

Georgia: NATO secretary-general visits Tbilisi

On 1 October, NATO's secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen visited Georgia, where he opened a NATO liaison bureau in Tbilisi for the South Caucasus region. The visit is an expression of the Alliance's political support in questions which are of key importance for Georgia: its territorial integrity and its aspirations to join NATO.

The new liaison bureau which the Alliance's secretary-general opened in Tbilisi will be responsible for contacts with Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The director of office is a Pole, Zbigniew Rybacki. During his visit to Georgia, Rasmussen also met the most important persons in the country. The secretary-general emphasised that in accordance with the decision taken at the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, Georgia will become a member of the Alliance as soon as it meets the requirements.

Intensive political co-operation between NATO and Georgia, including the prospect of membership and awarding Georgia the Membership Action Plan (MAP), was inhibited due to the Georgian-Russian war in 2008. However, Georgia remains the most important partner for NATO in the region; currently, as part of the mission in Afghanistan, 900 Georgian soldiers are stationed there. Rasmussen's visit to Tbilisi is a sign of NATO's readiness to increase its political co-operation with Georgia, although this does not equal the prospect of Georgia actually joining NATO any time soon. <JaStrz>