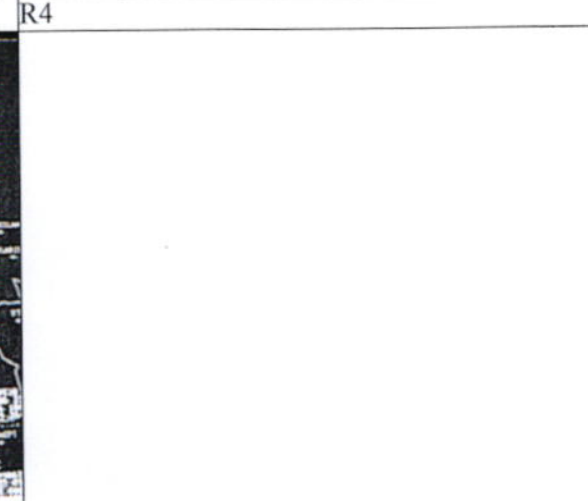
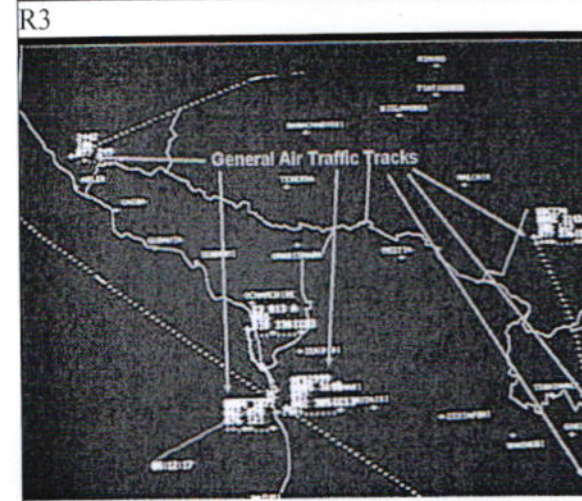
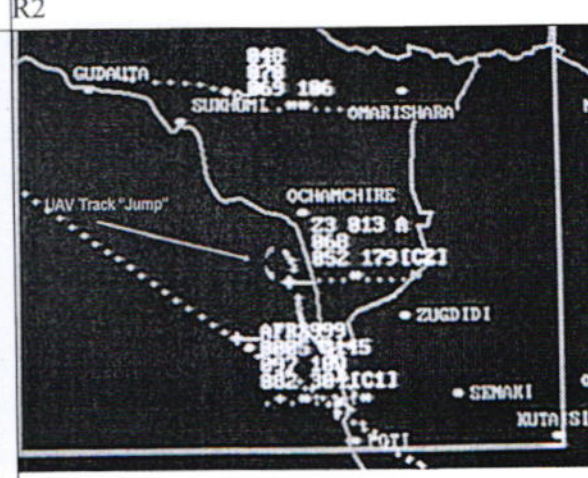
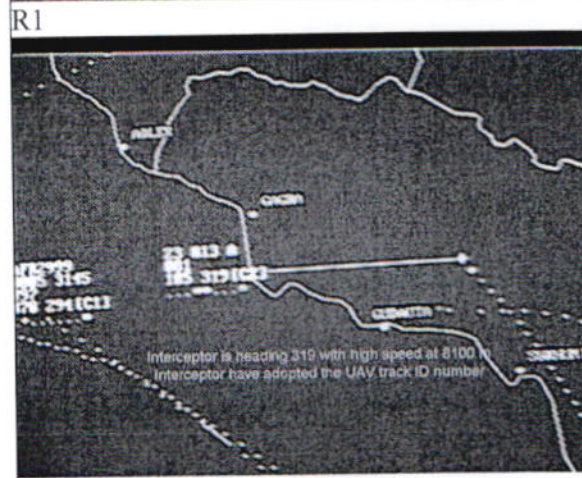
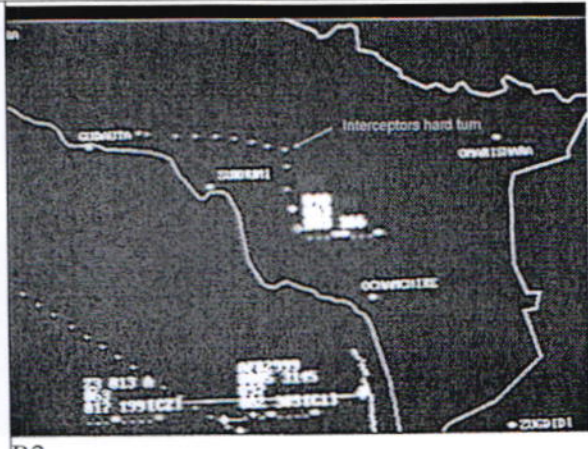
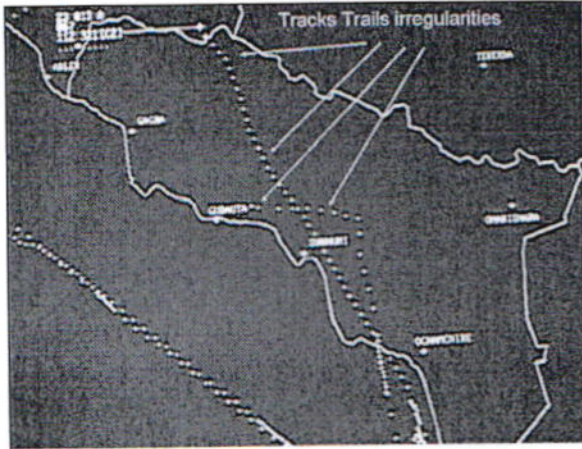


Radar track images





MEPs debate the situation in Georgia amid escalating tension in the region

The European Parliament debated the situation in Georgia given the escalated tensions in the region and concerns over build-up of Russian troops. Many MEPs expressed their solidarity and support for Georgia's territorial integrity given the deteriorating situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. MEPs will vote on a resolution on this topic in June.

Council Presidency

"We are particularly worried about the increased number of Russian forces in Abkhazia, and the introduction of 15 additional checkpoints on the border with Georgia," Slovenian State Secretary for European Affairs Janez **Lenarcic** said on behalf of the Council Presidency. "The EU stresses its commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised border according to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1808," he added. On Georgia's internal politics, the State Secretary expressed his hope for free and fair elections, saying "the Georgian authorities must establish the trust of the population in these elections."

Commission

External Affairs Commissioner Benita **Ferrero-Waldner** expressed her "whole-hearted support for Georgia," saying that "the decision by Russia to strengthen links with separatist elements in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia represent an erosion of Georgia's territorial integrity." She urged Russia to rethink this decision, or to at least not implement it. She said "any proposed action should be measured against its capacity to lower the temperature" in the area, given that "the stability of the entire South Caucasus is in danger." She added that "in the past 4 years, Georgia has made tremendous efforts to move towards democratic society," and reminded MEPs of the 2 million euros of electoral aid the Commission has pledged to Georgia for the upcoming polls.

Group speakers

Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Jacek **Saryusz-Wolski** (EPP-ED, PL) said Russian actions "violate existing agreements and the territorial integrity of Georgia, undermining international peace efforts." He urged Russia to reverse its decision to strengthen ties with separatists and to withdraw its forces, called on the UN forces on the ground to become a "truly international peace force" and asked the Council to "consider an ESDP mission" in Abkhazia. "The EU should act in line with its ambitions, to not only be a payer, but also a player in conflict resolution situation," he added.

Hannes **Swoboda** (PES, AT) said "a border has suddenly been drawn in the middle of the country." He nevertheless said Georgia must also show restraint, and refrain from

using "war-like terms," such as those by Deputy Prime Minister Giorgi Baramidze yesterday in the Foreign Affairs Committee. He said a "peace mission unilaterally led by one of the parties to the conflict, especially the bigger one," was untenable. He also urged free and fair elections in the upcoming May 21 parliamentary polls in Georgia.

On behalf of the ALDE group, Georgs **Andrejevs** (ALDE, LV) said Russian military troops are having a "destabilising effect," and said "EU supervised troops should be considered." He added that a true democratic political culture in Georgia is important, saying the "administrative bodies of Georgia have not done everything necessary to convince people that they will deal with electoral concerns from the previous elections."

Marie Anne **Isler Béguin** (Greens/EFA, FR), Chair of the EP's Delegation for Relations with the South Caucasus said the situation "is close to annexation." "There is no confidence to be rebuilt, no dialogue; it has been broken off for two years," she added. "History will not pardon us if we do nothing," she warned, adding that the Balkans offered lessons that need to be heeded.

Konrad **Szymanski** (UEN, PL) said "a shameful silence has reigned in the EU about Georgia." He said ethnic cleansing in the 1990s had let to the present situation, and warned that "saying no to Georgian membership of NATO encourages Russia in its actions." "If we assist Russia in partitioning the region, the new imperialism of Russia will push the region to the brink of war," he added.

"The situation in Georgia is so bad today that 25% of its population has left the country," said Miloslav **Ransdorf** (EUL/NGL, CZ). He said new Russian President Medvedev "will need some time to implement what he has said he will do: to offer a friendly hand to Georgia."

British speakers

Charles **Tannock** (EPP-ED, UK) stated that "Russia has a new President today but Vladimir Putin's new job as Prime Minister will enable him to maintain his grip on power and supervise his protégé, Dimitri Medvedev. As a result, Russian foreign policy will not change. Recognition of Kosovo has opened a can of worms and has given Russia the moral high ground. It would indeed be tragic if through our approach to Kosovo we have irreparably damaged Georgia and precipitated conflict in a country whose territorial integrity we should defend strongly."

Robert **Evans** (PES, UK) said the EU is not doing enough to support Georgia at this time of "Russia's imperialism", that "Russia has never respected the territorial authority of Georgia over Abkhazia" and that we should be doing everything we can to stop the situation "before we have another Balkan crisis".

Response to the debate

Commissioner **Ferrero-Waldner** replied that Georgia "should not fall into the trap of reacting violently, and must also strengthen its own democracy." She added that "there is no question of the EU standing idly by," adding that the Council has already started talks on visa facilitation with Georgia, and more and more Member States see the importance of the issue, although unanimity is not yet reached. She also reminded MEPs that the Commission has given significant aid to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who have fled Abkhazia in previous years.

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