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NATO Sec-Gen Talks about Russian Aggression and Its Influence on Georgia's Path Towards NATO

BY KHATIA BZHALAVA

"It is only for NATO members, Georgia and Ukraine to decide when they are ready to join the alliance, not Russia," said NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg at an event hosted by Brookings Institution and Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. NATO Sec-Gen noted that the relationship between the North Atlantic Alliance and Russia is currently at the lowest point since the end of the Cold War.

According to him, NATO started to form a positive relationship with Russia after the Cold War by establishing the NATO-Russia Council. "We had, step by step strengthen our cooperation and political dialogue with Russia, and many of us were quite optimistic," Stoltenberg noted, however, as NATO Sec-Gen notes, this gradually started to change, starting in 2008 when Russia went into Georgia and took control over parts of Georgian territory, followed by the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014.



NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg at an event hosted by Brookings Institution and Georgetown University.

When asked if Georgia and Ukraine joining NATO would exacerbate relations with Russia, Stoltenberg stressed

that "it is the right for any sovereign nation to decide its path." According to him, the idea that Russia's small

neighbors joining NATO would be a "provocation" to Moscow is 'absolutely wrong' and the message that it was provoca-

tive for Russia that Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic joined the NATO, exemplifies that Russia strives to have a world order where they control the neighbors. "That's not the world I would like to live in, and actually I have fought for decades to move away from that world," Stoltenberg noted.

Stoltenberg believes that more should be done to support aspirant countries in implementing reforms, fighting corruption, and building security and defense institutions.

"It is only for NATO members, Georgia and Ukraine to decide when they're ready to join. Not Russia. We support their efforts to modernize, to reform, to meet the NATO standards and when 30 Allies agree that they are ready to join, they will join. I cannot tell you when that will happen, but that's the only way that this can be dealt with," said the NATO Secretary-General.



"We support their [Georgia, Ukraine] efforts to modernize, to reform, to meet the NATO standards," Stoltenberg stressed.

Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 3.1300; Euro - 3.6192; GBP - 4.2640; 100 Russian Ruble - 4.3453; Swiss Franc - 3.3690

Georgia Mourns 9 Citizens Deceased in Residential Building Collapse



The illegal construction works lead to the eventual collapse of a section of the residential building causing the death of 9 people, including 3 minors.

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Nine people died as a result of the collapse of a house in the Black Sea city of Batumi on October 8. The incident happened on May 26 Street, where the entrance of a 7-story building suddenly collapsed. One person is in the hospital and his health is stable at the moment.

Sending his condolences to the families of those who died in Batumi, Prime Minister Gharibashvili declared October 11 a day of mourning for the events in Batumi on October 8.

People have brought flowers, toys, and candles to an iron fence surrounding the building to pay tribute to the victims of the tragic incident. Several foreign dignitaries have sent their condolences to the government of Georgia and the Georgian people as a sign of solidarity.

Promising to take all the legal steps 'to protect the legitimate interests of the victims', the Prosecutor's Office sends the 'deepest condolences' to the families of those who have died during the tragic incident.

3 people were charged by the Prosecutor's Office on October

10 for violating safety regulations during construction work on the residential building in question. The Prosecutor's Office said that workers (2 individuals, father, and son) removed a retaining wall of the residential building per the instruction of the owner of the apartment, who had no official consent to carry out renovation work on his prop-

erty, apartment located on the ground floor of the building.

On October 4-8, those 2 individuals started to remove retaining walls in the building without state consent. The illegal construction works have led to the eventual collapse of a section of the residential building.

The defense requested bail, but the judge granted the

prosecutor's motion.

"The cause of the collapse is not certain, and pressing charges and arrest before the expert opinion is available, is a very hard measure. The court said that the evaluation of the validity of the standard information, the witness's testimony, that these works have resulted in the destruction, was considered enough to detain," said Ramin Papidze, the defendant's lawyer. One of the accused, who was taken out of the court building, managed to say a few words to the journalists before being transferred to the penitentiary institution: "I did not take out anything [demolition of the load-bearing wall], they are blaming everything on me."

The Prosecutor's Office indicted the detainees - ZB, Kh.S., and G.S. - under the second part of Article 240 of the Criminal Code of Georgia (violation of safety rules during construction work, which resulted in the loss of life and serious consequences.) The offenses carry a sentence of 2 to 10 years in prison. A trial date has been scheduled for December 1.

Amid Batumi events, PM Gharibashvili announced that construction regulations will be tightened even more and the construction permit procedures should be strictly controlled.

According to him, the families affected by the collapse of the building in Batumi on August 8

will receive housing and monetary compensation from the government.

"The government of Adjara has done everything and the central government will stand by it to ensure that everyone owns apartments and monetary compensation to create appropriate conditions in their homes," Gharibashvili said.

The Government of Adjara and Batumi City Hall will provide apartments to the families affected by the collapse of a house in Batumi. Also, families will be compensated for the improvement of the apartments. s 90 000 has already been allocated from the reserve fund of the Government of Adjara for the families of the victims of the tragedy. Besides that, by the Tbilisi City Hall's decision, money that should have been spent on the "Tbilisoba" event - up to s 500 million, will be given to the victims of the demolition of the building in Batumi.

Amid the tragedy in Batumi, building security complaints have risen sharply, Tbilisi Municipal inspection says.

According to the Vice-Mayor of Tbilisi, Irakli Khmaladze, it is planned to allocate an annual budget of 100 million for the replacement of damaged buildings, since there are about 10 thousand damaged buildings in the capital at the moment.

"We tried to allocate a budget of 15-18-20 million annually for the strengthening of damaged buildings, but now we want to allocate 25-50 and 100 million annually for the replacement of damaged buildings," he said.



Georgian national flags were flying at half-mast on all government buildings across the country.

Weather

Tuesday, October 12

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 19°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 10°C

Wednesday, October 13

Day Partly Cloudy
High: 21°C

Night Clear
Low: 12°C

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