

GEORGIA UPDATE

WEEKLY EDITION • 12 February 2009

A Publication of the Government of Georgia

www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge

TOP STORIES

- EU, NATO Warn Russia on Plan to Increase Troops in Georgia
- Biden Meets With Saakashvili, Underscores Strong US Support for Georgia
- OSCE Envoy Confirms "de facto ethnic cleansing" ongoing in South Ossetia
- IMF Says Georgia in Good Position to Weather Global Recession
- EU's War Inquiry Mission Visits Georgia
- New PM & Cabinet Win Confidence Vote in Parliament



In the first statements on Georgia by the Obama administration, Vice President Joe Biden made it clear that American support for Georgia was unwavering. "The United States will not recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. We will not recognize a sphere of influence. It will remain our view that sovereign states have the right to make their own decisions and choose their own alliances." Biden met with President Saakashvili in Munich last weekend, and also reassured him of Washington's support for Georgia's economic recovery.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

GLOBE & MAIL: Timothy Garton Ash on "Taming the Russian Bear"

DEUTSCHE WELLE: European Leaders Split on Russian Security Plan

RIA NOVOSTI: Georgian NGO files hundreds of human rights suits

AP: Greek FM says deal hoped for on Georgia monitors

UPI: Swords & shields-Russia's Abkhaz base plan

EURONEWS: Shevardnadze interview—"Russia has set a very dangerous precedent for itself"

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"I cannot see how we can have such a discussion of the new architecture ... when Russia is building bases inside Georgia. That cannot be ignored, and it cannot be the foundation of a new security architecture."

—Jaap De Hoop Scheffer, NATO Secretary General

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Feb.12: President delivers state of the nation address in Parliament

Feb.15: UN monitoring mandate expires

Feb. 16: Robert Simmons, NATO Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia, visits Georgia

Feb. 17-18: Next round of peace talks scheduled in Geneva

Feb. 17-18: FM Vashadze visits Poland

Feb. 20-21: FM Vashadze visits Armenia

Mar. 8-12: FM Vashadze visits Japan

Mar. 31: EU monitoring mandate expires

Apr. 27: Tenth anniversary of Georgia's membership in the Council of Europe

TOP STORIES

EU, NATO Warn Russia on Plan to Increase Troops in Georgia

The EU and NATO warned Moscow that its unilateral plan to increase Russian troop presence in S. Ossetia and Abkhazia was a grave violation of the Sarkozy-Medvedev ceasefire agreement and of international law. Said the Union: "The EU would consider the implementation of such plans to be a serious violation of the principle of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity." Russia is advancing plans to build naval and air bases in the occupied territories as a means to project power in the crucial Black Sea region and throughout the broader Caucasus and Central Asian regions.

REUTERS (Feb. 5): **EU says Russian bases would be violation**
www.iht.com

AFP (Feb. 6): **NATO, Russia argue over troop plans**
<http://news.yahoo.com>

Biden Meets With Saakashvili, Underscores Strong US Support for Georgia

US Vice President Biden, meeting last weekend with President Saakashvili, confirmed America's continued and unwavering support for Georgia under the Obama administration. The Vice President underscored Washington's commitment to Georgia's economic recovery and to its territorial integrity. Said Biden: "The United States will not recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. We will not recognize a sphere of influence. It will remain our view that sovereign states have the right to make their own decisions and choose their own alliances."

REUTERS (Feb. 8): **Biden says up to Georgia to join NATO**
www.reuters.com

AFP (Feb. 8) **Biden affirms US support for Georgia**
<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net>

OSCE Envoy Confirms "de facto ethnic cleansing" ongoing in S. Ossetia

A European special envoy to Georgia confirmed that Russia is continuing its brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing in the occupied territory of South Ossetia. "(In South Ossetia), there is now a situation where you have had de facto ethnic cleansing, where refugees have their homes and wish to go back," said OSCE Parliamentary Assembly envoy Goran Lenmarker. Late last year, Moscow vetoed the continuation of the OSCE's monitoring mission in Georgia, thus creating a vacuum that Russian forces have exploited to drive more Georgians from the occupied territories and prevent the return of IDPs. The OSCE is trying to revive its monitoring mandate.

REUTERS (Feb. 5): **"De facto ethnic cleansing" in S. Ossetia**
<http://uk.news.yahoo.com>

IMF Says Georgia Well-Placed to Weather Global Recession

Amidst the global financial crisis, Georgia's economy is holding up much better than other emerging markets and even the developed world, according to the IMF. "Georgia is relatively well placed in comparison with other countries, because it has already put in place a series of measures to deal with the shock that happened last summer," IMF regional chief Masood Ahmed said last week. Ahmed praised the Georgian government's swift action to mitigate the economic repercussions following Russia's invasion, calling it a "very sensible strategy."

REUTERS (Feb 6): **Georgia "well placed" to weather global crisis**
<http://www.guardian.co.uk>

EU's War Inquiry Mission Visits Georgia

In a visit this week to Tbilisi, the team leading the EU's investigation into the Russian invasion of Georgia held talks with senior officials, after having sent a list of questions to the government seeking clarification on the origin and conduct of the war. FM Vashadze said the questions sought to ascertain the "particular circumstances preceding Russia's invasion, when the war started, and when the shelling of the Georgian villages started," among other issues. President Saakashvili first urged an international investigation into the origins of the war on August 17; Georgia has been cooperating fully with the inquiry since it began.

CIVIL GEORGIA (Feb. 9): **EU War Inquiry Mission's Experts**
<http://www.civil.ge>

New PM & Cabinet Win Confidence Vote in Parliament

New PM Gilauri won a confidence vote in Georgia's Parliament last week, thus officially replacing former PM Mgaloblishvili. In his address following the vote, Gilauri said his top priorities would be to create new jobs, tackle the country's economic challenges, and seek the de-occupation by Russia of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia. Dimitri Shashkin, minister for penitentiary and probation, and Kakha Baidurashvili, the new finance minister, were also confirmed by Parliament.

CIVIL GEORGIA (Feb. 9): **Cabinet wins confidence vote**
<http://www.civil.ge>



Archaeological excavations in the village of Sakorkio—which historians believe was part of ancient Phasis—have revealed evidence of 4th-century silk-manufacturing, as well as amphorae; last year, the same site yielded stunning jewelry of ancient Greek origin.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

THE GLOBE & MAIL: Timothy Garton Ash on “Taming the Russian Bear”

There will be no European foreign policy unless there is a European Russia policy, writes Garton Ash. There will be no European Russia policy unless there is a European energy policy and a European strategy for Ukraine. In this matter of sovereignty, what's sauce for the Russian goose must also be sauce for the Georgian or Ukrainian gander. A state cannot consistently say: We insist on full respect for our own sovereignty but will violate the sovereignty of others whenever we decide it's necessary.

www.theglobeandmail.com

DEUTSCHE WELLE: European Leaders Split on Russian Security Plan

European leaders are both split and alarmed by Russia's ambitious proposal to fundamentally revamp Europe's security architecture. Says NATO chief De Hoop Scheffer: "I cannot see how we can have such a discussion of the new architecture...when Russia is building bases inside Georgia.

That cannot be ignored, and it cannot be the foundation of a new security architecture." The EU's Solana argues that the key problem in the relationship between Russia and the West is a lack of trust, which should be addressed by creating a "climate of cooperation."

www.dw-world.de

RIA NOVOSTI: Georgian NGO files hundreds of human rights suits against Russia

A Georgian NGO has filed nearly 400 lawsuits in the European Court of Human Rights, seeking justice after Russia's mass human rights violations during last year's invasion. "The claims are on human rights violations, torture and inhuman treatment, enslavement and forced labor, violations on the right to freedom and integrity, respect for personal and family life, rights on effective and just defenses, and others." According to the NGO "42nd Article of the Constitution," Russia has repeatedly violated numerous points in the European Convention that uphold human rights and civil liberties.

<http://en.rian.ru>

AP: Greek FM says deal hoped for on Georgia monitors

Greek FM and current OSCE chair Bakoyannis believes consensus on an OSCE monitoring mission in Georgia is possible by month's end. "We hope that all our colleagues will realize that it is very important to keep a mission that is carrying out important humanitarian work," she said. Russia, the occupying force in South Ossetia, has denied the unanimous requests of its OSCE partners to renew the 16-year-old monitoring mandate.

www.iht.com

UPI: Swords & shields—Russia's Abkhaz base plan

Russia is aiming to enhance its military might abroad by constructing a naval base in Ochamchire, part of Georgia's occupied territory of Abkhazia. "The base raises questions about Moscow's motivation for the August 2008 war, as well as Abkhazia's independence," says Russian expert Ariel Cohen. Although, the base is not a viable alternative to Russia's Sevastopol base in Ukraine, it is a key location in the event of future Black Sea conflicts.

www.upi.com

EURONEWS: Shevardnadze says, "Russia has set a very dangerous precedent for itself"

Former Georgian president Shevardnadze says Russia's motives in Georgia primarily lie in controlling Caspian energy supplies. Yet, by recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia while refusing to honor the sovereignty of Russia's five separatist provinces, "Russia has set a very dangerous precedent for itself." As an energy transit state, Georgia is of key geopolitical importance in helping Europe achieve energy security.

www.euronews.net

THINK TANKS & NGOS

CSIS: Georgian Military Reform—An Alternative View

Although leaked reports have sharply criticized Georgia's armed forces, they fail to acknowledge their significant progress and ignore the impact of Russia's August invasion on Georgia's military reform. "The authors of much of the recent reporting on Georgia's military capabilities have abandoned balance and perspective and thereby provided fodder for a 'Russia-first' policy." This will only encourage bellicose Russian policy in the Caucasus and beyond.

www.csis.org

IRC: IRC Helps People in Need in Georgia

The IRC is providing critical aid to Georgia's refugees. "Many people returning to their villages in the buffer zone are in poor health and bad shape economically and psychologically," says the IRC's country director. Since August, the IRC has been pivotal in helping refugees find stability in war's aftermath.

www.theirc.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.gfsis.org>

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

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

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

Local Government: Official website of Georgia's capital, Tbilisi: http://www.tbilisi.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=1

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

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

President Saakashvili's official website:

<http://www.president.gov.ge/?l=E&m=0&sm=0>