

# GEORGIA UPDATE

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## TOP STORIES

- **Georgia Moves One Step Closer to NATO, as Alliance Accelerates Membership Preparations**
- **President, in Unprecedented Testimony, Reveals Details of August War**
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- **Russian Occupying Forces Building a new “Berlin Wall” to Divide Georgia**
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- **Georgia Expands Its Global Diplomatic Reach With 10 New Embassies**
- **European Educators, Experts Convene in Tbilisi to Advance the “Bologna Process”**



### **NATO Strengthens Ties With Georgia**

NATO brought Georgia closer to the Alliance this week by accelerating membership preparations. The Allies noted: “NATO Ministers expressed their continuing resolve to assist Georgia in its democratic development and the programme of reforms....They acknowledged Georgia’s efforts to continue to improve elections, political pluralism, and judicial professionalism and independence... and stressed their commitment to assisting Georgia in its reforms.”

## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

**LE MONDE & THE WALL STREET JOURNAL:** Mikheil Saakashvili on “Georgia acted in self defense”

**THE DAILY TELEGRAPH:** David Bakradze on “Stronger Georgian democracy emerges from ashes of war”

**DEUTSCHE WELLE:** Mengrelians in the Georgia conflict

**WASHINGTON POST:** How far will we go for Georgia?

**EURASIANET:** The European Union—Back to “business as usual” with Russia?

**FINANCIAL TIMES:** US aims to shift focus over Kiev and Tbilisi

**DER TAGESSPIEGEL:** Georgian leader warns EU against “betrayal” over Russia

## QUOTES OF THE WEEK

**“The Russians have said that they are in favor of this sort of enquiry. We hope that will translate into effective support for the work of this mission.”**

—French Presidency spokesman during official EU announcement of its war investigation (Dec. 2)

**“We didn't invade South Ossetia, as our antagonists are prone to say—a country can't invade its own territory—rather, we fought to repel foreign intervention.”**

—President Saakashvili during 5 hours of testimony before Parliament’s war commission (Nov. 28)

## UPCOMING MILESTONES

Dec. 4-5: OSCE FM’s meet in Helsinki

Dec. 4: Azerbaijani PM visits Georgia

Dec. 5-9: EU-Georgia Cooperation Council meets in Brussels

Dec. 9: Armenian PM visits Georgia

Dec. 11-12: EU summit in Brussels to discuss “Eastern Partnership”

Dec. 9-11: Parliament Speaker visits US

Dec. 18-19: Third round of Geneva talks

TOP STORIES

**Georgia Moves One Step Closer to NATO, as Alliance Accelerates Membership Preparations**

NATO foreign ministers reconfirmed Tuesday that Georgia and Ukraine eventually will join the Alliance, and agreed to accelerate membership preparations. "We have decided to provide further assistance to both countries in implementing needed reforms as they progress towards NATO membership," the Alliance said in its communiqué. After a meeting Wednesday of the NATO-Georgia Commission, the main vehicle for advancing relations, the Allies also recognized "Georgia's efforts to continue to improve elections, political pluralism, and judicial professionalism and independence."

**NATO (Dec. 2): Final Communiqué of NATO Meeting**

<http://www.nato.int>

**CIVIL GEORGIA: Georgian Officials Hail NATO Decision**

<http://civil.ge>

**President, in Unprecedented Testimony, Reveals Details of August War**

In a display of public accountability and transparency unprecedented in the region, President Saakashvili testified for five hours before the Parliamentary commission investigating the origins and conduct of the August war. He made a forceful case that he took military action only to protect Georgian civilians from lethal Russian attacks—and even then, Georgia only acted after Russian tanks and troops began crossing the border. He also emphasized that Georgia neither sought nor received a green light from any allies. "Today everyone recognizes that Russians are occupiers, and however inconvenient this truth might be for the world, that is the fact," Saakashvili said. "This is a new reality for Georgia." The commission questioned 22 high-level Georgian officials and will soon issue its report.

**CIVIL GEORGIA (Nov. 28): Saakashvili testifies before war commission**

<http://www.civil.ge>

**REUTERS (Nov. 28): Under-fire Saakashvili defends Georgia war**

<http://www.reuters.com>

**EU Elaborates on New "Eastern Partnership"**

The EU unveiled a plan on Wednesday to spend €600 million to boost ties with Georgia and other former-Soviet states—a plan EU leaders pushed up the political agenda in the wake of Russia's August invasion of Georgia. "The EU has a vital interest in stability, better governance, and economic development on our borders," said Commission chief Barroso. "This does not aim at building new areas of influence ... but at increasing stability and prosperity." The Eastern Partnership was conceived by Poland and Sweden; it initially includes Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Moldova.

**AFP (Dec. 1): EU to offer partnership to Ukraine, Georgia**

<http://www.eubusiness.com>

**Russian Occupying Forces Building a new "Berlin Wall"**

Russian forces are erecting a "Berlin Wall" as part of a campaign to cut off rebel regions from the rest of Georgia, Foreign Minister Tkeshelashvili told a London think tank audience. "Russia is trying to divide Abkhazia and South Ossetia from the rest of Georgia" by building a wall at the Abkhaz border. "Russia is physically destroying physical links between the regions of Georgia," she said. "It is blowing up bridges in Gali region so that it is harder for people to go to the neighboring region of Samegrelo."

**AFP (Nov. 28): FM says Russia building 'Berlin Wall' in Georgia**

<http://www.google.com>

**Georgia-EU Visa Negotiations Set to Begin**

The EU has agreed to open negotiations with Georgia in early 2009 to ease visa restrictions for Georgians traveling to European countries. EU leaders had agreed to speed up the process last September, in a show of solidarity following the Russian invasion. The visa facilitation agreements will significantly reduce the cost of European short-stay visas for Georgians; it will be paired with a readmission agreement that will make it easier for EU countries to return Georgians who are in Europe without legal documentation.

**AP: (Dec. 1): EU to open visa talks with Georgia early 2009**

<http://www.iht.com>

**EUROPEAN VOICE (Nov. 27): EU to launch visa negotiations with Georgia**

<http://www.europeanvoice.com>

**Georgia Expands Global Reach With 10 New Embassies**

Georgia will continue to expand its global diplomatic reach by opening 10 new embassies in the coming year, including new outposts in Brazil, Canada, and Ireland; representation to UNESCO also will be created. Meanwhile, Georgia ended diplomatic relations with Nicaragua, the only country apart from Russia to recognize the independence of Georgia's two breakaway regions.

**MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS: [www.mfa.gov.ge](http://www.mfa.gov.ge)**

**European Educators, Experts Convene in Tbilisi to Advance the "Bologna Process"**

Over 150 European and Georgian experts convened last week in Tbilisi to make progress on Europe's "Bologna Process"—a national qualifications system for higher education. The Process aims to create a European Higher Education Area by 2010, in which students can choose from a wide and transparent range of high quality courses and benefit from smooth recognition procedures. Georgia joined the 44 other participating countries in 2005. The recommendations adopted at Tbilisi meeting will be reviewed at a ministerial conference in April 2009.

**Georgian Women Take Gold in World Chess Olympiad**

The women's team of Georgia prevailed last week at the 38th World Chess Olympiad in Dresden, Germany. Georgia needed a tiebreaker to win gold, while Ukraine took silver, after both teams finished with 18 points. Over 150 teams participated in the premier international chess competition.



## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

**LE MONDE & WALL STREET JOURNAL: Mikheil Saakashvili on "Georgia acted in self defense"**

"It has never been in dispute whether our forces entered South Ossetia," writes President Saakashvili. "I have always openly acknowledged that I ordered military action in South Ossetia—as any responsible democratic leader would have done, and as the Georgian Constitution required me to do in defense of the country." He adds: "So the question is not whether Georgia ordered military action—including targeting of the artillery sites that were shelling villages controlled by our government. We did. The question is, rather: What democratic polity would have acted any differently while its citizens were being slaughtered as its sovereign territory was being invaded? South Ossetia and Abkhazia are internationally recognized as part of Georgia, and even some areas within these conflict zones were under Georgian government control before the Russian invasion."

<http://www.lemonde.fr>  
<http://sec.online.wsj.com>

**THE DAILY TELEGRAPH: David Bakradze on "Stronger Georgian democracy emerges from ashes of war"**

Amid the widespread destruction of war, Russia's invasion of Georgia has enhanced a stronger and more vibrant democracy, writes Parliament chairman David Bakradze. "If there is any silver lining, it is that the war gave us reason and opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to a democratic path." He points out that the Parliament's war commission underscores that "no official, including our President, is beyond public accountability. It shows that we are committed to political pluralism, with the opposition playing an active and even a leading role in our country's most critical activities. The democratic debate in Georgia has never been livelier than today."

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk>

**DEUTSCHE WELLE: Mengrelians in the Georgia conflict**

Mengrelians, a small Georgian ethnic group, continue to be discriminated against by rebel Abkhaz authorities in Georgia's Galidistict. Deutsche Welle reports that although democratic entities funded by Western nations support the civil and human rights of Mengrelians, violence against them persists.

<http://www.dw-world.de>

**WASHINGTON POST: How far will we go for Georgia?**

Russia's militarization of Georgia's Akhagori district—a previously uncontested, ethnically Georgian area—has left Americans and the world at large to debate: "How far will we go for Georgia?" Ensuring Georgia's stability "will probably require an entirely new level of American commitment...and billions more in subsidies to keep the country afloat until investors return." While averting confrontation with Moscow, Obama must steadfastly support Georgia's territorial integrity, or face the consequences of a Russian assault on Tbilisi.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com>

**EURASIANET: The European—Back to "business as usual" with Russia?**

By resuming partnership negotiations with Russia, the EU has signaled that it is back to "business as usual" with Russia—despite Moscow's open defiance of international law and its refusal to comply with the Sarkozy ceasefire agreement. The EU has clearly backed away from using sanctions to exert pressure on Moscow.

<http://www.eurasianet.org>

**FINANCIAL TIMES: US aims to shift focus over Kiev & Tbilisi**

The US has de-emphasized the importance for Georgia and Ukraine to attain NATO's MAP status and, instead, has focused on advancing political and security reforms in both countries. Citing the highly politicized nature of MAP, the US ambassador to NATO said: "We ought to deescalate the situation, help these countries reform, keeping an eye focused on the fact that eventually they will become members of NATO."

<http://ft.onet.pl>

**DER TAGESSPIEGEL: Georgian leader warns EU against "betrayal" over Russia**

President Saakashvili warned the EU of the consequences in forging too many concessions with Russia during the EU's resumed partnership talks with the country. In an interview with DerTagesspiegel, he noted: "Russia's smaller neighbors would see a decision by larger European countries to just accept Russia's aggression as a betrayal. Saakashvili says any new EU pact should include a condition for Russia to honor and respect international law."

<http://www.eubusiness.com>

## NGO'S/THINK TANKS

**INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP: Georgia: Risks of Winter**

To secure Georgia's stability in a post-war environment requires significant political and economic reform, says the International Crisis Group. "The government should thus ensure that it implements an effective social assistance strategy, carries out democratic changes in the broadcast media, creates an independent judiciary and prevents abuse of property rights." Meanwhile, the West must form a unified front in ensuring that Russia fully complies with the ceasefire agreement by allowing EU monitors access to conflict zones and assisting in the return of Georgia's forcibly displaced.

<http://www.crisisgroup.org>

## WEBSITES @ GEORGIA

**Civil Georgia:** Leading independent English-language news website on Georgia: <http://www.civil.ge>

**Georgia Update:** Official government information service: <http://www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge>

**Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies:** Leading non-governmental organization that focuses on Georgian domestic and foreign policy: <http://www.qfsis.org>

**Georgian Parliament:** <http://www.parliament.ge/>

**Government of Georgia:** <http://www.government.gov.ge/eng/>

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs:** <http://www.mfa.gov.ge>

**National Investment Agency:** <http://www.investgeorgia.org>

**Georgian Mission to NATO:** <http://embassy.mfa.gov.ge>

**Discover Georgia:** Official tourism site. <http://www.tourism.gov.ge/>