

# Road to Russia-Georgia stand-off

Tensions between Russia and Georgia escalated after President Mikhail Saakashvili came to power in 2004. His desire to join the EU and NATO, military build-up with Western help, and claims of interference by Moscow in breakaway South Ossetia and Abkhazia, have triggered Kremlin fury



**2002:** Work begins on **BTC pipeline**. Run by British-U.S. oil giant BP, \$3.6bn, 1,768km pipeline bypasses Russia to pump oil from Baku to Mediterranean port of Ceyhan for shipment to west. **U.S. stations troops near Tbilisi to train Georgian army to counter Chechen guerrillas based in Pankisi Gorge and to protect pipeline**

**2003:** Georgian President **Eduard Shevardnadze** ousted following mass demonstrations over corruption, poverty and crime

**2004, Jan:** **Mikhail Saakashvili** elected president vowing to take Georgia out of Russia's orbit, reign in breakaway provinces and join NATO

**Mar-Oct:** Tensions rise with leaders of Abkhazia, Ajaria and South Ossetia demanding full independence. Saakashvili proposal of limited autonomy angers Kremlin which backs separatist regions

**2005, May:** President **George W. Bush** – first U.S. leader to visit Georgia – proclaims country a **"beacon of liberty"**. Moscow agrees to withdraw troops from Georgia

**2006, Jan:** Price of gas supplied by Russian gas giant **Gazprom** doubled. Blasts on Russian side of border cut gas and electricity supplies during freezing weather. Russia blames insurgents – Saakashvili accuses Moscow of sabotage

**May-Jun:** Russia bans imports of Georgian mineral water and wine on health grounds. Tbilisi demands that Russian troops in Georgia have visas

**Jul:** **BTC pipeline opens**

**Sep:** Georgian helicopter carrying defence minister is fired on over South Ossetia. Tbilisi temporarily detains four Russian army officers on spying charges. Moscow pulls out 84 diplomats and their families from Georgia

**Oct 3:** Russia slaps transport and postal blockade on Georgia

**Oct 5:** Kremlin says Georgians will no longer be granted work or residence permits in Russia. Georgians in Russia send home around \$300m a year. **Saakashvili vows to block Russia's bid to join World Trade Organisation until sanctions are lifted**