
German Efforts for Georgia

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German Chancellor Angela Merkel expressed her deep concerns regarding the conflict in the separatist pro-Russian enclaves of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the run-up to her meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in the Black Sea City of Sochi - a place just 35 kilometres far to the Georgian border and the expected venue of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games. It will be Medvedev's 100th day in office when Merkel arrives on Friday.

Some topics on the meeting agenda changed at a short term and most of them will focus on the heavy fighting between Russian and Georgian forces since late last week and will try to find satisfying solutions. Chancellery Spokesman Thomas Steg said that Merkel called for an end of the violence, the proper and unconditional withdrawal of all forces from the crisis area and the search for a political solution during a phone conversation with Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili on Monday.

Actually Merkel's visit to Russia and her meeting with Medvedev were planned to shape the frame of a relaxed and trustful friendship that would deepen mutual relations and give Merkel the opportunity to sightsee the Olympic sites. The chilled and smooth atmosphere between both sides' predecessors Putin and Schröder was expected to create an exemplary and fruitful basis for this meeting. But now, with a crisis next door, international criticism on Russia's disproportionate military response and the fear of oil and gas shortages through Georgian pipelines, Merkel will need to line up intensive diplomacy in Sochi. She already emphasized her respect for Georgia's territorial integrity.

Also, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier made diplomatic efforts this weekend. He had presented some solution proposals to the Georgian Government and to the internationally not recognized authority of the Abkhaz Region during his two-day journey to Georgia in July. Steinmeier held talks regarding a 3-step-plan with Medvedev and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov at that time. Germany is coordinator of a Friendship Group under the umbrella of the UN Secretary and it participates the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) with military observers and sanitary troops. UNOMIG has been monitoring the ceasefire between the conflict parties since 2003. Steinmeier's efforts yielded fruits and he was able to establish two direct contacts between Georgian Foreign Minister Eka Tkeshelashvili and Lavrov at the weekend. Besides, the German Foreign Ministry provided an immediate 1-Million-Euro humanitarian aid package and enabled its supply to the civil population through two humanitarian corridors. In the meanwhile, the German Embassy in Tbilisi organized busses to transport its citizens out of the country. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Jens Ploetner made clear that this action is not part of an evacuation plan, but helps Germans to leave Georgia and to head for the Armenian capital of Yerevan voluntarily.

U.S.-backed Georgia called for ceasefire and signed unilaterally a four-step peace plan initiated by French Foreign Minister and head of the rotating EU Council Presidency Bernard Kouchner. Together with his Finnish counterpart Alexander Stubb he runs talks in Tbilisi and Moscow. German Minister of State Gernot Erler appealed for Russia to co-operate with international mediators and MP Eckart von Klaeden criticized Russia's attitude as provocative. EU Foreign Ministers will hold a special conference after the return of Kouchner from the crisis area.

Young, charismatic and ambitious Saakashvili desires to join NATO, but he seems to have failed his election campaign promise to re-establish Georgia's territorial integrity. He also miscalculated Russia's military and strategic power that stands head and shoulders above the Georgian capabilities. The western governments ` including Germany ` did not recognize the seriousness of the situation in time. The crisis turns to become an internal conflict of the European Union how to deal with Eastern neighbours, especially with Russia. Germany's `gas diplomacy' through the direct pipeline connection with Russia ` initiated by former Chancellor Schröder- and the Baku-Ceyhan-Pipeline that runs partly through Georgia and feeds the European consumers has an outstanding significance, despite harsh words and warnings by Merkel. She should be well aware of the situation.
