

# GEORGIA UPDATE

WEEKLY EDITION • 7 January 2010

A Publication of the Government of Georgia

[www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge](http://www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge)

## TOP STORIES

- Parliament Passes Election Code Changes, Sets Stage for Local Vote in Spring
- EU Official Says Russia Violates Ceasefire; NATO Tells Moscow Alliance Will Not Compromise on Georgia
- Georgia to Reopen Border Crossing, Resume Air Links with Russia
- US Senator Calls for Renewed Support for Georgia and its Military
- Transatlantic Concern Continues to Grow Over Sale of Warships to Russia
- Georgia Launches Russian-Language TV Station for the Caucasus



World-renowned tenor Jose Carreras ushered forth 2010 on a high note during a New Year's Eve gala in Batumi, along with other global artists who assembled in Georgia's sublime Black Sea resort. In his new year's address, President Saakashvili underscored the need for unity: "A secret recipe of our survival is very simple—our strength is in our unity," he said, adding, "it is in the unity of all ethnic groups and all the citizens of Georgian, regardless of their origins and religious beliefs." The Batumi event was broadcast internationally.

## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

**WSJ:** Mikheil Saakashvili on "Georgia and the War in Afghanistan"

**FOREIGN POLICY:** Proposed French arms sale to Russia faces mounting opposition on Capitol Hill

**LIBÉRATION:** Giorgi Baramidze, Georgian Minister for European Integration

**NEWSWEEK:** The evil (cyber) empire

**RFE/RL:** Russian says defected to Georgia for moral, political reasons

**LOS ANGELES TIMES:** Editorial—Russia buys a tiny ally: Nauru

**DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR:** European Union rejects Abkhazia elections

**FOREIGN POLICY:** Lugar calls on NATO to lead, not upset Russia-Georgia security balance

**EURASIA DAILY MONITOR:** Azerbaijan considers Georgia-Black Sea-Bulgaria route for compressed natural gas to Europe

**WASHINGTON POST:** Russia's embargo against wine from Georgia prompts growers to improve quality

## QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"The United States Government should...work with NATO allies in crafting a comprehensive, transparent approach to security assistance and military sales in the region. While Georgia has encountered great difficulty in procuring equipment from NATO countries to provide for its basic territorial defense needs, some allies have pursued significant military deals with Russia that could upset the military balance."

"The United States and NATO allies must reconcile a policy that leaves a dedicated NATO partner unable to provide for its basic defense requirements. These efforts will be most effective if they are undertaken on a multilateral basis. The Alliance must come to grips with the reality that Georgia will require coordinated security support from America and European nations for some years to come."

—U.S. Senator Richard Lugar in a new report on Georgia issued by his office

"The test of the bonds among nations is not what we do when it is easy, but rather what we do when it is hard. Georgia has been grateful for the extent to which the U.S. and Europe have stood alongside us over recent years. Now we are proud to stand—and fight—alongside you."

—President Saakashvili on Georgia's contribution to NATO's mission in Afghanistan

## UPCOMING MILESTONES

**Jan. 7:** Georgians celebrate Orthodox Christmas

**Jan. 14:** International Energy Summit in Batumi

**Jan. 16-17:** FM of Switzerland visits Georgia

**Jan. 18-19:** FM Vashadze visits Iran

**Jan. 21:** People-to-people working group under the US-Georgia Charter on strategic partnership meets

**Jan. 24-29:** Parliament Speaker Bakradze visits Brussels

**Jan. 26** FM Vashadze visits Holland

**Jan. 28:** Next round of Geneva peace talks

## TOP STORIES

**Parliament Passes Election Code Changes, Sets Stage for Local Vote in Spring**

Parliament last week passed approved a new election code last week, setting the stage for local elections expected in May. The changes were the product of cross-party collaboration initiated by Parliament Speaker Bakradze that brought together a range of opposition parties, NGOs, and international organizations to improve the country's electoral process. The new code will bring greater accountability and transparency on numerous issues, from the verification of voter lists to the adjudication of complaints. It also establishes a 30% threshold for the Tbilisi mayoral election—meaning that a candidate who reaches that level in the first round will win outright. President Saakashvili said that the spring polls—the first since Russia's invasion and occupation—would be “a huge test for Georgia.”

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Saakashvili: 'Local Elections Huge Test'](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Election code amendments approved](#)

**EU Official Says Russia Violates Peace Deal; NATO Chief Tells Moscow Alliance Will Not Compromise on Georgia**

The EU monitoring mission chief in Georgia said Moscow has failed to fully observe an EU-brokered peace deal that ended Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia. Hansjoerg Haber said Russia has not met an obligation to withdraw its forces to positions held before the August 2008 conflict. He added that Russia has refused to let EU monitors enter Georgia's Russian-occupied territories of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia. Meanwhile, NATO's chief reiterated that the transatlantic security alliance isn't willing to compromise with Russia on admitting Georgia to the Western military alliance. NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen said at a Moscow summit that NATO wasn't prepared to compromise on issues of fundamental importance, such as plans to eventually admit Georgia and Ukraine.

[UPI: NATO tells Russia no Georgia compromise](#)

[AP: EU official in Georgia says Russia violates peace deal](#)

**Georgia to Reopen Border, Resume Air Links with Russia**

Georgia and Russia have agreed to reopen land and air transport links. The Verkhny Lars border crossing was closed in 2006 when Russia's began an increasingly aggressive posture towards Georgia that culminated in the 2008 invasion and occupation. Meanwhile, Georgian Airways said it received the go-ahead from the Russian transport ministry to begin charter flights to Moscow and St. Petersburg; the first flight departs Tbilisi Friday. The flights had ceased following Russia's invasion of Georgia.

[DPA: Russia and Georgia to reopen border crossing](#)

[AP: Lawmaker Urges NATO to Consider Arms for Georgia](#)

[U.S. SENATE: STRIKING THE BALANCE—U.S. POLICY AND STABILITY IN GEORGIA](#)

**US Senator Calls for Renewed Support for Georgia**

In a new report, US Senator Richard Lugar, the top Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, urges the Obama administration and European allies to consider rearming Georgia. Lugar has been a key ally for President Obama in his pursuit of an arms control deal with Russia that has been the centerpiece of the administration's efforts to improve relations with the Kremlin. Lugar's report warns that Georgia's military vulnerability could lead to further instability in the Caucasus amid continuing tensions between Georgia and Russia. The report notes: “Tensions in Georgia remain high and mutual suspicion risks tipping the balance towards renewed conflict.” The report recommends that the US should work with NATO allies to craft a “comprehensive, transparent approach to security assistance and military sales in the region;” “internationalize” the security issues in Georgia's Russian-occupied territories of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia; help facilitate a non-aggression pact between Russia and Georgia; and progress regional communication and integration efforts.

[AP: Lawmaker Urges NATO to Consider Arms for Georgia](#)

**Transatlantic Concern Grows Over Sale of Warships to Russia**

France's plans to sell the powerful Mistral-class warship to Russia has drawn fire in the US Congress. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, has introduced a resolution urging President Obama to press Paris to cancel the transaction. “France and other member states of NATO and the EU should decline to sell major weapons systems or offensive military equipment to the Russian Federation,” the resolution says. Ros-Lehtinen underlined that the sale would mark the first time a NATO nation has provided “such advanced technology to Russia” and will likely upset Moscow's neighbors.

Meanwhile opposition in the Senate also is growing, as six senators sent a letter to France's ambassador to Washington voicing their concerns about the sale. “Such a sale would be the most significant military sale ever between a NATO member country and Russia, and we believe it would have significant implications for all NATO members.” Russian Navy Commander Vysotskiy said recently that the Mistral would have allowed Russia's Black Sea Fleet to land its troops in Georgia during the August 2008 invasion “in 40 minutes, not 26 hours, which is how long it took us.”

[AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: US Congress uneasy over French warship sale to Russia](#)

**Georgia Launches Russian-Language TV Station for the Caucasus**

The Georgian public broadcaster launched its third TV channel, First Caucasian, targeting Russian speakers in the post-Soviet space. The channel, which will focus on news and developments in the Caucasus region, began broadcasts Monday online ([www.1k-tv.com](http://www.1k-tv.com)) and will soon go out via satellite and cable. President Saakashvili said the station will serve as “a continuing source and channel of dialogue within our society and between our society and other neighboring societies and peoples, a dialogue without borders, one without artificial limitations such as border posts.” The public broadcaster's chief said First Caucasian would offer an opportunity for viewers “to learn such facts, both from history and current events, that are not possible to learn from other Russian-language TV channels.”

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Georgia's Caucasus TV channel launched online](#)

[RFE/RL: Georgia Kicks Off Russian-Language TV Venture](#)



Today is Christmas in Georgia, which celebrates the Feast of the Nativity according to the Julian calendar, which runs 13 days behind the prevailing Gregorian calendar. (The image above is from an exceptional photo essay by French photographer Stéphane Siohan that appeared in *Le Monde*; it depicts a Sunday morning service in the church of Sameba, the new Tbilisi cathedral. The full essay appears here: [www.lemonde.fr](http://www.lemonde.fr))

## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

### WALL STREET JOURNAL: Mikheil Saakashvili on "Georgia and the War in Afghanistan"

The test of the bonds among nations is not what we do when it is easy, but rather what we do when it is hard. Georgia has been grateful for the extent to which the U.S. and Europe have stood alongside us over recent years. Now we are proud to stand—and fight—alongside you. We see ourselves as firmly allied with the values of the U.S. and the trans-Atlantic community. That is why we are sending serious forces—a heavy battalion and two light companies—with no restrictions on the kinds of missions and combat in which they can participate. Almost 800 Georgians will deploy with the U.S. Marines into Helmand Province, where some of the most intense fighting has occurred. Meanwhile, our reform know-how could help in training the Afghan police forces and other civil servants, an effort that is crucial to achieving long-term stability and a more transparent government.

[online.wsj.com](http://online.wsj.com)

### FOREIGN POLICY: Proposed French arms sale to Russia faces mounting opposition on Capitol Hill

Have you heard of the French ship called the Mistral? Well, you're about to. Several senior members of the U.S. Congress are becoming heavily involved in trying to thwart the possible sale of the Mistral from France to Russia. The sale would be the first significant arms transfer from a NATO country to Russia and what's more, the Russians have already indicated that it could be used in future operations in countries in its near abroad, such as Georgia, which it invaded last year. "There is the signal such a sale would send Moscow about just how unserious the West is in holding Russia's feet to fire over its invasion of Georgia and the terms of the subsequent agreement," said defense expert Gary Schmitt.

[thecable.foreignpolicy.com](http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com)

### LIBÉRATION: Questions to Giorgi Baramidze

"We want to show that when Georgia says she wants to join NATO, she is not only asking for security, but will provide security," said Georgia's Minister for European Integration Giorgi Baramidze, in an interview with Libération. "We want to show that we are capable of being that kind of a member, that we share the same security concerns and the same values as the other members. We are ready to pay the adequate price for that, even the highest, since our soldiers, who are all professionals and volunteers, are risking their lives."

[www.liberation.fr](http://www.liberation.fr)

### NEWSWEEK: The evil (cyber) empire

The alleged Russian cyber-assaults, most recently on Citigroup, may seem to be political. In 2007, a cyber attack on Estonia paralyzed the country's government. Then, when the Russia-Georgia conflict flared in 2008, software suddenly became available to anyone wanting to wage their own personal cyber war on Georgia. Indeed, NATO takes the threat of cyber-warfare so seriously that it signed off on a special report on the topic last October. "Although there is no conclusive evidence that the cyber attacks in Georgia were executed or sanctioned by the Russian government," the NATO report notes, "there is no evidence that it tried to stop them, either."

[www.newsweek.com](http://www.newsweek.com)

### RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY: Russian says defected to Georgia for moral, political reasons

A Russian soldier who asked for political asylum in Georgia says his decision to leave the Russian Army was morally and politically motivated. Vitaly Khripun, 25, left his unit in Georgia's Russian-occupied territory of S. Ossetia and asked for asylum last month. Khripun said his decision to defect was prompted by the reality of the "humiliation of the Georgian population in S. Ossetia." Khripun said anyone "who considers himself a human being could not stand the things I witnessed."

[www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org)

### LOS ANGELES TIMES: Editorial—Russia buys a tiny ally: Nauru

The tiny Pacific island nation of Nauru has only one thing left to sell: its international reputation. Enter Russia, which is more than happy to buy. That's how Nauru this week became the fourth country to establish formal relations with Abkhazia and S. Ossetia, joining Russia, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. Nauru requested \$50 million in aid in return for its diplomatic recognition. Unfortunately for the Kremlin, that's all it has to show after 15 months lobbying its allies to recognize the two breakaway regions.

[www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com)

### DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR: EU rejects Abkhazia elections

EU states said they will never recognize the independence of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia, and harshly criticized Russia for its support for them. "The EU has taken note of the 'presidential elections' held in the Georgian territory of Abkhazia on December 12. The EU does not recognize the constitutional and legal framework within which these elections have taken place," read a joint statement of all 27 EU states. "The EU continues to support Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty."

[www.earthtimes.org](http://www.earthtimes.org)

### FOREIGN POLICY: Lugar calls on NATO to lead, not upset Russia-Georgia security balance

US Senator Lugar, the top Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations committee, released a report calling on NATO to take a lead role in coordinating security assistance to Georgia. Lugar argues that Georgian military weakness increases the risk of armed conflict by pinning the Georgians into a desperate position and raising the possibility of conflict-starting miscalculations. Lugar argues that NATO must establish a leadership role in maintaining the security balance in the Caucasus, which is tipping more every day toward the Russian advantage.

[thecable.foreignpolicy.com](http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com)

### EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Azerbaijan considers Georgia-Black Sea-Bulgaria route for compressed natural gas to Europe

Azerbaijan and Bulgaria have signed a memorandum of cooperation on gas export and transport from the S. Caucasus to European markets. The centerpiece concerns transportation of compressed natural gas from Azerbaijan, via Georgia and the Black Sea, to Bulgaria and farther into EU territory. Azerbaijan's State Oil company is considering building a gas-pressurizing installation in the Georgian Black Sea port of Kulevi as a starting point for CNG transportation by tankers to Bulgaria.

[www.jamestown.org](http://www.jamestown.org)

### WASHINGTON POST: Russia's embargo against wine from Georgia prompts growers to improve quality

More than their rich gastronomy and lavish hospitality, it is the quality of the Georgians' wine that surprises me. Now, with its longtime buyer silent, Georgia is courting new markets. With the help of USAID, Georgia is investing large sums of money and hope in an industry with more potential than was previously realized. Large wineries, including Telavi Valley and Chateau Mukhrani, are focusing on high-quality modern wines that the country hopes will soon find a place in American stores and stomachs.

[www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

## WEBSITES @ GEORGIA

**Civil Georgia:** Leading independent news website in English 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**