

GEORGIA UPDATE

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In a visit to underscore the Obama Administration’s support for Georgia, US Vice President arrived yesterday in Tbilisi. “I come here on behalf of the United States with a simple straightforward message,” he told Parliament in a speech today. “We, the United States stand by you on your journey to a secure free democratic and once again united Georgia.” Biden pointed to Georgia’s democratic reforms since the Rose Revolution as being of global importance. “Every progressive nation in the world has a stake in your success, particularly nations in this region, and that makes Georgia a very important nation for the future of this region, this continent, and the world.” On Monday, President Saakashvili laid out an ambitious new set of reforms.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

- WASHINGTON POST:** Editorial—U.S. leadership in the post-Soviet age
- NEW YORK TIMES:** Eastern Europe is uneasy over U.S. ties with Russia
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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“One year ago, when I came to Georgia, it was under very different and difficult circumstances. I was proud to stand with you then. And the reason I’m back, and the reason President Obama asked me to come back, was to send an unequivocal, clear, simple message to all who will listen, and those who even don’t want to listen, that America stands with you at this moment and will continue to stand with you.”

“We are with you—period—on the notion that your territorial integrity is recognized. We refuse to recognize that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are not part of Georgia.”

“I am not exaggerating when I say many other people in the world are looking to you to see whether or not you can bring the revolution to full fruition and dig those roots -- plants those roots of democracy very deep,” Biden said. “Every progressive nation has a stake in your success.”

—US Vice President Biden in Tbilisi

“I frankly feel that this process of dialogue and reform is moving too slowly,” he said. “The people cannot wait. The reforms cannot wait. Georgia cannot wait.”

—President Saakashvili

UPCOMING MILESTONES

July 22-23: US Vice President Biden visits Tbilisi, addresses Parliament

July 22-24: Amb. Schramm, deputy head of the Tagliavini Commission, visits Georgia

Aug. 12: 1st Anniversary of Sarkozy-Medvedev ceasefire agreement

Sep. 9 -11: Vice Premier Baramidze attends economic forum in Poland

Sep. 17: 7th round of Geneva talks

Oct.: Next meeting of US-Georgia Commission

TOP STORIES

US VP Biden in Georgia: “America Stands With You at This Moment & Will Continue to Stand With You”

US Vice President Joseph Biden, in a visit to Tbilisi, made clear that American support for Georgia was unequivocal and bipartisan. “We, the United States stand by you on your journey to a secure, free, democratic and once again united Georgia,” Biden said to rapturous applause during an address to Parliament. “We will not recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states and we urge the world not to recognize them as independent states,” he added.

Biden also confirmed American support for eventual Georgian membership in NATO: “We understand that Georgia aspires to joint NATO. We fully support that aspiration.” Biden also allayed concerns about what America’s “reset” with Russia might mean for Georgia: “I know there is some concern, and I understand it, that our efforts to reset relations with Russia will come at the expense of Georgia. Let me be clear: they have not, they will not and they cannot.” The VP rejected Moscow’s claims to a “privileged sphere of interest,” saying: “We stand by the principle that sovereign democracies have the right to make their own decisions and choose their own partnerships and their own alliances. We stand against the 19th century notion of spheres of influence. It has no place in the 21st century.”

During his two days in Georgia, Biden met with President Saakashvili, Parliament Speaker Bakradze, and other officials, as well as with opposition leaders. Before leaving, he also was set to meet with IDPs who were ethnically cleansed during last summer’s invasion of Georgia by Russia.

[REUTERS: Biden-U.S. backs Georgia, urges Russia pullback](#)
[AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Biden pledges US loyalty to Georgia](#)

European Union Troika Visits Georgia, Calls for Immediate Access to Occupied Territories

A high-level EU delegation visited Georgia last week, calling for immediate access into Georgia’s Russian-occupied territories. “Our Troika reiterates the EU’s position that Europe supports Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity,” said current EU President and Swedish FM Bildt, flanked by representatives from the EU’s Council of Ministers and the European Commission. The troika spent three days in Georgia meeting with President Saakashvili and other government leaders, emphasizing the EU’s role in promoting regional stability and democratic reform, and discussing how best to advance the Eastern Partnership and European integration measures in Georgia.

[RFE/RL: EU ‘Troika’ begins tour of South Caucasus](#)
[CIVIL GEORGIA: EU Troika visits Georgia](#)

International NGOs: Georgia Using Aid Transparently

The Open Society Georgia Foundation and Transparency International Georgia have found that Georgia’s use of post-war aid funds has been transparent. Transparency International is tracking how aid from the 12 largest donors is being used in Georgia. Meanwhile, USAID—the largest provider of budgetary support to Georgia—says it is “comfortable” with the level of transparency and accountability at the Ministry of Finance.

**President Saakashvili, in Speech, Announces Ambitious 100-Day Agenda for Democratic Reforms**

President Saakashvili proposed bold new reforms Monday to deepen the country’s democratic institutions and help Georgia move beyond the recent period of political stalemate. “I want to move the discussion from the conceptual to the concrete—from general ideas to specific commitments and deadlines,” he said in an address to Parliament (image above). Saakashvili pledged a “renewed commitment to strengthen our democratic institutions” and urged his critics to leave the streets and join him in pursuing “a continual opening of our political system.” He announced a 100-day reform agenda, including the direct election of mayors, shifting local elections earlier to May 2010, reforming the Central Election Commission and the electoral code, increasing rights for expatriates, and reforming the public broadcaster.

[WASHINGTON POST: Georgian President moves on reform](#)

The 100-Day Reform Agenda: Key Highlights

The key reforms announced by President Saakashvili include:

Electoral Reform: direct election of mayors; consensus appointment of the head of the Central Election Commission; the establishment by October of a new electoral code and commission; early local elections in May 2010.

Constitutional Reform: new limits on presidential powers and stronger checks and balances.

Judicial Reform: stricter sanctions for contact with judges about pending cases, and new powers to the judiciary to investigate attempts to improperly influence cases; the introduction of jury trials.

Media Reform: restructuring of the public broadcasting board so that four of its nine seats are controlled by the opposition, four by the government, and the final seat is occupied by a civil society representative; expansion of nationwide satellite licenses to additional stations (Maestro, the broadcaster most critical of the Government, was recently granted a license).

Extended NSC Meetings: extended meetings of the National Security Council to include opposition leaders and civic society, beginning this month.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Saakashvili addresses Parliament](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

WASHINGTON POST: Editorial—U.S. leadership in the post-Soviet age is needed to face new challenges

A group of former presidents and ministers from Eastern and Central Europe have written to President Obama to warn that long-lasting success in the post-Soviet space should not be assumed. "All is not well either in our region or in the transatlantic relationship," they cautioned. Nations clamoring for a stronger U.S. relationship, built on the ideals of freedom and alliance, should not be taken for granted. The Obama administration should recommit to NATO as a defense alliance, support pipelines that will diminish the region's dependence on Russian oil and gas and invest in relationships with younger generations that do not remember Communism or the struggle against it.

www.washingtonpost.com

NEW YORK TIMES: Eastern Europe is uneasy over U.S. ties with Russia

America's Eastern European allies expressed deep concern over improved relations between Russia and the US in a recently published letter to the Obama administration. "There is the fear among Central and Eastern Europeans that our interest in keeping the trans-Atlantic bond could be somehow sold out to the relationship with Russia," said former Czech FM Vondra. "We all understand that a deal must come with Russia, but we do not believe that a deal can be made at the expense of the security interests of the countries of our region or of Georgia and Ukraine," the letter said.

www.nytimes.com

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: EU demands access to Georgia rebel regions

The EU has demanded that Russia allow European monitors access to Georgia's occupied territories, as per the mandate outlined in last year's EU-brokered ceasefire agreement. "We will continue to demand the EU monitors' access to Abkhazia and South Ossetia," said current EU president and Swedish FM Bildt. EU monitors are the only international observers operating along the administrative borders of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia, after Moscow vetoed the OSCE and UNOMIG missions.

eubusiness.com

FINANCIAL TIMES: Saakashvili sets out vision to bolster Georgia

President Saakashvili launched "a new wave of democracy" yesterday to strengthen Georgia as it approaches the anniversary of the disastrous war with Russia last year in which it lost control of a fifth of its territory. In an address to parliament, Saakashvili promised sweeping electoral, constitutional, judicial, and media reform in the next 100 days, saying deepening democracy would help Georgia face "hard times" and the challenge of partial occupation by Russia. "The people cannot wait. The reforms cannot wait. Georgia cannot wait," he said. Saakashvili, who won an overwhelming majority after the Rose Revolution in 2003, has steered Georgia on a pro-western course, pursuing membership of Nato and the European Union.

www.ft.com

REUTERS: EU criticizes Medvedev visit to South Ossetia

The EU criticized President Medvedev's unannounced visit to Georgia's occupied region of S. Ossetia last week, which only Russia recognizes as an independent state. "The EU considers this visit as incompatible with the principle of territorial integrity and is concerned about its effects on the international efforts to stabilize the region," the EU said. "The EU reiterates its support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

www.reuters.com

ST. PETERSBURG TIMES: The Smell of War

The smell of war is once again in the air in the Caucasus. Russia is mobilizing for war, beefing up its forces in Abkhazia and S. Ossetia, while driving out international observers and potential witnesses to Moscow's planned aggression from the region. The Kremlin's foreign policy is driven by one basic principle: It will pursue an aggressive, hostile policy as long as it believes it can get away with it.

www.sptimes.ru

RFE/RL: 'Strategic' Nabucco Deal Inked To Help Curb Dependence On Russian Gas

Turkey and four EU member states finalized a landmark deal aimed to curb Europe's energy dependence on Russian supplies, agreeing to start construction on the Nabucco pipeline. European Commission President Barroso called the Nabucco Intergovernmental Agreement "a truly European project" that "will provide energy security to Turkey, to Southeast Europe, and to Central Europe." The 3,300 km pipeline—which should run from Turkey through Georgia to Austria—will come online in 2014.

[RFE/RL: 'Strategic' Nabucco Deal Inked To Help Curb Dependence On Russian Gas](http://www.rferl.org/content/Strategic-Nabucco-Deal-Inked-To-Help-Curb-Dependence-On-Russian-Gas/25146791.html)

NEW YORK TIMES: Georgians Want U.S. Along Border

Georgian leaders hope the US will join the EU's monitoring effort along the boundary with two occupied Georgian enclaves, a step they believe could deter aggression from Russian or separatist forces. Eka Tkeshelashvili, secretary of the Georgia's national security council, said broadening the monitoring mission to include the US and other non-union members would make it "politically very costly to Russia to do anything on the ground. It has the potential for reaching a very tangible impact," she said. "It's always very hard to think what are the red lines that ultimately Russia might respect, because we saw last year that it passed most of the red lines that we could have imagined."

www.nytimes.com

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://nato.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>

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>