

GEORGIA UPDATE

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TOP STORIES

- **Russia Cedes Village to Georgia, but Quickly Returns; EUMM demands pullback**
- **Council of Europe Warns of "Renewed Clashes or Outbreak of Hostilities" in Georgia**
- **Senator Kerry Commends Georgian Reforms, Urges Russian Ceasefire Compliance**
- **Former Foreign Minister to Lead NSC; New Ambassadors Named to US, UN**
- **Parliament Plans New Wave of Electoral Reforms Next Spring**
- **OPIC Approves \$79 Million in Funding for Long-Term Mortgages in Postwar Georgia**

HAPPY HOLIDAYS! AND SEE YOU IN 2009!

Georgia Update is taking a Holiday Break and Will Next Appear on January 8, 2009



US Senator John Kerry, who met with both government and opposition leaders during a visit to Georgia last Saturday, said there was "a lot of progress" in Georgia "that the people of Georgia should be very proud."

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"My judgment is that Georgia as a sovereign country needs to be upheld and respected. And the agreement that the Russians have signed up to needs to be upheld."

–Senator John Kerry, Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in Tbilisi (Dec. 13)

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Dec. 18: Parliament releases final report of its war investigation

Dec. 18-19: Third round of Geneva peace talks

Dec. 18: Heidi Tagliavini expected to disclose details of the EU war inquiry

Dec. 31: OSCE monitoring mandate expires

Feb. 15: UN monitoring mandate expires

Mar. 31: EU monitoring mission mandate expires

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

ASSOCIATED PRESS: Exclusive-Questions of KGB ties for S. Ossetian activist

LE MONDE DIPLOMATIQUE: Georgia on Europe's mind

FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG: Wrong Signal

THE ECONOMIST: Georgia After the War-A Hard Winter

DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR: EU Condemns Shooting at Peacekeepers

GAINESVILLE TIMES: Georgians Help Georgians

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL: Caspian Energy States Move Towards West

TOP STORIES**Russia Cedes Village to Georgia, but Quickly Returns; EUMM demands pullback**

Over 500 Russian troops returned Saturday to Perevi—a Georgian village near the administrative border with South Ossetia—after a brief, mock withdrawal. The bizarre about-face drew a sharp reprimand from the European Union Monitoring Mission, which demanded an immediate Russian withdrawal. Russian-backed forces also denied access into Perevi to a group of EU ambassadors seeking to assess the situation in the area.

AGENCE FRANCE PRESS (Dec. 13): Russian Troops Move Back into Disputed Village

<http://www.google.com>

CIVIL GEORGIA (Dec. 13): EUMM Calls on Russia to pull Back from Perevi 'Without Delay'

<http://www.civil.ge>



Russian-backed militia, above, repeatedly denied access last weekend to a convoy of EU ambassadors who sought entry into Perevi, the Georgian village near South Ossetia that was reoccupied Saturday by Russian forces.

Council of Europe Warns of "Renewed Clashes or Outbreak of Hostilities" in Georgia

The Council of Europe yesterday expressed serious concern that the escalation of tensions and provocations along Georgia's administrative borders could lead to "renewed clashes or an outbreak of hostilities" between the two member states. The CoE called for access for international monitors to South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and said this access, as well as the establishment of a new internationalized peacekeeping format and force, was "crucial" for stability in the region. It also called on Russia to put an immediate halt to the "looting, pillaging and ethnic cleansing" taking place in South Ossetia, which they have so far failed to stop.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE (Dec. 17): PACE Co-rapporteurs Concerned About the Possibility of Fresh Hostilities Between Georgia and Russia
<http://assembly.coe.int>

Senator Kerry Commends Georgian Reforms, Urges Russian Ceasefire Compliance

Senator John Kerry, the incoming chair of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said "that the people of Georgia should be very proud" of the democratic reforms that have taken place. During a brief visit to Tbilisi last Saturday, he added: "I am confident that the current government is very interested in continuing that progress and in undertaking further reforms and we look forward to working with them." He also underscored the need for additional electoral and media reforms.

CIVIL GEORGIA (Dec. 13): Senator Kerry-Government Interested in Reforms

<http://www.civil.ge>

Former Foreign Minister to Lead NSC; New Ambassadors Named to US, UN

A government reshuffle that began in early December was completed this week as EkaTkeshelashvili, the former foreign minister, was appointed Secretary of the National Security Council. Her predecessor at the NSC, Alexander Lomaia, will become the country's permanent representative to the United Nations. Meanwhile, David Sikharulidze, Georgia's ambassador to the United States, was named the country's new defense minister. He will be succeeded in Washington by Batu Kutelia, until now the acting defense minister of Georgia.

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE (Dec. 9): Ambassador to US Named Georgia's Defense Minister

<http://georgiandaily.com>

Parliament Plans New Wave of Electoral Reforms Next Spring

A new parliamentary group has been established to advance further reforms to Georgia's election code. Parliamentary Chairman Bakradze said the group, which includes members of both the majority and opposition parties, will consult widely with civil society, political groupings not represented in Parliament, and international organizations. The reforms are expected to be in place before the next round of voting in Georgia; local elections are scheduled for 2010, while parliamentary elections are scheduled for 2012, with a presidential vote in 2013.

CIVIL GEORGIA (Dec. 15): Group to Tackle Election Code

<http://www.civil.ge>

OPIC Approves \$79 Million in Funding for Long-Term Mortgages in Postwar Georgia

In another vote of confidence for the Georgian economy, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) approved \$79 million in financing for two initiatives to help in postwar rebuilding. One project will provide relatively uncommon long-term mortgages to middle-income borrowers in Georgia, promoting home ownership and thereby accelerating the country's recovery from the invasion. Part of the aid provided by the US government agency will help build much-needed government office space in Tbilisi.

OPIC (Dec. 12): OPIC Board Approves \$79 Million for Two Projects in Georgia

<http://www.opic.gov>

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

AP: Exclusive—Questions of KGB ties for S. Ossetian activist
Lira Tskhovrebova flew to Washington on a mission: The self-described independent activist from S. Ossetia wanted to challenge U.S. support for Georgia in its war with Russia over the breakaway region and describe atrocities by Georgia. Backed by an expensive public relations firm, Tskhovrebova lined up meetings with U.S. officials. What Americans meeting with Tskhovrebova didn't know is that she has ties to South Ossetia's KGB security service.

<http://www.cbsnews.com>

LE MONDE DIPLOMATIQUE: Georgia on Europe's mind

The EU is being criticized for failing to ensure implementation of the ceasefire agreement that ended the Russian-Georgian war; the shortcomings highlight deep flaws in EU foreign policy. The EU's position on the Georgian crisis is part of a jigsaw puzzle that is very hard to fit together, reflecting a complex compromise between widely divergent interests. The core disagreements stem from strategic choices not made in the past—for one, the failure to develop a common energy policy. How could the EU have an effective common foreign policy in the Caucasus if it has no common energy policy?

<http://mondediplo.com>

FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG: Wrong Signal

Nicolas Busse takes the EU and Germany to task for being too soft on Russia—first having been unwilling to impose sanctions after the invasion of Georgia in August, then rushing to restart partnership talks despite Moscow's failure to abide by the ceasefire agreement brokered by the EU. Bosse argues that the wrong signal has been sent to aggressive actors on the world stage—especially since the West stood by as a country that had been promised NATO membership was invaded.

www.faz.net

THE ECONOMIST: Georgia After the War—A Hard Winter

A bleak winter landscape is settling across Georgia. Russian troops remain hunkered in Akhgori, just 25 miles (40km) from Georgia's capital, Tbilisi. The first of some 30,000 Georgians who fled South Ossetia during the August war are now moving into box-like cottages in an archipelago of refugee camps spread across northern Georgia. The outgoing secretary of Georgia's Security Council, Alexander Lomaia, says that "80-90% of our time goes on dealing with the consequences of the Russian invasion."

<http://www.economist.com>

DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR: EU Condemns Shooting at Peacekeepers

The EU condemned an unprovoked attack on unarmed peace observers near Georgia's war-torn city of Gori. An investigation is ongoing to determine the perpetrators—presumably Russian-backed South Ossetian militias—behind last week's shooting. Sporadic violence and shootings prevail near the administrative borders of Georgia's separatist regions despite the EU-brokered ceasefire.

<http://news.trend.az>

GAINESVILLE TIMES: Georgians Help Georgians

The Georgians from Georgia—Gainesville, Georgia, USA—have come to the aid of their namesakes halfway around the world. The American NGO Conscience International (CI), based in the state of Georgia, has donated nearly \$250,000 in medical equipment to the Gori Pediatric hospital. "It's a brand-new hospital, but there's nothing in it," said CI's founder after traveling to Gori. Up to four deliveries of essential medical aid will be shipped to help tens of thousands of Georgians displaced by Russia's August invasion.

<http://www.gainesvilletimes.com>

UPI: Caspian Energy States Move Towards West

Several Caspian energy states are strengthening relations with the West by advancing plans for the Nabucco and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipelines. Ariel Cohen of the Heritage Foundation believes this is a promising sign, despite Russian protests. Meanwhile, "Moscow is assertively opposing the Western-controlled pipeline projects transporting Eurasian oil and gas to the European markets," he says. Azerbaijan also has signed additional gas deals with Georgia to help its neighbor in the aftermath of Russia's invasion.

<http://www.upi.com>

NGO'S/THINK TANKS**COUNCIL OF EUROPE: Georgia—Special Follow-up Mission to the Areas Affected by the South Ossetia Conflict**

The Council of Europe praised Georgia's efforts to provide housing for the country's war refugees. "The Georgian government has committed itself to finding a durable solution for all displaced person by 2011, irrespective of whether they originate from the 2008 or 1991-92 conflicts," the group said in a report released this week. The CoE also condemned Russian occupying forces for continuing to deny IDP's access to their homes in S. Ossetia and Abkhazia.

<http://www.reliefweb.int>

SECURITY & DEFENSE AGENDA: The Georgia-Russia Stalemate—Do's and Don'ts for Avoiding a New Cold War

The Brussels-based think tanks says that, the West should use this summer's war in the Caucasus to bring some serious policy debate back to NATO, push collaborative initiatives between NATO and the EU, and continue to support progress to towards membership of NATO on the part of all countries who wish to move in that direction.

<http://www.securitydefenceagenda.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 independent organization focusing on Georgian policy: <http://www.gfsis.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/>