

Georgian Diplomat Said Georgia started war in South Ossetia

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Georgia's former ambassador to Russia Erosi Kitsmarishvili has accused his own country of starting the war in South Ossetia. His comments almost led to a fistfight between politicians.

"It was the Georgian government that launched the military action. It doesn't matter whether it was provoked or not," he told the Georgian parliamentary commission analysing the August events. "As for the fact that Russia was prepared for it, Moscow was ready to perform the actions it did, because they were part of Russia's overall plan. I am not saying Georgia is to blame for everything, because Russia was not an innocent lamb either."

Erosi Kitsmarishvili was one of the founders of the 'Rose Revolution' and the former head of Georgia's Rustavi-2 TV station. This, however, didn't prevent the anger of one member of the commission on hearing his statement. He threw a pen at the former ambassador and seemed ready to fight.

"Today's session is a vivid example of how the Saakashvili regime is collapsing," commented Pikriya Chikhradze, a leader of the Georgian opposition party, New Rightists. "The behaviour of the commission members who assaulted Erosi Kitsmarishvili, shows that they are interested not in listening to a person who possesses really important information, but in publicly denying it."

Kitsmarishvili had more revelations about his conversations with President Saakashvili.

"The President told me he wanted to relocate the Georgian capital to Sukhum in Abkhazia in August," he said. "I told him there wasn't any peaceful way to reach this goal in four months and asked how we could develop relations with such plans in mind?"

Kitsmarishvili's controversial comments are seen by some as evidence of a growing battle in Georgian politics.

"A tough political fight is developing in Georgia between Saakashvili's team and the opposition. And the Georgian opposition consists of former allies of the incumbent president," said Vladimir Zharikhin, Deputy Head of the Institute of CIS countries. "The West knew that Saakashvili started the war. Yet there was an attempt to tell this story differently. But such distortion of the picture is possible only for a short term."

South Ossetia and Abkhazia were part of Georgia during the Soviet era. After the breakup of the USSR, the two republics pushed for independence resulting in an armed conflict with Tbilisi.

After several years of fighting a Russia- UN peacekeeping force was deployed in the two conflict zones. The growing tensions erupted into a war between Georgia and South Ossetia in August 2008.

The mainly Russian peacekeeping mission in the region deployed troops to push Georgian forces out of South Ossetia.

The republic's authorities claim Georgia's actions caused the death of more than one and a half thousand civilians.

Despite criticism from the West, on August 26 Russia recognised the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The Georgian parliamentary commission investigating the conflict in South Ossetia is expected to announce its conclusion on what happened and who is to blame in mid-December.

Some findings are already known and according to the head of the commission, a criminal case could be opened against Georgia's former ambassador to Russia for alleged negligence during his work.

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