
Georgia rejects Russia's version of pact with breakaway regions

RIA Novosti - 23/1/2008

TBILISI, January 23 (RIA Novosti) - Georgia's acting state minister for conflict settlement said Wednesday the ex-Soviet republic would not sign the Russian version of a non-use of force agreement with its separatist regions.

South Ossetia and Abkhazia declared independence from Georgia following bloody conflicts in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse. Georgia's current pro-Western leadership has been seeking to recover its influence in the separatist regions and secure international support on the issue.

"The Georgian side is not rejecting an agreement not to resume hostilities. But the form offered by Russia is unacceptable to us. The Russian side wants Georgia to sign agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia as if they were neighboring independent countries," David Bakradze said, adding that Georgia would never agree to that.

The Georgian acting minister said an agreement should deal with the settlement of the internal conflict in Georgia and the restoration of the country's territorial integrity by peaceful means.

If this happens there will be no problem with Georgia signing the document, Bakradze said.

Meanwhile, Abkhazia said on Wednesday it had opened fire on two Georgian naval vessels that entered the unrecognized republic's territorial waters.

Kristian Bzhania, a spokesman for Abkhazia's president, said the ships were detected 4 miles from the Gagida settlement in the Gali District. "In line with orders received, Abkhazia's coastal services opened fire on the vessels after which the Georgian ships left Abkhazia's territorial waters," he said.

Georgia's Navy mainly consists of patrol vessels and landing craft.

However, Georgia's border police denied the incident. "The information from Abkhazia that Georgian naval vessels were near the unrecognized Abkhazian coast is untrue," spokeswoman Lela Mchedlidze said.
