequently fines could amount to as much as \$8 billion if the "take-or-pay" clause in the contracts had been enforced by Gazprom. This would have sunk Naftohaz. Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko suspects that Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko reached secret agreements with the Kremlin in exchange for the concessions.

3.

Ukraine Leader Urges Major Changes to Gas Contract with Russia

09.12.2009, RIAN News

READ MORE: <http://en.rian.ru/exsoviet/20091209/157177234.html>

President Viktor Yushchenko renewed on Wednesday his appeal for a "drastic review" of a 10-year natural gas contract with Russia, which ended the ex-Soviet states' latest pricing and debt row. "The Yalta agreements represent sarcasm and irony at the expense of Ukraine's economy," Yushchenko said in televised remarks in the eastern Sumy region. "We will survive a few months, but they are only an opportunity to prepare for new talks."

4.

Medvedev: Changing Ukraine Gas Deals "Irresponsible"

09.12.2009, Reuters

READ MORE: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSGEE5B80QM20091209>

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said on Wednesday it would be "irresponsible" to amend gas supply contracts with Ukraine, in a sign Moscow will offer no more concessions to its ex-Soviet neighbour on gas payments. Medvedev's comments follow a renewed attack by Ukraine's top security body on the 10-year supply pact which brought an end to the January "gas war" and restarted Russian gas flows through Ukraine, a route supplying Europe with one-fifth of its gas.

5.

Ukraine Plays Down Fears of New Gas Crisis with Russia

09.12.2009, RIA Novosti

READ MORE: <http://en.rian.ru/exsoviet/20091209/157174205.html>

Ukraine's national energy firm Naftogaz gave further assurances on Wednesday that no new gas crisis with Russia is looming, as it has been paying for supplies on schedule. The statement came after the National Security Council's warning on Tuesday of the threat of a new gas dispute with Moscow, similar to the one at the start of the year, which caused losses for industries and left households in Europe without heating.

6.

Ukraine to Become Member of European Energy Community in December

09.12.2009, BSANNA News

READ MORE: <http://bsanna-news.ukrinform.ua/newsitem.php?id=11357&lang=en>

President Viktor Yushchenko hopes that a decision on Ukraine's accession to the Energy Community Treaty will be taken at the December 18 meeting of the Ministerial Council of the Energy Community, he has said this in Lutsk when on a meeting with lecturers and students of Volyn National University named after Lesya Ukrainka.

7.

US Urges Ukraine to Pursue Reform to Get Gas Investment

09.12.2009, EUbusiness

READ MORE: <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/ukraine-energy-gas.1v7>

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Wednesday urged Ukraine to pursue reforms to attract foreign investment for an energy sector both sides want to become more independent from Russia. "We reiterated... the importance that we place on Ukraine becoming more energy secure and more energy independent," Clinton said at a press briefing with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Petro Poroshenko.

8.

Expert: Azeri Gas Cannot Replace Russia's

02.12.2009, UPI

READ MORE: http://www.upi.com/Science_News/Resource-Wars/2009/12/02/Expert-Azeri-gas-cannot-replace-Russias/UPI-85891259770500/

Azerbaijan could emerge as a possible alternative to Russia as a European gas supplier, though its stability as a gas transporter is unclear, analysts said. Azerbaijan sits on some of the largest natural gas deposits in the world, and both Russia and Europe are looking to taps its vast reserves.

9.

Investors Call for Tough EU-Russia Energy Treaty

02.12.2009, EUobserver

READ MORE: <http://euobserver.com/24/29084>

Stuck mid-way through a years-long legal battle with the Kremlin, the former owners of Russian oil firm Yukos have urged Brussels to negotiate tough energy rules with Moscow to protect other investors. The businessmen behind GML, the majority owner of Yukos, would have no chance of getting their money back unless they had a legal means of redress, GML director, Tim Osborne, told EUobserver on Tuesday (1 December).

10.

Eon and Gazprom in Contract Conflict

01.12.2009, UPI

READ MORE: http://www.upi.com/Science_News/Resource-Wars/2009/12/01/Eon-and-Gazprom-in-contract-conflict/UPI-57321259716034/

German energy firm Eon is rowing with Russian state-controlled energy giant Gazprom over a long-term gas contract. Eon's Ruhrgas unit may see its earnings fall by 30 percent because the German gas utility is stuck with a long-term contract to buy natural gas from Russia's Gazprom, German newspaper Die Welt reports.

11.

France Joins South Stream Gas Pipeline

01.12.2009, EurActiv

READ MORE: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/energy/france-joins-south-stream-gas-pipeline/article-187830?Ref=RSS>

French company Electricité de France (EDF) on 27 November signed a memorandum of understanding with Russia's Gazprom regarding its possible participation in the South Stream gas pipeline, seen as a competitor to the EU-backed Nabucco project.

12.

Papoulias says Greece to Benefit from Fuel Deals with Russia

25.11.2009, RIA Novosti

READ MORE: <http://en.rian.ru/world/20091125/156975335.html>

Greece and Bulgaria will benefit from joint energy projects with Russia, Greek President Karolos

Papoulias said during an official dinner to mark the visit of his Bulgarian counterpart. "We [Greece and Bulgaria] could become the main hubs of energy supplies to Europe, international players in the energy sector," he said.

13.

Final Curtain for Nabucco?

24.11.2009, UPI

READ MORE: http://www.upi.com/Science_News/Resource-Wars/2009/11/24/Final-curtain-for-Nabucco/UPI-40091259078400/

Energy deals between Azerbaijan, Russia and Iran and Brussels' negligence could spell serious trouble for the Nabucco gas pipeline to Europe, analysts say. Europe sees Nabucco as a foundation to its effort to diversify a regional gas sector that depends currently on Russia. "This hugely expensive and ambitious project required firm political and financial commitments which Brussels has not delivered," writes Alexander Jackson in the *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*.

XV. EU

1.

Mutual Distrust Blurs EU-Ukraine Summit

07.12.2009, EUobserver

READ MORE: <http://euobserver.com/9/29105>

No breakthrough decisions were taken at the 13th EU-Ukraine summit held in Kiev last Friday (4 December). Although Ukraine's president Viktor Yushchenko had said during the year he hoped the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement would be signed during the summit, it was clear early on that these hopes were unrealistic.

2.

EU-Russia Relations: Reset or stagnation?

26.11.2009, EurActiv

READ MORE: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/foreign-affairs/eu-russia-relations-reset-stagnation/article-187720>

The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the conclusion of the 24th EU-Russia summit in Stockholm show that relations between Europe and Russia are at a critical juncture, writes George Bovt in a November article for the EU-Russia Centre. "The whole Russian vision of its relations with Europe may be reconsidered. Moscow will have to deal with a much more efficient EU than before," Bovt claims.

3.

Eastern Commissioners Compete for Energy, Enlargement

25.11.2009, EurActiv

READ MORE: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/future-eu/eastern-commissioners-compete-energy-enlargement/article-187649>

Four East European commissioners are finding themselves in competition after their countries expressed preferences for the energy and enlargement portfolios in the next European Commission. The coveted portfolios cover policy areas in which they apparently hope to leverage their countries' experience, but also to alleviate difficulties.

XVI. NATO

1.

NATO-Russia Council back on Constructive Track - Envoy

03.12.2009, RIA Novosti

READ MORE: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20091203/157082238.html>

The work of the NATO-Russia Council has been put back on a constructive track, Russia's envoy to the 28-member military alliance said on Thursday. "All the impasses, protests and other [obstacles] have been disavowed," Dmitry Rogozin said. Rogozin said on Tuesday Canada had blocked the adoption of all documents to be considered at a ministerial meeting in Brussels on Friday, the first official talks to be held since the August 2008 armed conflict between Russia and Georgia over South Ossetia.

2.

NATO-Georgia Commission to Meet in Brussels

02.12.2009, Civil.ge

READ MORE: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21741>

NATO-Georgia Commission will meet on a foreign ministerial level in Brussels on December 3 on a sideline of NATO foreign ministers' summit. Speaking at a news conference in Brussels on December 2, NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, reiterated the commitment the alliance made in Bucharest summit and said: "They [Georgia and Ukraine] will become NATO members, when they meet the standards and if they so desire."

XVII. SECURITY

1.

U.S., Russia Enter Endgame Stage in Arms Reduction Talks

10.12.2009, RIA Novosti

READ MORE: <http://en.rian.ru/world/20091210/157179827.html>

The United States and Russia have agreed on the core of a new strategic arms reduction deal to replace the expired START 1 treaty and need only a few final touches to conclude the talks, the U.S. State Department said. Moscow and Washington have been in intensive negotiations since July, when Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and his U.S. counterpart Barack Obama agreed the new treaty's outline, which included cutting nuclear arsenals to 1,500-1,675 operational warheads and delivery vehicles to 500-1,000. "The vast majority of the text is already agreed on, but we do have some of these final issues that we need to work out," Ian Kelly, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of State, told a daily press briefing on Wednesday.

2.

Russian FSB Officers Leave Port In Ukraine's Crimea

10.12.2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

READ MORE: http://www.rferl.org/content/Russian_FSB_Officers_Leave_Port_In_Ukraines_Crimea/1900874.html

The last Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) officers stationed with Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Crimea reportedly left the Ukrainian peninsula today, RFE/RL's Ukrainian and Russian services report. Black Sea Fleet officials say the FSB's special department in Sevastopol has been fully transferred to Novorossiisk, another Russian Black Sea port.

3.

Armenia to Send 40 Soldiers to Afghanistan

10.12.2009, Hurriyet Daily News

READ MORE: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=armenia-to-send-40-soldiers-to->

afghanistan-2009-12-10

Armenian lawmakers approved plans for the former Soviet republic to send 40 soldiers to serve with NATO-led forces in Afghanistan. The move follows a call by the United States for its international allies to help boost total troop numbers to around 150,000 to launch a new offensive in the fight against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

4.

Russia's Latest Bulava Missile Test Unsuccessful

12.10.2009, RIA Novosti

READ MORE: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20091210/157186305.html>

The latest test launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile in the White Sea in northern Russia ended in failure, the Defense Ministry said on Thursday. Wednesday's test was Bulava's seventh failure, according to official reports. Russia hopes the submarine-launched missile will be a key element of its nuclear forces.

5.

Russian Navy Questions whether it Needs French Warship

09.12.2009, RIA Novosti

READ MORE: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20091209/157173276.html>

The Russian Navy is continuing discussions on whether to purchase a French warship, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Wednesday. The chief of the General Staff said on Tuesday that Russia would decide by the end of 2009 whether to purchase a Mistral class amphibious assault ship from France.

6.

Russian Combat Training Prioritizes the Individual

08.12.2009, Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35812&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=27&cHash=bc8eb0a494](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35812&tx_ttnews[backPid]=27&cHash=bc8eb0a494)

As the new combat training year in the Russian armed forces began on December 1, senior officials outlined the priorities for the year ahead, while reflecting soberly on annual training results in 2009. The main change envisages concentrating on the individual skills of officers and soldiers, shifting away from brigade-level exercises to focus instead on the tactical-level and consequently reducing the overall total number of exercises. This attempt to replace quantity with quality has been characterized by some commentators as a gamble in the pursuit of higher standards. Lieutenant-General Valeriy Yevnevich, the chief of the main combat training directorate and a career paratrooper was surprisingly candid during a press conference on November 30, noting the weaknesses that were exposed during the past year (Interfax, November 30).

7.

Georgia Concerned by Possible Russia-French Deal

06.12.2009, New Europe

READ MORE: <http://www.neurope.eu/articles/98014.php>

Georgia is tremendously worried about possible purchase of French helicopter carrier amphibious assault warships, Mistral, by Russia, Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze was quoted as saying by the press. The only destination of this kind of ship is the Black Sea, Vashadze said in his address to an audience at French International Relations Institute (IFRI) in Paris. The consequences might be devastating ... We are tremendously worried, he said, adding that Georgia simply would like to understand why Russia would need such an assault vessel.

8.

Russian Strategic Bomber Flights: Long Range Deception

01.12.2009, Eurasia Daily Monitor

READ MORE: [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35782&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=b6c2493f88](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35782&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=b6c2493f88)

On November 24 and 25 two Russian Tu-95MS strategic bombers flew long range patrolling missions above neutral waters in the Arctic to the Atlantic Oceans. Russian Air Force spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Vladimir Drik said that during the 16 hour missions that featured mid-air refueling from Il-78 tankers, NATO F-15 and RAF Tornado's followed the Russian bombers. Russian strategic aviation flights, according to Drik, "strictly comply with the international rules of using airspace over neutral waters without violating the borders of foreign countries" (Interfax, November 25). The UK defense ministry and the RAF dispute this, arguing that while these flights pose no direct military threat, and remain in international airspace, the Russian authorities consistently fail to inform the relevant air traffic control bodies of their movements; raising civil aviation flight safety concern since these military patrols transit some of the busiest air routes (Russia: a New Confrontation? House of Commons Report, July, 2009).

XVIII. TRANSPORT

1.

Greece, Russia Boost Transport Ties

09.12.2009, BSANNA News

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Visiting Russian transport minister Igor Levitin and Greece's minister of infrastructure transport and networks Dimitris Reppas on Wednesday discussed further development of bilateral cooperation in the sectors of road, rail and air transports. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Reppas noted the traditional good relations between Greece and Russia, and announced that a committee of experts of the two ministries has been set up which will have completed its work in 2010 aimed at the signing by the two ministers of a new agreement on road transports, which he said will boost the trade cooperation and economic relations between the two countries.

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