

GEORGIA UPDATE

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Foreign Minister Vashadze greets NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen at the NATO-Georgia Commission meeting in Brussels last week. NATO confirmed Georgia’s “full compliance” with EU-mediated cease-fire agreement and urged Russia “to fulfill all of its commitments” under the agreement. Alliance officials also applauded Georgia’s efforts to implement democratic reforms, and they remained steadfast in their commitment to Georgia’s territorial integrity

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“I think it is accurate to say that Georgia may be the largest per capita contributor to the NATO ISAF mission. I want to thank the government and people of Georgia for an extraordinary effort.”

“I made it very clear that the US supported Georgia, that we would never recognize S. Ossetia and Abkhazia, that we wish to see Russia work with the international community to bring about a peaceful resolution of the situation, that we applauded the creation of a monitoring system that would try to prevent actions from escalating. But we very much stand with the people of Georgia, and we’re very grateful for Georgia’s contributions to this important mission in Afghanistan.”

—US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

“NATO Ministers reaffirmed their strict policy of non-recognition of the “independence” of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia, and called once again on Russia to reverse its decision in this regard,”

—Statement by NATO foreign ministers last week at the NATO-Georgia Commission meeting in Brussels

UPCOMING MILESTONES

- Dec. 9-12:** FM Vashadze visits the Vatican
- Dec. 11:** State Minister Baramidze visits Czech Republic to meet European Affairs Minister Füle
- Dec. 12-17:** State Minister Baramidze visits France.
- Dec. 13-14:** FM Vashadze visits Switzerland
- Jan. 28:** Next round of Geneva peace talks

TOP STORIES

US, NATO Praise Georgian Troop Commitment to Afghanistan; Clinton Hails "Largest Per Capita Contribution"

Georgia's commitment of 900 new troops to NATO's Afghanistan mission was hailed by the Alliance and singled out by US Secretary of State Clinton as the highest per-capita contribution to the effort. "I think it is accurate to say that Georgia may be the largest per capita contributor to the NATO ISAF mission," Clinton said. "I want to thank the government and people of Georgia for an extraordinary effort." Many of the Georgian troops will be paired with U.S. and French forces in Afghanistan's heavily contested south. Said President Saakashvili: "Unlike some of the European states, our Afghanistan contingent has no restrictions in respect of engagement in combat operations." The Alliance also confirmed that Georgia will enter NATO: "The commitment made in Bucharest to both Georgia and Ukraine still stand. They will become NATO members when they meet NATO standards," said NATO chief Rasmussen. Georgia's Deputy FM Kalandadze said Georgia will send doctors, teachers, and police forces in the future to assist in the Afghanistan peace mission.

[ASSOCIATED PRESS: Georgia to Send 900 Troops to Afghanistan](#)
[US STATE DEPARTMENT: Remarks by Secretary of State Clinton](#)
[CIVIL GEORGIA: Saakashvili on Georgia's Afghan mission](#)

Council of Europe Calls for Immediate Release of Georgian Teenagers Jailed by Russian Occupiers

The Council of Europe's (CoE) Chief human rights commissioner, Thomas Hammarburg, labeled the abductions and "hostage-taking" of four Georgian teenagers unacceptable, calling for their immediate release. "There is a need for the international community to go deeper into the issues and to try to protect the ordinary people, who are in many cases victimized in a shadow of this conflict and many of them hope that the international community should be some kind of protection for them," Hammarburg said. Meanwhile CoE political director Jean Louis Loran last week expressed special gratitude to the Georgian government for the work and assistance Georgia did toward advancing law enforcement and judicial reform, including the detention of suspected criminals.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: CoE Human Rights Chief on Detained Persons](#)
[RUSTAVI: CoE Political Director contented with reforms in Georgia](#)

MPs Endorse Amendments to Election Code, as New Candidates Enter Tbilisi Mayoral Contest

Georgia's Parliament endorsed amendments to the electoral code, which will set the framework for next spring's municipal vote in Tbilisi and other cities. The draft, which will need to be approved with second and third readings later this month, establishes a 30-percent threshold for a candidate to be elected in the first round. If no candidate clears that level, a second round will be held between the two candidates with the highest number of votes in the first round. The robust election reform also increased the number of seats in Tbilisi's City Council from 37 to 50 and has encouraged several new candidates to enter Tbilisi's mayoral contest.

[CIVIL GEORIGA: MPs endorse election code amendments](#)

Georgia and the European Union Herald Signing of Mobility Partnership, Easing Movement

The EU, led by Vice President Jacques Barrot, signed a "mobility partnership" last week with Georgia. Also present was External Relations Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, who said: "This mobility partnership with Georgia will give practical expression to the migration policy guidelines defined under the Eastern Partnership; it is a practical response to the Georgian citizens' aspirations for mobility and a new step in promoting close relations between our peoples." Added Barrot: "I welcome the signing of the mobility partnership agreement between Georgia and the EU, which will add to the recent visa facilitation and readmission agreements to boost cooperation between the EU and Georgia in the field of migration and open up new opportunities for practical joint initiatives."

[EU MONITOR: The EU and Georgia enter into a mobility partnership](#)

Interior Ministry to Investigate Blackmail Claims Against Journalist

Georgia's Interior Ministry's internal investigations unit has launched a probe into claims by the Batumi-based weekly newspaper, Batumelebi, that its journalist was blackmailed by the law enforcement officers. Shota Utiashvili, head of the information and analysis department at the Interior ministry, said that the case "contains clear signs of blackmailing." He also said that the probe currently focused on efforts to identify those police officers who were, as claimed by the newspaper, attempting to blackmail and intimidate the journalist.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Police probe into journalist blackmail claims](#)

Russian Occupation Forces Digging Ditches Along Administrative Boundary, Threaten Coast With Armed Patrols

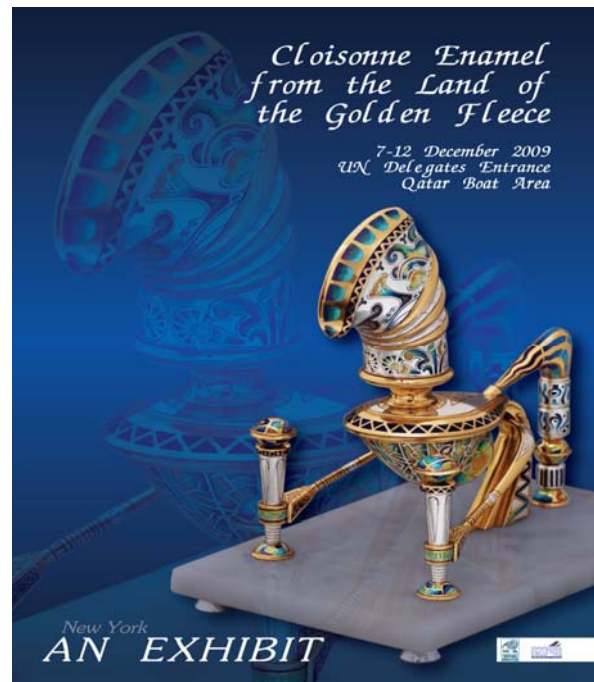
Russian occupation forces are digging ditches, four meters deep, along the administrative boundary of Georgia's Russian-occupied territory of Abkhazia. Special units have been intensively working along the Eristskali River in the upper zone of Gali district. Meanwhile, on Wednesday, Moscow said its navy would begin patrolling the coast off Abkhazia, threatening a further escalation of tensions.

[RUSTAVI: Russian occupiers digging ditches along boundary](#)

Parliament Adopts 2010 Budget Targeting Modest Growth

The Georgian Parliament adopted a 2010 budget last week with a growth target of 2 percent, as the country hopes to recover from the economic fallout of the global financial crisis and last year's Russian invasion. "The budget for the next year is mainly aimed at financing social needs and infrastructural projects," said Zurab Melikishvili, parliamentary finance committee head. Georgia's economy is expected to contract 4-5 percent in 2009, but a return of foreign investment should result in positive growth in 2010, Georgian officials and independent experts say.

[REUTERS: Georgia Adopts 2010 Budget Targeting Modest Growth](#)



If you were to look for a single art form that is both distinctively Georgian and yet also embodies the country's openness to outside cultural influences, then the art of cloisonné enamel would be a fine example. This ancient art, which spans 15 centuries, is on display at the United Nations in New York, thanks to an exhibition of contemporary and older works organized by the Permanent Mission of Georgia and supported by the Georgian Culture Ministry. "If you focus carefully on these small, beautiful objects, you just might hear the austerity of solemn polyphonic medieval gospels intertwined with playful and sometimes even frivolous love serenades," said Alexander Lomaia, Georgia's UN ambassador, at the exhibition launch. "You also will discover the discipline and detachment of workshops overtaken by a myriad of scents and colors from a noisy oriental bazaar."

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

DEFENSE NEWS: Don't sell Russia Mistrals

Such advanced land attack capabilities in Russian hands will worsen the already tense security situation in the Black and Baltic seas and may even threaten Russia's Arctic neighbors. Mistral-class ships would threaten Georgia, but also Western access to Eurasia via the East-West corridor between the Black and the Caspian seas; Ukrainian sovereignty, particularly over Crimea, where Moscow wants to hang on to its Black Sea Fleet headquarters at Sevastopol; and the viability of US forward operating bases in Bulgaria and Romania.

www.defensenews.com

EURONEWS: Jailed teens sour Georgia/S.Ossetia relations

A prisoner swap between Tbilisi and the Georgian territory of S. Ossetia turned sour after the Russian-occupied region jailed two Georgian teens. Hours after Tbilisi freed five prisoners, S. Ossetia put four young Georgians, including two 14-year-olds, on trial for illegally entering the region and arms possession. The EU supported calls for their release and said they may be pardoned soon, while the Georgian government denounced the charges and ungrounded prison terms.

www.euronews.net

THE TELEGRAPH: A revealing case about the freedom of the Georgian media

A new case surfaced in Georgia last week, accusing Georgian authorities of interfering in the editorial independence of regional newspaper publisher, Batumelebi. If the allegations are true, the blackmail appears to have had the opposite of the desired effect and backfired so far as to prompt the investigation. Georgian interior ministry spokesman Shota Utiashvili said that the case bore "clear signs of blackmail." It's encouraging to see the interior ministry appears to be taking this case seriously.

blogs.telegraph.co.uk

VARIETY: Sundance unveils competition lineup

Despite the industry turmoil and contractions, the number of submissions to the Sundance Film Competition rose this year. Officials found a trend especially among documakers "to tell the truth, to find out what's going on out there and tell it so as to get their point across in a way that conventional films can't." One example: "Russian Lessons," directed by Olga Konkaya and Andrei Nekrasov; the film looks into ethnic cleansing in Georgia revealed by an investigation of Russian actions during its 2008 invasion of Georgia.

www.variety.com

RIA NOVOSTI: S. Ossetia refuses entry to EU official

Border guards from the Russian-occupied territory of S. Ossetia refused to allow the Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights, Thomas Hammarberg, into Tshkinvali last week, stopping him at the administrative border. Hammarberg intended to negotiate the release of four Georgian teenagers detained by de facto officials in S. Ossetia over a month ago. He told reporters that he would continue his efforts to help release the Georgian teenagers and would necessarily visit S. Ossetia, but declined to specify the time.

en.rian.ru

WASHINGTON POST: Placating Russia won't work

President Obama's efforts to placate the Russians come at the expense of US relations with Eastern and Central European governments that are already uneasy about the US commitment to their region. Whatever the official explanation is for not moving forward with the missile defense shield in Eastern Europe, many—including the Kremlin—will read this shift as an effort to placate Moscow. Worse, rewarding bad Russian behavior is likely only to produce more Russian demands on this and other issues.

www.washingtonpost.com

THE GUARDIAN: Olympic challenge for Sochi games

The International Olympic Committee may have bitten off more than it can chew with the Sochi, Russia, gamble. Many unanswered questions on Sochi's safety and infrastructural preparedness in anticipation of the 2014 Winter Olympics are still lurking in the shadows. There is a very realistic prospect that the Olympic brand, with its lofty values of "excellence, respect and friendship," will be tarnished once again, irrespective of a potential boycott. And the worst-case scenario could yet materialize. In August, White House foreign policy heavyweight Zbigniew Brzezinski used an article in Time magazine to tell the west it should consider the option of an Olympic boycott.

www.guardian.co.uk

ST. PETERSBURG TIMES: Denis MacShane on "Avoiding a New Berlin Wall"

The continuing bitter feud between Russia and the Council of Europe (CoE) reflects a major problem about Russian engagement with the rest of Europe. After the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, there was great concern among delegates that Russia had mobilized its military power to go well beyond the contested regions of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Kremlin has refused to allow EU or CoE missions to examine the problem on the ground and has rejected their recommendations. If Russia wants to join and be active in the CoE, it should live by its norms, values, and rules.

www.sptimes.ru

TRANSITIONS ONLINE: Editorial-Abkhazia, territorial imperative

Abkhazia is another small territory going through growing pains. Even in the aftermath of Russia's 2008 invasion, it is still true that "Abkhazia is not Kosovo," and for many the Abkhaz claim of sovereignty is hard to swallow, particularly given this small territory's tangled history. For one thing, the Abkhaz are not a majority there.

www.tol.cz

DPA: West gives lukewarm response to Russian's security pitch

Foreign ministers meeting at the OSCE summit gave a lukewarm response to a new Russian-drafted Euro-Atlantic security pact, calling instead for existing organizations to be improved. Diplomats said progress on the Russian proposal was uncertain, given the differences between members over how to re-organize Europe's security policy.

www.sindhtoday.net

BUSINESS NEWS EUROPE: Georgia targets Mideast money

Georgia's government is hoping that the development of free industrial zones offering tax and customs breaks to investors, a new fiscal austerity bill, and the easing of the world financial crisis will unfreeze stalled projects and attract fresh capital, particularly from the Middle East. Investments from the UAE totaled \$124 million in the first half of 2009, down from \$202 million during the same period of the previous year. In 2008 as a whole, the UAE was the biggest foreign investor in Georgia, accounting for \$306 million out of a total \$1.56 billion.

businessneweurope.eu

BLOOMBERG: Dubai debt crisis won't slow Persian Gulf investment in Georgia

Dubai's debt crisis won't impair Georgia's long-term plans to attract investment from the Persian Gulf region as the former Soviet republic attempts to rebuild an economy buffeted by Russia's August 2008 invasion and the global slump. "There's no threat for Georgia, because the companies that invested here fortunately had no exposure to Dubai World and we're in constant communication with them," Georgian Finance Minister Kakha Baidurashvili said last week. President Saakashvili said in October that he had made several trips to the United Arab Emirates this year, netting as much as \$1 billion in investment "within the next two to three years."

www.bloomberg.com