

GEORGIA UPDATE

WEEKLY EDITION • 29 October 2009

A Publication of the Government of Georgia

www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge

TOP STORIES

- Georgia Leaps in Media Freedom Rankings, Best in the Former Soviet Union
- Popularity of Government Rises, Support for President Reaches 63 Percent
- Russian-Backed Forces Kidnap 21 Georgians Near Occupied Territories, Stoking Tensions
- On Anniversary of Donor Conference, President Thanks Germany, Friends for Support
- Georgia Looks to Middle East to Kick-Start Investment After War
- Rasmussen: Georgia & Ukraine to Become NATO members
- Blast Derails Train Carrying Oil in Georgia



Polish President Lech Kaczynski, after meeting for four hours on Wednesday with President Saakashvili, underscored that the road to the EU and Georgia should be open to Georgia. He also affirmed his country's unwavering support for Georgia's territorial integrity. During his visit to Warsaw, where he also met with Prime Minister Donald Tusk, President Saakashvili discussed developments in Georgia, including the situation in the occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as bilateral relations between Poland and Georgia and the EU and Georgia.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

ASSOCIATED PRESS: US says Russia not complying with Georgia war truce

AFP: Biden says Europe can guide Ukraine, Georgia to stability

DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR: US defense deputy assures East Europeans

THE INDEPENDENT: Georgia welcomes "President Garcia"

WASHINGTON TIMES: Editorial—America needs to stand by its friend in danger

REUTERS: Georgia to probe death of first post-Soviet leader

EU OBSERVER: New wave of MEPs wary of Russia, EU parliament chief says

THE GUARDIAN: Andy Garcia plays Saakashvili in Renny Harlin's Georgia

FINANCIAL TIMES: Russia's unsustainable energy model

MISSOURIAN: Columbia to host officials from Republic of Georgia

FOREIGN AFFAIRS: Clarity in the Caucasus?

AMERICAN THINKER: Caucasus unrest threatens 2014 Olympics

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"We appreciate very much the Georgian commitment, the Georgian contribution. It testifies to Georgia's strong engagement with our Alliance. That's a very important signal, of course; it's also a positive step"

—NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen, reaffirming last week in Bratislava that Georgia will join the Alliance

"The United States will continue to support and train Georgia's military despite Russian objections... We will help the Georgian people to feel like they can protect themselves."

—US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

"Georgia has never had such a high reputation and authority like it has today. A year ago, everyone bet on Georgia's disintegration and destruction; a year ago, a friendly Eastern European leader told me that the Georgian government was given only a 20 percent of chance to survive, because the invader swore that this government would not survive."

—President Saakashvili on Georgia's international reputation

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Nov. 11: Eighth-round of Geneva peace talks

Nov. 13: NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Scotland

Nov. 18: Euro-Atlantic Integration Minister Baramidze attends NATO ANP meeting in Brussels

Nov. 23: Sixth anniversary of Rose Revolution

Dec. 1-2: OSCE Ministerial in Athens

Dec. 3-4: NATO Ministerial in Brussels

Dec. 8: Eastern Partnership Ministerial in Brussels

TOP STORIES

Georgia Leaps in Media Freedom Rankings, Best in the Former Soviet Union

Georgia leapt 39 places in the 2009 Press Freedom Index from Reporters Without Borders, earning the highest ranking in the former Soviet Union. "Indicators point to deterioration in the press freedom situation in almost all of the former Soviet republics except Georgia," the report noted. In a CNN interview, President Saakashvili underscored Georgia's liberalized media environment: "I think we are a politicized society to the extent you won't find in most of the eastern and central European countries and we welcome it," he said. "We have 27 independent channels in Georgia; we have dozens of political talk shows every day."

[REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS: Press Freedom Index 2009](#)
[CIVIL GEORGIA: Saakashvili on media freedom in Georgia](#)

Popularity of Government Rises, Support for President Reaches 63 Percent

Vice President Joe Biden's visit to Tbilisi in July helped to push President Saakashvili's approval rating to its highest level this year. Sixty-eight percent of respondents said they approved of the President's performance, while 30 percent disapproved. Biden's visit was viewed as "positive for Georgia's security" by 76 percent. The poll was conducted by Washington-based Greenberg Quinlan Rosner. Saakashvili's popularity was also enhanced by an increased sense of security following the 2008 war with Russia. Sixty-three percent in the poll said it was highly likely that Saakashvili will serve out his term, which ends in 2013; 8 percent said it was very unlikely.

Russian-Backed Forces Kidnap 21 Georgians Near Occupied Territories, Stoking Tensions

Russian-backed militias in the occupied territory of South Ossetia abducted five Georgian men. The five were kidnapped Monday while chopping firewood in a disputed border area, said interior ministry spokesman Shota Utiashvili. Russian border guards detained 16 other Georgians on Monday for alleged illegal border crossings. The EU Monitoring Mission condemned the abductions and called for the immediate release of all 21 captives. Ethnic Georgians are being kidnapped to be swapped for jailed Ossetian criminals, for ransom or for revenge for militia relatives killed or wounded in the war, Georgian officials said.

[AP: 5 Georgian men abducted in South Ossetia](#)
[CIVIL GEORGIA: Tbilisi Demands Release of 16 Georgians](#)

On Anniversary of Donor Conference, President Thanks Germany, Friends for Support

President Saakashvili thanked Germany and European friends for their support on the anniversary of the European donor conference that secured \$4.5 billion in war recovery aid. "We are grateful to German government, which has helped us in the hardest period for our country," Saakashvili said at a ceremony at which German-funded houses were handed over to Georgian IDPs. "This day is a very important day in the friendship and relations of Georgia and Germany," he added.

[RUSTAVI: President thanks Germany for significant support](#)

Georgia Looks to Middle East to Kick-Start Investment After War

The Middle East is helping revive foreign investment that almost evaporated after Russia's invasion and the global financial crisis. President Saakashvili has visited the United Arab Emirates several times this year, netting as much as \$1 billion in investment projects over the next two to three years. Meanwhile, UAE developer Rakeen plans to launch construction of the "biggest airport in the Caucasus" at the Black Sea port of Poti in coming months, having invested \$65 million in the infrastructure development project. "That will be a major hub for the region," the President said. "Consider also that it's midway between most of the Gulf destinations and Europe."

[BLOOMBERG: Saakashvili Looks to Lure Middle East Investors](#)

Rasmussen: Georgia and Ukraine to become NATO members

NATO Secretary General Rasmussen spoke out in support of Georgia's and Ukraine's bid for membership at ministerial meeting held last week in Bratislava. He said Georgia and Ukraine will eventually become members of the Alliance, in accordance with the 2008 Bucharest Summit decision. Meanwhile, NATO officials commended Georgia's military contributions to operations in Afghanistan. "We appreciate very much the Georgian commitment, the Georgian contribution. It testifies to Georgia's strong engagement with our alliance. That's a very important signal of course it's also a positive step", Rasmussen said.

[RUSTAVI: NATO appreciates Georgia's contribution to Afghan operation](#)
[RUSTAVI: Rasmussen: Georgia and Ukraine to become NATO members](#)

Blast Derails Train Carrying Oil in Georgia

An explosion derailed a train carrying oil products in Georgia last week, the latest in a series of blasts targeting a key railway network in the west of the country. The blast occurred while the train was in transit to Georgia's Black Sea port of Poti, a major center for oil exports to Western markets. The railway network in western Georgia has been hit by three bomb blasts in recent months, including explosions at the central train station in the western city of Zugdidi in June. Officials have described some of the blasts as "terrorist acts" and believe that rebels in occupied territories of Abkhazia were behind the attacks.

[AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Blast derails train carrying oil in Georgia](#)



Parliament Chairman David Bakradze (left) met last week in Washington with US National Security Adviser Jim Jones (right) and senior State Department officials to discuss Georgia's democratic reform progress and security concerns. "Our positions are very close on every issue we discussed," he said of his meeting with Jones. Later, Bakradze reflected on the US-Georgia relationship in a meeting with reporters. "The leader of the free world does not abandon its friends," he said. "American diplomacy is more than European-style realpolitik. It's a country of values. We share the same values. They are worth defending. In the end, America stands for something." Meanwhile US Assistant Secretary of Defense Vershbow and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Kaidanow visited Tbilisi last week to hold discussions on implementing the bilateral US-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

AP: US says Russia not complying with Georgia war truce

Russia is violating an EU-brokered ceasefire by maintaining troops in two occupied Georgian territories, the US State Department said. "The cease-fire accord that President Sarkozy negotiated requires that all the Russian armed forces withdraw to their positions before the outbreak of hostilities," said US Undersecretary of State Fried. "The Russians have not done so, and therefore they are not in compliance with the cease-fire." Russia says it will keep 7,600 troops in the occupied territories.

www.nytimes.com

AFP: Biden says Europe can guide Ukraine, Georgia to stability

US Vice President Biden last week urged countries in eastern Europe to guide the fledgling democracies of Georgia and Ukraine to stability. "In Eastern Europe, there are countries still struggling to establish fully functioning democracies and vibrant market economies. You can help guide Georgia and Ukraine along the path to stability and prosperity," he said in Bucharest. "The example you set 20 years ago inspired the world. The leadership you exert over the next 20 years can do even more: encouraging, supporting, and consolidating young democracies." Biden said the US stands against the 19th-century notion of spheres of influence, and supports the right of sovereign democracies to choose their own alliances.

www.silobreaker.com

DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR: Pentagon assures E. Europeans

A Pentagon official said last week that credible backing for NATO's joint-defense clause is a White House priority and that it will require a more efficient organization. "The bottom line for me and my government is that this is an important priority, made all the more urgent in the wake of the anxieties aroused by August 2008, and we want to see that the Article 5 guarantee is meaningful for all members of the alliance," said Assistant Secretary of Defense Vershbow. "NATO has to fulfill its pledges if it wants to remain relevant in the future."

www.earthtimes.org

THE INDEPENDENT: Georgia welcomes "President Garcia"

Georgia welcomed Hollywood star Andy Garcia as he played President Saakashvili during last week's filming of a big-budget movie based on the 2008 Russian-Georgian war. "Tonight, do not be deceived, we are not alone," Garcia told his pseudo-supporters, who were re-creating a demonstration that took place outside the country's parliament on 12 August last year. But whereas on that occasion there were Russian tanks moving towards the city, this time there was a party atmosphere.

www.independent.co.uk

WASHINGTON TIMES: Editorial—America needs to stand by its friend in danger

The buzz in Russia is over the "unfinished business" in Georgia, as the Russian army looms 40 miles from Tbilisi. The case for supporting Georgia is fundamentally based on American ideals. "The leader of the free world does not abandon its friends," said Georgia's Parliament Chairman Bakradze. "American diplomacy is more than European-style realpolitik. It's a country of values. We share the same values. They are worth defending." He added: "In the end, America stands for something." We fervently hope that this is still true.

www.washingtontimes.com

REUTERS: Georgia to probe death of first post-Soviet leader

Georgia's Parliament ordered an inquiry into the mysterious death of the country's first post-Soviet president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, whose legacy still scars the country. "The purpose in setting up this commission is to provide a legal and political assessment of the overthrow of the first Georgian president and his tragic death under strange circumstances," said the opposition deputy who tabled the bill.

www.alertnet.org

EU OBSERVER: New wave of MEPs more wary of Russia

EU Parliament members from central and eastern Europe have brought a different perspective on Russia and energy security to Brussels—a perspective wary of Russia. "We are very much interested and sometimes worried about the EU's relations with Russia," said EU Parliament President Buzek. "We need Russia, of course, but I think Russia needs us as well and we should base our co-operation on shared rules and values." He added: "It's a very sensitive issue to some countries, especially the Baltic states, which were inside the Soviet Union."

euobserver.com

FINANCIAL TIMES: Russia's unsustainable energy model

Russia has taken a significant step in its bid to become a dominant energy supplier, one with important implications for the EU. Russia's repudiation of the energy charter treaty should be read as a clear signal of strategic intent. The Kremlin's statist and highly politicized approach to the use of energy resources is here to stay and any lingering European hope that Russia might be persuaded to accept an energy relationship based on commercial logic and multilateral rules can now be forgotten.

www.ft.com

MISSOURIAN: Columbia to host officials from Republic of Georgia

Columbia, Missouri, has enjoyed strong ties with Georgia since the early 1990s through the work of the local aid organization, A Call to Serve. In 1997, Columbia was paired as a sister city with Kutaisi, the second-largest city in Georgia. Now, Columbia has been selected to host four government officials and a facilitator from Georgia, who will come next month to learn about American government in an event sponsored by the Open World Program.

www.columbiamissourian.com

AMERICAN THINKER: Caucasus Unrest Threatens 2014 Olympics

In 2014, the International Olympic Committee plans to hold the Winter Olympics Games in the city of Sochi, smack dab in the middle of the broiling Caucasus cauldron. Already, Sochi has seen a terrifying series of terrorist bombings that have claimed six lives and injured at least 50. Shamefully, the world media has woefully failed to report these attacks. Russia should not be permitted to place the lives of the world's amateur athletes at risk just to achieve a public relations stunt.

www.americanthinker.com

THINK TANKS/NGOS**AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE: It's Official—Russia Was Spoiling for a Fight**

It is clear from the EU-funded war report that the animating force behind the conflict was Russia's "more adamant" pursuit of "imposing its influence upon its 'near abroad'" and Georgia's attempts to integrate itself more fully with the West. Bottom line: the US "invades" Iraq and Western elites are up in arms for years about American "imperialism." Russia invades Georgia; there is a small peep and then nothing. There is a lesson in here somewhere and I'm pretty sure Moscow has gotten it.

blog.american.com

WEBSITES @ GEORGIA

Civil Georgia: Leading independent English-language news website on Georgia.

Georgia Update: Official government information service.

Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies: Leading NGO focuses on Georgian domestic and foreign policy.

Georgian Mission to NATO

Georgian Parliament

Government of Georgia

Local Ministry of Foreign Affairs

National Investment Agency

City of Tbilisi: Official website of Georgia's capital, Tbilisi

Office of the President of Georgia