

GEORGIA UPDATE

WEEKLY EDITION • 19 March 2009

A Publication of the Government of Georgia

www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge

TOP STORIES

- Georgia Offers to Provide Route to Afghanistan, Host US Bases
- United Nations Says Georgians Who Fled Russian Invasion Unable to Return Home
- President Says Prospects of New Assault by Russia Are Low
- Georgia Intensifies Drafting of Annual National Program with NATO
- Ombudsman Raises Detention Case of Akhgori Residents with Council of Europe
- US Considers Easing Trade Restrictions with Georgia



US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matt Bryza visited Tbilisi last week and underscored the positive democratic developments that had taken place in Georgia since November 2007. He also said he hoped the demonstrations planned for April 9 would be peaceful. "It is our great hope that the event of April will energize society and lead the opposition, government, and politically neutral people to get down to a very serious work that lies ahead to strengthen democracy," he said. "I hope that the protest will lead to a dialogue directly between the government and the opposition."

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

BBC NEWS: Abductions disrupt Georgia's peace

WALL STREET JOURNAL: A new NATO bargain

BLOOMBERG: Saakashvili puts out welcome mat for Russian business

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Wartime approaching in the Caucasus

DEFENSE NEWS: Georgia moving on from war

WIRED: Georgia blames Moscow for summer cyber attacks

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Georgia drops out of Eurovision over Putin song

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"The West bears its share of blame for not standing up for those core principles and not drawing red lines for Moscow. Europe and the U.S. failed to engage sufficiently in meaningful peacekeeping and conflict resolution in Abkhazia and South Ossetia."

—The Wall Street Journal (March 6, 2009)

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Mar. 20-22: President Saakashvili in Belgium for Brussels Forum

Mar. 23: Greek FM and OSCE Chair Dora Bakoyanni visits Georgia

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

Mar. 30 – Apr. 1: Speaker Bakradze visits Denmark & Norway

Mar. 31: First Deputy FM of Germany visits Georgia

Mar. 31: EU monitoring mandate expires

Apr. 2-4: Parliament Speaker Bakradze visits Finland

Apr. 27: 10th anniversary of Georgia's CoE membership

May 4: Parliament Speaker visits Sweden

TOP STORIES

Georgia Offers Afghanistan Route, US Bases

Georgia has offered to host US military bases in Georgia to assist NATO's mission in Afghanistan. "If the United States thinks it wants to establish a base, we will seriously consider it," said FM Vashadze. The remarks came as the US steps up efforts to find new transit routes to supply coalition forces in Afghanistan following Kyrgyzstan's decision to shut NATO's primary base in Central Asia. US officials said they were grateful for Georgia's offer, emphasizing the need to focus on the bilateral strategic partnership agreement and prepare Georgia for NATO accession.

[AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Georgia would consider hosting US military bases-official](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: US Official comments on Georgia's 'generous' readiness to host US bases](#)

UN Says Georgians Who Fled Russian Invasion Unable to Return Home

The UN says thousands of ethnic Georgians who fled their homes after Russia invaded Georgia last year will probably not be allowed to return home. "I am concerned that tens of thousands remain displaced and will probably not return to their homes in South Ossetia unless solutions to the underlying conflict can be found," said one UN human rights official. Russia has denied international observers access to Georgia's separatist enclaves, allowing de facto ethnic cleansing to prevail in the occupied territories.

[REUTERS: Georgians who fled war unable to return home](#)

President Says Prospects Low of New Assault by Russia

President Saakashvili says the possibility of a renewed Russian invasion of Georgia had been reduced, but cannot be ruled out. "I know one thing—our ill-wisher knows for sure—a fortress can be broken from the inside," he said. "But it is impossible to make Georgia kneel down if Georgia is united and if Georgia is stable." Saakashvili emphasized unity to overcome national challenges, "This is our historic challenge and this is our immediate task—unity."

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Saakashvili: War resumption chances low](#)

Georgia Intensifies Drafting of Annual Program with NATO

Georgia is intensively working on the final draft of its NATO Annual National Program (ANP), an initiative to enhance cooperation with the Alliance. "We hope it will be finalized by the end of this month and then it will be submitted to NATO and agreed," said deputy defense minister Muchaidze. Meanwhile, NATO Commander Gen. Mattis also agreed to transform Georgia's army training center into a NATO Partnership for Peace cooperative training center.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Official: Intensive work ongoing on drafting Annual Program with NATO](#)

Ombudsman Raises Detention of Akhagori Residents' Case with Council of Europe

Georgian Public Defender Sozar Subari has asked the Council of Europe to investigate the detention of two Georgians in occupied S. Ossetia. In early March, two Akhagori residents were arrested on unsubstantiated grounds of treason by S. Ossetia's Russian-backed de facto authorities. Subari says that the two are citizens of Georgia, "so it is absurd that they are charged with treason based on the Russian Federation's law," used by the breakaway region's authorities.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Ombudsman raises two Akhagori residents' case with CoE human rights chief](#)

US Considers Easing Trade Restrictions with Georgia

The US might ease trade restrictions with Georgia in an effort to establish "permanent normal trade relations," according to Representative Sander Levin, chairman of the House of Representatives Ways and Means trade subcommittee. The new legislation would eliminate tariffs on goods from Georgia to help the country recover from Russia's August invasion.

[REUTERS: U.S. may ease trade with Russia, Georgia, Pakistan](#)



Paris Awaits Artist Anton Balanchivadze

Paris is set to host an exhibition by the gifted Georgian artist Anton Balanchivadze. About 30 of his works, in oils and mixed media, will be on view next week at the "Christian Kolas" gallery. "This was the dream of my life—the exhibition makes me proud and a little bit nervous as well."

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

BBC NEWS: Abductions disrupt Georgia's peace

Politically motivated kidnappings are breaking the uneasy peace along the ill-defined administrative borders between Georgia and its occupied territories. "There were several guys with masks and we were detained, we were put on the group, then our hands were tied up," said one Georgian who escaped from his S. Ossetian captors. A Georgian human rights group is taking Russia to the European Court of Human Rights.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk>

WALL STREET JOURNAL: A New NATO Bargain

We enshrined—and Russia accepted—the core principle that any country was free to choose its own path and alliance. Russia's invasion of Georgia broke those rules and principles. This war took place largely because of Moscow's desire to thwart Tbilisi's desire to be independent and to go west. But the West bears its share of blame for not standing up for those core principles and not drawing red lines for Moscow. Europe and the U.S. failed to engage sufficiently in meaningful peacekeeping and conflict resolution.

<http://online.wsj.com>

BLOOMBERG: Saakashvili Puts Out Welcome Mat for Russian Business

President Saakashvili is welcoming Russian business investment in Georgia, while rejecting criticism that privatization of Georgia's strategic assets poses a threat to security. "We're not going to hinder Russian companies from coming to Georgia," he said. "The more business interest we get, the less political pressure there will be."

<http://www.bloomberg.com>

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Wartime Approaching in the Caucasus

After the snow melts on the high mountain passes separating Russia and Georgia, it will be wartime again in the Caucasus, writes Russian military expert Pavel Felgenhauer. Halfhearted attempts by EU mediators to strengthen the ceasefire have accomplished virtually nothing to prevent renewed hostilities. To avert a looming war, the West must recognize the imminent threat and begin a high-level round of diplomacy to persuade all sides to genuinely strengthen the ceasefire.

<http://www.jamestown.org>

DEFENSE NEWS: Georgia Moving on From War

Despite Russia's ongoing occupation of the country, Georgia is moving on from war. "We are strengthening our democracy, improving our economy, and building our defenses," writes Defense Minister Sikharulidze. "Our commitments to democratic values, reform obligations, and international security are stronger than ever."

<http://georgiandaily.com>

WIRED: Georgia blames Moscow for summer cyber attacks

Eka Tkeshelashvili, Georgia's National Security Advisor, says there is "plenty of evidence" of the Kremlin's direct involvement in cyber attacks on Georgia's governmental websites before and during last year's invasion. Russian hackers have claimed key roles in the cyber war; one Russia Parliament member said the attacks originated from his office. Internet security analyst Jeffrey Carr says Tkeshelashvili is "definitely in the ballpark" in making the allegations against the Kremlin.

<http://blog.wired.com>

AFP: Georgia drops out of Eurovision over Putin song

Georgia dropped out of the Eurovision song contest in Moscow after organizers rejected its entry, apparently because it included lyrics that might be interpreted as being political. "It's still not clear to us why Eurovision took this decision," said one of the Georgian producers. "We have not received a concrete explanation. We suspect that this decision is a result of political pressure from Russia. If that is the case, it's unacceptable." Eurovision asked Georgia to change the song—which was entitled "We don't wanna put in"—but the producers refused; they noted that in past competitions, far more overtly political lyrics had been accepted.

<http://www.google.com>

THINK TANKS & NGOS

DEFENSE ACADEMY OF THE UNITED KINGDOM: Provocation, Deception, Entrapment—The Russo-Georgia Five Day War

There can be no doubt that Russia still intends, despite the financial downturn, to re-establish its former position and influence throughout the Caucasus. Russian assertiveness as exhibited in Georgia in August 2008 not only fueled concerns in the West, but also prompted "shock and horror" amongst near-abroad states. The West must pursue a strategy of "reflexive interaction" to inhibit Russia's reassertion of influence and power in the Caucasus.

<http://www.da.mod.uk/>

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>