

GEORGIA UPDATE

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TOP STORIES

- NATO Reaffirms Support for Georgia, Expands Military & Political Cooperation
- Georgia to Send Company of Troops to Afghanistan to Join NATO Effort
- South Ossetians Chafe at Control, Corruption Under Russian Occupiers
- OSCE Says “Meaningful” Presence Needed in Georgia
- Defense Minister Unveils Priorities for 2009
- UAE Firm to Invest \$2 Billion in Georgia, Focusing on Major Infrastructure Projects



During talks at the NATO-Georgia Commission in Krakow last week, Georgian Defense Minister Sikharulidze (above left) met with his 26 NATO counterparts and Alliance chief Jaap de Hoop Scheffer (above right) to discuss NATO's recovery assistance to Georgia, illegal Russian military bases on Georgian territory, and other issues. The Alliance affirmed its support for Georgia's eventual NATO membership, while announcing expanded military and political cooperation with Georgia.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

RFE/RL: Signs Could Point To New War Despite Step Toward Stability

FINANCIAL TIMES: UK calls for unit to defend NATO territory

ASSOCIATED PRESS: Russia hands out passports, stirs fears in West

RUSSIA TODAY: Most Russians say conflict over Crimea is “possible”

PROJECT SYNDICATE: Energy Disarmament

REUTERS: EU Offers Belarus Closer Ties, Warns on Georgia

AFP: Georgia Eurovision entry pokes fun at Putin

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“We have a continuing security relationship with Georgia. We are involved in training. We are involved in military reform in Georgia. So this is an ongoing relationship. And it is a relationship that we are pursuing both bilaterally and within the framework of our NATO allies.”

— US Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

“Georgia is still a very attractive and interesting country for investors, with its geographic location and great business potential.”

— Zaza Mikadze, General Director of Rakia, which is investing \$2 billion in Georgia

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Mar. 2-7: State Reintegration Minister visits Iran

Mar. 1-12: NSC Secretary Tkeshelashvili visits Washington, D.C

Mar. 8-12: FM Vashadze visits Japan

Mar. 23-27: Parliament Speaker Bakradze visits Washington, D.C

Mar. 30: Parliament Speaker visits Denmark and Norway

Mar. 31: EU monitoring mandate expires

Apr. 2-4: Parliament Speaker visits Finland

Apr. 27: 10th Anniversary of Georgia's membership in Council of Europe

TOP STORIES**NATO Reaffirms Support for Georgia, Expands Military & Political Cooperation**

NATO defense ministers reaffirmed their support for Georgia's military reform and prospective alliance membership last week. "We have a continuing security relationship with Georgia. We are involved in military reform in Georgia...it is a relationship that we are pursuing both bilaterally and within the framework of our NATO allies," said US Defense Secretary Gates. The Alliance offered to deepen military and political cooperation with Tbilisi to help advance military reforms required for future membership.

[RFE/RL: NATO Ministers seek to keep door open to Georgia](#)

Georgia to Send Company of Troops to Afghanistan to Join NATO Effort

Georgia will deploy 100 troops to Afghanistan to help reinforce NATO efforts in the fight against terrorism. "Georgia has taken a decision to send one company to Afghanistan; it will be our contribution to the tasks the alliance is trying to resolve in Afghanistan," said Georgian FM Vashadze last week. Since 2003, Georgia has committed 2,000 soldiers to Iraq, and also has supported NATO missions in Afghanistan and Kosovo.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: FM: Georgia to send troops to Afghanistan](#)

[AP: Georgia to send 100 soldiers to Afghanistan](#)

South Ossetians Chafe at Control, Corruption Under Russian Occupiers

South Ossetia has become Moscow's de facto protectorate since Russia invaded last August. But with millions in reconstruction aid gone missing and opposition growing to Moscow's puppet president, the occupied territory is threatening to become an embarrassment. Two high-ranking former S. Ossetian officials have accused Moscow-backed leader Eduard Kokoity of embezzling funds. Most unflattering, Kokoity's opponents have accused him of turning tale and taking shelter far from the front lines of the fighting.

[DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR: Unruly South Ossetia—a potential embarrassment to Kremlin?](#)

OSCE Says "Meaningful" Presence Needed in Georgia

OSCE Chair and Greek FM Bakoyannis stressed the imperative to maintain a "meaningful" international presence in Georgia's occupied territories. "The position of Greece is clear: the current crisis demands that the OSCE should do more in Georgia, not less," she said last week at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. The OSCE's observation mission in Georgia was terminated in January after Russia vetoed an extension; a compromise was reached earlier this month on a skeletal mission, but the OSCE is seeking a more robust presence.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Greek FM: "Meaningful" OSCE presence needed in Georgia](#)

Defense Minister Unveils Priorities for 2009

Defense Minister Sikharulidze unveiled the country's defense and security priorities at the NATO-Georgian Commission meeting in Krakow last week. NATO's 26 defense ministers and Sikharulidze assessed Georgia's national security strategy, defense reform, and NATO's assistance programs. They expressed concern over Russia's remilitarization and recognition of Georgia's separatist territories. "That is crystal clear that we do not agree with Russia there; we fundamentally disagree," said NATO chief Jaap de Hoop Scheffer.

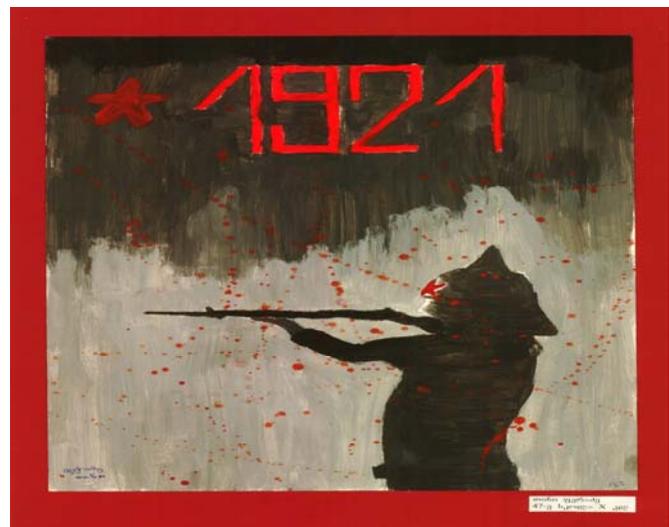
[CIVIL GEORGIA: NATO-Georgia Commission meeting](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Georgia, NATO defense ministers meet](#)

UAE Firm to Invest \$2 Billion in Georgia

The UAE's leading financial firm, Rakia, announced plans to invest \$2 billion over the next five years in Georgia, drawn by the country's relatively favorable business climate amidst the global economic crisis. "Georgia is still a very attractive and interesting country for investors, with its geographic location and great business potential," said Rakia's general director. Rakia's infrastructure projects will be critical to advancing the country's economic development.

[GULF DAILY NEWS \(Feb. 20\): Rakia plans \\$2bn Georgia investment](#)

**Georgia Marks Anniversary of 1921 Russian Invasion With Student Exhibits, TV Boycott**

Students throughout Georgia marked the anniversary of the Red Army's 1921 invasion of the country with exhibitions, group discussions, and a literary contest. Russia invaded Georgia on February 25, 1921, toppling the independent government. Radio and TV broadcasters, meanwhile, commemorated the anniversary by refusing to air Russian songs and movies for the day. They underscored that this was not a protest against Russian culture, but against the Russian occupation of Georgia.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

RFE/RL: Signs Could Point To New War Despite Russian, Georgian Step Toward Stability

If by May President Saakashvili remains in power, a military push by Russia to oust him may be seriously contemplated, writes respected Russian military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer. The constant ceasefire violations could escalate to involve Russian servicemen—constituting a public *casus belli*. The desire by the West to "reset" relations with Moscow, putting the Georgia issue aside, may be interpreted as a tacit recognition of Russia's right to use military force.

www.rferl.org

FINANCIAL TIMES: UK calls for unit to defend NATO territory

The UK has proposed a new defense force to deter Moscow from future aggression in NATO's east. The unit is "a dedicated homeland security force that will have no call on its priorities other than European homeland security," said Defense Minister Hutton. He said the force would reassure NATO's eastern members that it is prepared to defend NATO territory and uphold NATO's mutual defense agreement—a faith shaken by Russia's invasion of Georgia last August.

www.ft.com

ASSOCIATED PRESS: Russia hands out passports, stirs fears in West

Russia has given passports to nearly 2.9 million former Soviet citizens since 2000, according to the Federal Migration Service. It does not break down the numbers between those who returned to Russia and those who still live abroad. Some fear Moscow will use its growing expatriate communities to meddle in the domestic politics of countries near its borders, or—as in the case of Georgia—as an excuse for military intervention. But the Kremlin says it is granting passports to Russians abroad for humanitarian rather than political reasons, to help Russians trapped in other countries after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

www.pr-inside.com

RUSSIA TODAY: Most Russians say conflict over Crimea is "possible"

Over 70 percent of Russians believe that a conflict is possible between Russia and Ukraine over Crimea, according to a Russian research center. After Russia's invasion of Georgia last August, in which Kiev sided with Georgia, Ukraine has suspected Russia of preparing an "intrusion" into Crimea. There are several eerie similarities, including Russia's tactic of illegally distributing Russian passports in the Crimea, as it did in Georgia's territories of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia.

www.russiatoday.ru

PROJECT SYNDICATE: Energy Disarmament

Has the "energy weapon" of the 1970's – the withholding of energy supplies for political ends – returned, ask two leading members of the European Parliament. Using oil or gas as a political weapon is easier said than done, of course, but this year's renewal of the Russia-Ukraine gas dispute, and the resulting cut-off of supplies to much of the European Union, should concentrate minds on the EU's need to disarm those who would use the energy weapon. Europe's leaders have a duty to tell their peoples what needs to be done to ensure a secure energy future.

www.project-syndicate.org

REUTERS: EU Offers Belarus Closer Ties, Warns on Georgia

The EU offered Minsk closer ties, but has warned President Lukashenko that he must support Georgia's territorial integrity. EU foreign policy chief Solana told Lukashenko that he must not recognize the occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, if Belarus wants to join the EU's "Eastern Partnership," an economic and security initiative for former Soviet states.

www.kyivpost.com

AFP: Georgia Eurovision entry pokes fun at Putin

Georgia has chosen a disco song poking fun at Vladimir Putin as its entry for this year's Eurovision song contest in Moscow. Georgia initially considered a boycott, but ultimately chose instead to use Eurovision to make a light-hearted political statement. "We don't wanna put in," performed by group Stephane and 3G with its none-too-subtle play on the prime minister's surname, was chosen by a panel and phone-in vote to represent Georgia.

www.afp.com

THINK TANKS & NGOS

WORLD VISION: Textbooks for children in former conflict zone

Russia's invasion of Georgia displaced thousands of ethnic Georgian children, leaving little them with few educational and financial resources. Last week, over 100 Georgian villagers convened to World Vision's distribution site, where over 30,000 schoolbooks donated by Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were distributed.

<http://meero.worldvision.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>