

GEORGIA UPDATE

WEEKLY EDITION • 14 May 2009

A Publication of the Government of Georgia

www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge

TOP STORIES

- President Launches Dialogue With Opposition on Reforms
- Prague "Southern Corridor" Summit Underscores Georgia's Critical Role in European Energy Security
- EU Launches Eastern Partnership, as Georgia Furthers European Integration
- Government Releases Opposition Activists Implicated in Journalist's Beating
- NATO Exercises Launched in Calm Environment; UN Considers Role of UNOMIG



After a month of demonstrations that failed to galvanize sufficient public support, opposition leaders finally accepted President Saakashvili's invitation to a dialogue. A delegation of four opposition leaders met on Monday with the President, as well as Parliament Speaker Bakradze, to discuss constitutional, electoral, and other reforms. Although further talks have yet to be scheduled, the Government is hopeful that the opposition will join in efforts to continuing taking Georgia on a path to becoming a modern European democracy.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

LE FIGARO: Eka Tkeshelashvili—"Russians have no limits in Georgia"

WASHINGTON POST: A friend to Georgia and Russia

THE NEW YORK TIMES: A Russia test

FINANCIAL TIMES: Leader-Talk to Russia, remember Georgia

THE ECONOMIST: Russia and its near abroad

BALTIC TIMES: Lithuania deepens support for Georgia

NEW YORK TIMES: Dynamic Tbilisi, Surviving & Then Some

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"Part of the way we can continue to support allies such as Georgia even as we do more to pursue vital national interests alongside Russia is by focusing on areas that can deliver real benefits to one side without hurting ties to the other. That's why we believe we should sign a free-trade agreement with Georgia and why we plan to introduce a resolution to this end today."

—Senator John F. Kerry and Representative David Dreier (writing in the *Washington Post*)

"The message is clear now: we can make errors, but our democracy no longer can be destroyed."

—National Security Advisor Tkeshelashvili (in an interview with *Le Figaro*)

UPCOMING MILESTONES

May 13-17: Prime Minister Gilauri visits the UK

May 15: UN SG to submit report on UNOMIG

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

May 22-26: NATO PA Spring Session in Oslo

Jun. 2-5: State Minister Baramidze visits the UK

Jun. 30: OSCE's monitoring mandate in Georgia expires

TOP STORIES

President Launches Dialogue With Opposition on Reforms

The Government finally had the opportunity to discuss its plans for Georgia's democratic reforms with the radical opposition leaders behind the recent demonstrations. On Monday, the opposition figures, who had been insisting on the President's resignation, were urged by the President to contribute to a series of planned constitutional, electoral, judicial, and other reforms. New talks have not yet been scheduled, but the radical opposition seems more open to opting for dialogue over protest.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: President Saakashvili's Televised Statement](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Saakashvili, opposition leaders meet](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Opposition Figure Against 'All or Nothing' Tactic](#)

Prague "Southern Corridor" Summit Underscores Georgia's Critical Role in European Energy Security

EU leaders championed a landmark new energy initiative last week, underscoring Georgia's critical role in enhancing Europe's long-term energy security. The "Southern Corridor" declaration pledged to give political support, technical and financial assistance to construct an energy corridor in the Caucasus and Central Asian region. The new initiative will further develop the high-profile Nabucco pipeline, as well as two additional pipelines, helping to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian energy supplies.

[DEUTSCHE PRESS AGENTEUR: EU hosts Prague summit on alternatives to Russian gas](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Saakashvili hails EU deal on Southern Corridor](#)

EU Launches Eastern Partnership, as Georgia Moves Closer to the European Union

The EU launched its Eastern Partnership in Prague last week, a landmark initiative aimed at bolstering political and economic cooperation with Georgia and five former Soviet countries. "We are becoming an institutional part of European Union space," President Saakashvili said. Noted Czech Deputy PM Vondra: "They are our close eastern neighbors and we have a vital interest in their stability and prosperity." The initiative will help facilitate future free-trade agreements, democratic reform, and ease Europe's visa restrictions for Georgians.

[REUTERS: Wary of Russia, EU works on eastern ties](#)

Government Releases Opposition Activists Implicated in Journalist's Beating

Georgian authorities released three opposition activists detained after beating a TV journalist during protests, in a gesture to defuse tensions with the opposition. The violent assault has raised concerns over media freedom. Georgia's Public Defender, Sozar Subari, condemned the attacks, as did media experts, civil society representatives, and politicians

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Three opposition activists freed](#)

NATO Exercises Launched in Calm Environment; UN Considers Role of UNOMIG

NATO's Partnership for Peace military exercises began in Georgia last week in a calm and professional environment, despite continuing Russian objections. The long-planned training exercises commenced one day after the Georgian government quelled a brief military mutiny aimed at disrupting the program. Meanwhile, the UN Secretary General will issue a report in the coming days with recommendations for UNOMIG's critical mission in Georgia; its current mandate expires in June.

[NEW YORK TIMES: NATO exercises begin amid tensions](#)



For Stephane & 3G, being banned from the Eurovision song contest turned into a blessing. Their song, "Don't Wanna Put In"—whose lyrics could be interpreted as a snub of Vladimir Putin—has rocketed up the charts in several countries. The tune is number two in the UK's Music Week pop chart, and is getting radio play in countries from Lithuania to France. Says John Kennedy O'Connor, author of the official history of Eurovision: "It's the first time a song has been banned for being too political, even though other nations have got away with it in the past. I think Georgia stood a good chance of winning, and the Russians were scared of that." Added Kennedy O'Connor: "The irony is that radio stations all over the world are now playing the song, many of whom wouldn't usually touch a Eurovision entry; so even without entering, it looks set to be the big hit of the competition."

[See story in The Guardian](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

LE FIGARO: Eka Tkeshelashvili—"Russians have no limits in Georgia"

National Security Advisor Tkeshelashvili says Moscow continues to escalate its military presence in Georgia's occupied territories. "During the August war, Russia's aim was to destroy the Georgian state and democracy. Moscow failed, but it is still pursuing this objective," she notes. "The invasion proved the resiliency of the Georgian state and democracy. The fact that we survived, as an independent state, reinforced our choice in favor of western reforms and values. The message is clear now: we can make errors, but our democracy no longer can be destroyed."

www.lefigaro.com

WASHINGTON POST: A Friend to Georgia and Russia

Senator John Kerry and Congressman David Dreier write in an opinion piece that, through carefully crafted trade and diplomatic relations, the Obama Administration can build both closer ties to Russia while continuing to support US friend and ally Georgia. "While some mistakenly view constructive relations with these two countries as mutually exclusive, we see no inherent contradiction." Georgia's people deserve praise for their impressive democratic and economic accomplishments, and America should support Georgia's undeniable right to its territorial integrity and independence.

www.washingtonpost.com

THE NEW YORK TIMES: A Russia Test

The U.S. should lead preventive diplomacy now, underscoring to Russia the high costs of intervention in Georgia. The West's stake in Georgia is high. The US and the EU have made support for the independence of former Soviet states a hallmark of their foreign policies. In January, Washington elevated Georgian independence to a "vital" interest. Georgia is weak and a real risk exists that Russia could again overreach. America and Europe ought to do all they can to lessen the chances of a new tragedy.

www.nytimes.com

FINANCIAL TIMES: Leader-Talk to Russia, remember Georgia

The real test of the Obama approach to Russia will come in how the US responds to Moscow's claims for primacy in its "near abroad," the former Soviet Union. As the Obama administration strives to "reset" relations with Moscow, the US must not abandon the former Soviet republics to renewed Russian domination. Although Washington cannot offer Georgia as much support as it gives, for example, the Baltic states, Russia must not be allowed a free hand.

www.ft.com

THE ECONOMIST: Russia and its near abroad

Georgia remains extremely tense after last week's failed military mutiny, a conspiracy believed by many to be Russian inspired. While the EU launched its "Eastern Partnership" to improve relations with six former Soviet republics, greater financial and military commitment is necessary to discourage Russian aggression. Unless the EU can offer tangible benefits to its new partners, its own appeal could quickly wear out.

www.economist.com

BALTIC TIMES: Lithuania deepens support for Georgia

Lithuania has consolidated its position as one of the most vocal supporters in the EU for diplomatic and humanitarian assistance to Georgia and has ardently supported Georgia's territorial integrity. In the wake of Russia's invasion, Lithuania has sent several relief packages, millions in humanitarian aid, and has widespread public support for Georgia's territorial integrity.

www.baltictimes.com

NEW YORK TIMES: Dynamic Tbilisi, Surviving & Then Some

A city rich in culture and flare, Tbilisi is a traveler's unique gem, gaining popularity among tourists. Although some development projects were slowed by the war and the current world crisis, the city still feels like a scene of dynamic renewal. And why not? Economic crisis or not, it seems only a matter of time before this city of 1.2 million becomes a tourist draw on par if not with Paris or Prague, then St. Petersburg or Moscow.

<http://travel.nytimes.com>

THINK TANKS/NGOs

COUNCIL OF EUROPE: The humanitarian consequences of the war between Georgia and Russia

The Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly passed a resolution last week calling on Moscow to honor the human rights of displaced persons in Georgia's Russian-occupied territories. "The villages in South Ossetia previously under Georgian control have been razed to the ground. The intention to cleanse the area of ethnic Georgians is clear," reads the resolution.

<http://assembly.coe.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