

GEORGIA UPDATE

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- Geneva Talks to Resume Between Georgia & Russia in May
- Turkey's Anadolu, British Energon to Invest \$150 Million in Georgian Hydroelectric Plant



Although opposition parties were able to attract only a fraction of the over 100,000 demonstrators it had predicted would gather on April 9, the Government has responded by offering a deep dialogue on several core issues—including changes to the constitution and the electoral code. The demonstrations have continued with dwindling numbers in recent days. Meanwhile, the Government won praise from international observers for the professionalism and transparency with which the police have handled the peaceful demonstrations.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"All channels were showing a full, objective picture, proving to us that Georgia is developing as a democratic country. This is very important for us Europeans."

—Eric Fournier, Ambassador of France to Georgia

"That's not the way that modern democracy works, that you change your government through street protests."

—EU Special Representative Peter Semneby

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Apr. 23-28: Spanish parliamentary delegation visits Georgia.

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

May 1-9: State Minister Yakobashvili visits the United States

May 1: Official opening ceremony of the Embassy of Japan in Georgia

May 4-6: National Security Advisor Tkeshelashvili visits France

May 11-13: Parliament Speaker Bakradze visits Sweden

May 15: UN Secretary General to submit report on UN mission in Georgia

May 18-19: Fifth round of Georgian-Russian peace talks in Geneva.

TOP STORIES

Peaceful Demonstrations Mark New Stage in Georgia's Democratic Evolution; Dialogue Proposals Weighed

The long-planned demonstrations by Georgian opposition parties that began on April 9 unfolded peacefully, in sharp contrast to the November 2007 protests, thus marking an important step in the country's democratic evolution. Although the crowds fell far short of opposition projections—a sign of weak public support of demands for yet another round of early elections—the Government heeded the calls for reform by offering a deep dialogue on numerous core issues. These include changes to the constitution and the election code, as well as direct elections for Tbilisi's mayor.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Saakashvili Calls for Dialogue to Tackle Difficulties](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Ruling Party MP on Current Political Standoff](#)

International Observers Hail Preparations, Transparency in Handling of Demonstrations

International observers praised Georgia for its meticulous preparations and its transparency in addressing the protests that began April 9. The Government had committed to a policy of maximum restraint in its effort to safeguard the civil liberties of protesters, and had called upon the EU for assistance in crowd-control techniques. The interior ministry also invited foreign diplomats into its situation room in order to monitor police actions in real time. The role of the media—a flash point in the November 2007 protests—also was hailed. Said French Ambassador Eric Fournier: "All channels were showing a full, objective picture, proving to us that Georgia is developing as a democratic country. This is very important for us Europeans."

[EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Georgian Government fine-tunes its response to radical opposition offensive](#)

NATO to Hold Exercises Next Month in Georgia, Dismisses Moscow's Protests

NATO confirmed plans to hold military exercises in Georgia from May 6-June 1, dismissing Moscow's protests as a "misunderstanding." Said a NATO spokesperson: "Everybody has been fully informed (of the exercise). There are no surprises." Nearly 1,300 troops from 19 member nations will help train forces in Georgia, an aspiring Alliance member, as part of NATO's Partnership for Peace initiative. Meanwhile, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer reiterated that Georgia will join the Alliance. "I am sure that the Georgian government and its people will continue with their reforms and finally become the members of the Alliance," he said in a BBC interview on April 21.

[DEUTSCHE PRESS AGENTUER: NATO dismisses Russian concerns over Georgia exercise](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: NATO exercise planned in Georgia](#)

Geneva Talks to Resume Between Georgia & Russia in May

Georgia and Russia will resume peace talks in Geneva next month, aiming to resolve growing tensions between the two countries in the wake of Russia's failure to abide by the Sarkozy ceasefire agreement. The fifth round of talks—mediated by the EU, UN, and OSCE—will take place May 18-19 with the goal of addressing current security arrangements, Russia's remilitarization, and humanitarian access for Georgia's ethnic refugees in S. Ossetia and Abkhazia.

[AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Russia, Georgia to resume talks](#)

Turkey's Anadolu, British Energon to Invest \$150 Million in Georgian Hydroelectric Plant

Turkish energy conglomerate Anadolu Group and Britain's Energon will build a \$150 million hydroelectric power plant in Georgia, Anadolu said last week. Construction of the 90 MW hydroelectric power station will begin this year in Georgia's Samtskhe/Javakheti region. The deal adds to a string of major foreign investments in the country announced in recent months. The Government projects that net FDI for 2009 will reach \$1.1 billion, a small dropoff from the previous year, and a major boost to Georgia's post-war economic recovery.

[HURRIYET: Turkey's Anadolu, British Energon to build power plant in Georgia](#)



The World Bank ranked Georgia as the best reformer country in Europe and Central Asia and fifth in the world. According to a five-year study, Georgia was nominated for its success in reforming the country's tax system and the financial sector. Georgian Parliament Speaker Bakradze accepted the WB's honor at an award ceremony held in Vienna earlier this week.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA**TIMES OF LONDON: Moscow's military occupation continues despite peace deal**

Eight months after President Medvedev signed an EU-brokered ceasefire agreement, Russia's military occupation continues—essentially violating all six points of the deal. Among other requirements, the ceasefire requires that Russia return its troops to their pre-invasion positions; rather than complying, Moscow actually has built up its presence in the occupied territories. Although the EU has condemned this illegal militarization, it has made precious little effort to enforce the treaty—thus undermining its diplomatic power.

www.timesonline.co.uk

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Russian forces deploying for possible action in Georgia

Russian forces have begun military exercises in the Caucasus, possibly signaling preparation for another intervention in Georgia. While Georgia's opposition rallies take the limelight, Russian troops and four naval ships from Russia's Black Sea Fleet disembarked from Ukraine's Sevastopol port, positioning the Fleet alarmingly close to Georgian borders.

www.jamestown.org

FOREIGN POLICY: Don't forget Georgia

The Obama administration should not distance itself from Georgia in its effort to “reset” relations with Moscow. For one, it does not seem likely that reducing support for Georgia will lead to improved ties with Russia. Meanwhile, Georgia still needs US help. The administration should continue to support political, economic, and military reform in the budding democracy and maintain an unwavering position on Georgia's territorial integrity.

www.foreignpolicy.com

REUTERS: Human Rights Watch says Russia used cluster bombs in Georgia

Human Rights Watch says Russian cluster bombs killed nearly 12 Georgian civilians and wounded at least 38 others during Russia's invasion last August. “Russia definitely violated international humanitarian law with its use of cluster munitions,” said HRW researcher Bonnie Docherty. The group has had investigators on the ground in Georgia since August.

<http://uk.reuters.com>

RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY: Russian roulette in the EU neighborhood

Russia has six bullets with which to wound or kill the EU's Eastern Partnership, and to put the Union's foreign policy strategy out of its misery in the process. Moscow has been unable to bring about regime change in either Georgia or Ukraine, two Eastern Partnership members; however, it may not need to in order to stymie their westward march. With ideas and information in short supply in Brussels, individual member states will resort to direct, bilateral contacts, thus weakening the EU's diplomatic effectiveness and reputation.

www.rferl.org

ASSOCIATED PRESS: Georgia, Ukraine seek US assurances

Georgian officials are seeking to secure continued US support despite President Obama's effort to improve diplomatic relations with Russia. In an AP interview, FM Vashadze said he was confident the US would continue to support Georgia's aspiration to join NATO and the European Union. Among other things, he pointed to the Obama administration's rejection of Moscow's claim of a sphere of interest in the region.

www.pr-inside.com

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Opposition demos test Georgia's democratic progress

Opposition supporters rallied last week to voice dissatisfaction with President Saakashvili, testing Georgia's democratic progress. “By demonstrating peacefully—by the complete and total lack of violence, by ensuring the right to free movement and freedom of assembly—we proved the maturity of our state and our democracy,” Saakashvili said. Georgian authorities are keen to portray the protests—and their tolerance for them—as proof that Georgia is maturing as a democracy.

www.afp.org

WALL STREET JOURNAL: As protests ebb, Georgia's president vows to stay on

President Saakashvili has vowed to remain in charge amidst an ongoing, yet dwindling tide of opposition protests. “There is only one way forward: that is by sitting down and addressing our challenges and needs together,” he said. “I recognize that this is not an easy process—that it is easier to issue ultimatums—but my entire government and I are ready for it.” The protests have so far passed peacefully, with discreet police presence.

www.wsj.com

THINK TANKS & NGOS**UNHCR: Georgia issues travel dox to Chechen refugees**

The Georgian government has for the first time granted Chechen refugees the right to travel overseas, earning praise from the UN refugee agency for honoring its promises. “That Georgia remembered at a time when it has many other concerns on its mind, such as over 400,000 IDPs, makes this even more remarkable,” said a UN representative. Eight Chechen refugees were offered traveling rights at a ceremony held in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge; hundreds more applications are expected to follow.

www.reliefweb.int

WEBSITES @ GEORGIA

Civil Georgia: Leading independent English-language news website: www.civil.ge

Georgia Update: Official government information service: www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge

Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies: Leading NGO focusing on domestic, foreign policy: www.gfsis.org

Georgian Mission to NATO: embassy.mfa.gov.ge

Georgian Parliament: www.parliament.ge

Government of Georgia: www.government.gov.ge/eng

Tbilisi: Official website of Georgia's capital: www.tbilisi.gov.ge

Ministry of Foreign Affairs: www.mfa.gov.ge

National Investment Agency: www.investgeorgia.org

President Saakashvili's official website: www.president.gov.ge