

---

# GUAM Summit Held Amid Adverse Trends on Energy and Conflicts 1

By Vladimir Socor

Eurasia Daily Monitor - Volume 5, Issue 128- 5/7/2007

---

Leaders of the GUAM group of countries -- Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova -- and of GUAM Partner countries (Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Czech Republic) held the annual GUAM summit on July 1 in Batumi, Georgia. Under the motto, 'GUAM: Integrating Europe's East,' a signal that the European Union could not miss, this year's summit registered adverse trends on the issues of uppermost concern to GUAM countries: the secessionist conflicts and Caspian energy transit.

In the backdrop to the GUAM summit, Russia accelerated the seizure of Abkhazia from Georgia by force, the first instance of seemingly successful Russian territorial revisionism in the post-Soviet era, and potentially repeatable elsewhere. In his speech at the summit, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili noted the parallels with the situation in Europe during the late 1930s.

European Union leaders, however, had failed to raise this issue at the EU-Russia summit on June 26 and 27, despite multiple appeals by Georgia and countries friendly to it. In the wake of that EU failure, Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus told the GUAM summit, 'Georgia and the whole of Europe need clear answers about what an alien army does in this or that country, on whose authority and on what mandate. Russia's so-called peacekeeping operation is preventing the return of hundreds of thousands of expellees, while forcing the remaining population to link their future with the presence of Russian troops' (BNS, July 2). Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev also expressed strong support for Georgia in that context (Trend, July 2).

The summit registered 'deep concern about the threats caused by the protracted conflicts and armed separatism' (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Karabakh, and Transnistria). It called for resolving those conflicts on the basis of 'territorial integrity and inviolability of the internationally recognized borders of the states, reintegration of the uncontrolled territories into the states that they are a part of, return of forcibly displaced persons, development of civil society, restoration of destroyed infrastructure on these territories', and mobilization of international support toward that end (summit communiqués, July 1).

Stagnation of Western-led pipeline and overland transport projects through the region is the other issue of concern to GUAM countries. The group is appealing to the EU to revitalize these projects, particularly the long-planned trans-Caspian transport links, 'without which GUAM's transit potential could not fully develop, and the bridge between Europe and Asia could not be created,' as the Azerbaijani presidency noted when handing over the reins to Georgia in Batumi (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, 'Report on GUAM during the Azerbaijani Presidency,' July 2008).

Some projects are being realized incrementally and on a relatively small scale, primarily through the efforts of GUAM countries themselves and short of the strategic scale that Brussels and Washington had envisaged before dropping the flag of leadership. During the Batumi summit, Presidents Saakashvili and Aliyev symbolically lit the gas stove in a Batumi apartment, inaugurating the flow of gas from Azerbaijan to this part of Georgia. Energy

Ministers Natig Aliev of Azerbaijan and Alexandre Khetaguri of Georgia, Economics Minister Eka Sharashidze of Georgia, and Transport Minister Serik Ahmetov of Kazakhstan discussed plans to increase oil deliveries along the direct corridor from Kazakhstan to Azerbaijan and Georgian Black Sea ports, for further shipment to Ukraine and into the projected Odessa-Brody-Plock-Gdansk route. The energy summit held in Kyiv in May launched an updated, expanded version of this project.

The Georgian-led GUAM Secretariat and the International Road Union (IRU) announced the creation of a partnership at this summit. The IRU, an overarching organization representing trucking, bus, and other forms of the motor transportation business, has launched a New Eurasian Land Transport Initiative (NELTI) involving the GUAM countries. GUAM Secretary-General Valeri Chechelashvili and IRU Secretary-General Martin Marmy presented the concept to the summit participants. It envisages the formation of a transport corridor Europe-Caucasus-Central Asia for freight services and passenger traffic, along the historic Silk Road. Trans-Black Sea and trans-Caspian ferryboat links for motor vehicles are key elements in this project (Statement by the GUAM Heads of State, July 1). NELTI might become one component in the overall Europe-Caucasus-Central Asia transit corridor, originally promoted as TRACECA by EU authorities in Brussels, but then relegated to the back burner of EU policy.

Azerbaijan's chairmanship of GUAM (June 2007-June 2008) proved to be the most efficient and dedicated chairmanship in GUAM's institutional history. It collected and published for the first time the full record of GUAM documents and activities, from the organization's inception in 1997 to date, in several volumes. It hosted three goal-oriented, project-based international conferences in Baku, and published the proceedings with full-scale policy recommendations concerning the protracted conflicts, energy development and transportation ('Basic Principles for the Settlement of Conflicts on the Territories of GUAM States,' April 2008; 'GUAM Transit,' April 2008; and 'GUAM Development Strategy,' May 2008).

These contributions have laid the basis for developing a 'GUAM aquis.' They also form a basis for GUAM's incoming Georgian chairmanship to move forward.

---