

# GEORGIA UPDATE

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

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- Georgia Rises by 6 Positions in the 2010 Index of Economic Freedom
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U.S. Senator John McCain (above) visited Georgia on Monday, together with two other Senate colleagues, John Thune (of South Dakota) and John Barrasso (of Wyoming). The delegation met with the President and other senior Georgian officials, as well as with an array of opposition and NGO leaders. Said McCain in a television interview after the visit: "If Americans really want to visit a country where the people really love the United States, I advise them to visit Georgia."

## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

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## QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"It is an expression of partnership and solidarity between our two nations, confronted by common challenges, bound by common interests, and united by common democratic values."

"These convictions join our nations in a friendship that is greater than any one leader, greater than any one government, greater than events of today and tomorrow. Our friendship is as enduring as our fidelity to the indivisible values that we share."

—U.S. Senator John McCain on being awarded with Georgia's honorable "National Hero of Georgia" by President Saakashvili.

## UPCOMING MILESTONES

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

**Jan. 16-17:** Swiss FM 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 in Tbilisi

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

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

**Feb. 1-3:** Tajik FM visits Georgia

**Feb. 5-7:** Munich International Security Conference

**Feb. 8-9:** FM Vashadze visits Rome

**Feb. 9-12:** Parliament Speaker Bakradze in Ankara

**Feb. 17:** Acting Head of OSCE Mission in Georgia

**Mar. 1-3:** Greek Parliament Speaker visits Georgia

## TOP STORIES

**US Senators McCain, Thune & Barrasso Visit Georgia to Underscore American Support**

Three US senators visited Georgia earlier this week to underscore American support for Georgia's territorial integrity and democratic reforms. Senators John McCain, John Barrasso, and John Thune met with members of Georgia's opposition and minority parties in the country's Black Sea port-town of Batumi. In another gathering, President Saakashvili decorated Sen. McCain with a "National Hero of Georgia" order for his support during Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008. McCain said the award was "an expression of partnership and solidarity between our two nations, confronted by common challenges, bound by common interests, and united by common democratic values." The US delegation also traveled to Zugdidi, a town located near Georgia's Russian-occupied territory of Abkhazia, where they visited a local field office of the EU Monitoring Mission and met with EUMM chief Hansjörg Haber.

[AP: McCain awarded 'Hero of Georgia' order on visit, calls for Russia to respect its integrity](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: U.S. Senators visit Georgia](#)

**President Nominates Central Election Commission Candidates, Opposition Set to Select Chair**

President Saakashvili nominated three candidates to potentially chair Georgia's Central Election Committee (CEC), narrowing the field for Georgia's opposition members to make the final selection. Members of Georgian civil society organizations had nominated over a dozen potential candidates Monday. The three potential candidates are Levan Tarkhishvili, the CEC chair incumbent; Otar Sichinava, a judge of the Constitutional Court; and Zurab Kharatishvili, a member of a campaign funds monitoring group within the CEC. The opposition and minority parties that will make the final selection are the Republican Party, a party within the Alliance for Georgia; Conservative Party; Labor Party; Industrialists; Christian-Democratic Movement, a leading party in the parliamentary minority; and On Our Own, part of the parliamentary minority. A nominee must win the backing of four opposition parties; if the opposition fails to reach a decision, then Parliament will make the final selection.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: President names CEC Chair Candidates](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Potential CEC Chair Candidates Named](#)

**For First Time, Georgia Becomes Exporter of Electricity**

For the first time in its history, Georgia has become a net exporter of electricity, shipping power to Russia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan. The Government's success in improving economic conditions is attracting ever more foreign entrepreneurs interested in investing in Georgia's power sector. As a result of its economic and infrastructural reforms, tariffs have been part-liberalized and an energy policy has been developed.

[OXFORD ANALYTICA: Georgia Has Power On Its Mind](#)

**EUMM Visits S. Ossetia, Calls for Talks on Detainee**

Officials from the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) met with representatives of Georgia's Russian-occupied territory of S. Ossetia and the Russian military to discuss arrest of a S. Ossetian man by the Georgian police last week—marking the first time that international monitors were granted access into occupied S. Ossetia. A controversy had erupted last week after Georgian officials arrested and detained Genadi Pliev for illegal possession of firearms and hand-grenades near the territory's administrative border. S. Ossetian officials called the detention a "kidnapping," claiming Pliev was a state guard service employee. EUMM called for talks within frames of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism to resolve the situation between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali. Russian proxies in S. Ossetia said they would not take part in the EUMM's proposed meeting with Georgian officials.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: EUMM Calls for Talks on Detained Persons](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: EU Monitors Visit Tskhinvali](#)

**Georgia Rises by 6 Positions in 2010 Index of Economic Freedom**

Georgia advanced six positions in this year's Index of Economic Freedom, published by the Heritage Foundation and the Wall Street Journal; Georgia ranked 26th out of 183 countries surveyed. The annual report scores countries based on 10 economic characteristics: business freedom, trade freedom, monetary freedom, government size, fiscal freedom, property rights, investment freedom, financial freedom, freedom from corruption, and labor freedom. The International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the Economist Intelligence Unit provided the data on which the survey was based.

[GEORGIA TIMES: Georgia up by 6 positions in the Index of Economic Freedom](#)

**First Georgian Flight Since Russian Invasion Lands in Moscow**

A Georgian Airways charter flight left from Tbilisi for Moscow last Friday in the first direct flight between the two countries since Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008. "We are very happy with the re-launch of these flights," said Tamaz Gaiashvili, chairman of Georgian Airways' board of directors. Georgian Airways flew to Moscow between Jan. 8 and Jan. 10 under a deal with Russia over the holiday season, raising hopes of a full resumption of regular flights between the neighbors. "Georgian Airways is ready to restart regular flights, but we are waiting for Russia," said an airline spokeswoman. The first flight carried 84 passengers on board. Georgian Airways is currently negotiating more flights with Russian aviation authorities for Jan. 16, 20, and 24.

[REUTERS: Georgians fly direct to Moscow, first time since war](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Georgian Airways Conducts Charter Flight to Moscow](#)

**High-level Batumi Conference Aims to Advance European Energy Security**

Prime ministers and senior officials from nine countries convened today in Georgia to attend a high-profile energy summit and promote European energy security in the western coastal town of Batumi. The Summit builds on the achievements of the Prague Southern Corridor Summit in May 2009, which laid the multinational foundation for development of the Southern Energy Corridor. Georgian Energy Minister Alexandre Khetaguri noted that: "It is highly significant that the first large-scale, post-Prague meeting of the key parties to that summit is being held in Georgia, underscoring Georgia's key role in the project, and in the region." The Batumi Summit underscores the broad political support for developing the Southern Corridor's great promise as a vital and stable route for energy to Europe.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Energy conference in Batumi](#)

**A Georgian Christmas**

Georgians in Tbilisi celebrated the Christmas holiday with a traditional ceremony called Alilo. Children, dressed as angels, and participants carrying white flags and icons led the procession from Vardebi Square to the President's Palace. Representatives of the legislative and executive bodies also participated in the Alilo procession—including Parliament Speaker Bakradze, who distributed presents to the cheerful crowd.

## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

**FOREIGN POLICY: GOP senators send letter expressing concern over French arms sale to Russia**

Six senators, all from the GOP, have signed a letter to French Amb. H.E. Pierre Vimont outlining their concerns with France's proposed sale of Mistral-class warships to Russia. "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," the letter reads. The letter comes after top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, put forward a bill calling on the Obama administration to try to stop the potential sale.

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

**WALL STREET JOURNAL: The criticism of Georgia is mistaken**

Mr. Barcella mocks President Saakashvili's anticorruption measures in his December WSJ letter, yet by every credible measure, these efforts have been a success. A recent Gallup and IRI survey found that trust in the police among the Georgian public exceeds 80%, versus just 4% in 2003 before the Rose Revolution. Meanwhile, Transparency International found that fewer than 2% of Georgians had to pay for a public service—among the best rankings in the world—and its Corruption Perception Index already ranks Georgia higher than several EU member states. As for media freedom, Georgia has leapt up the rankings maintained by Reporters Without Borders, and is now considered more free than its neighbors, including Turkey and Ukraine.

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

**JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION: Former prime minister Zurab Noghaideli—Putin's new pick for Georgia**

Georgia's former PM Zurab Noghaideli visited Moscow several times last month to meet with influential figures in the Russian establishment, including PM Putin. As Georgia has started to move away from its Soviet past—and with that the Russian political orbit—over the past several years following the peaceful Rose Revolution in 2003, the Russian leadership has had several attempts to destabilize or outright oust the government in Tbilisi. Now it appears from the highly publicized meetings held by Noghaideli, the Kremlin seems to have moved to a more or less mainstream Georgian political spectrum to achieve its strategic objectives vis-à-vis Georgia.

[jamestownfoundation.blogspot.com](http://jamestownfoundation.blogspot.com)

**RFE/RL: South Ossetia to require Georgian IDs translated into Russian**

Russian proxies in Georgia's occupied territory of S. Ossetia say that residents in the Akhgori district, an area with a large ethnic Georgian population, will soon require Russian-translated documents to gain entry into Georgia proper. Starting this week, Georgian passports and other identification documents will not be valid to cross the border into Georgia proper. Paata Davitaia, the deputy speaker of the Georgian Parliament, told RFE/RL that such a regulation violates international law because residents who refuse to change their passport will eventually have to leave the territory.

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

**THE ECONOMIST: The neighbour from hell**

Russia's latest political move adds insult to injury. It has formally proposed a new security treaty to NATO, which would specifically prohibit the alliance from making military plans or positioning forces in a way that Russia does not like. This is the latest iteration of what is commonly known as the "Medvedev Plan"—the idea of creating a new, realpolitik-based, security architecture for Europe that would weaken NATO, bypass the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and sideline America.

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

**WIRED: Picture this—After war, Georgia picks up the pieces**

After Georgia's civil war in the early 1990s, hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people were basically left to fend for themselves. Today, Georgians displaced by the recent fighting live in neat, orderly settlements that dot the landscape of central Georgia; roads and bridges destroyed in the fighting were quickly repaired; Georgia's small military is even planning to send a contingent to Afghanistan next year. Georgia still struggles under a crippling economic embargo by Russia, but it is far better than shape as a country than it was a decade and a half ago.

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

**RFE/RL: Georgia kicks off Russian-language TV venture**

Georgia has launched a new Russian-language television channel, broadcasting regional news and developments to Russian speakers in the post-Soviet space. The First Caucasian Channel, initiated by President Saakashvili and funded by the government, will broadcast to Georgia and several foreign countries including Russia. Its moderators include Oleg Panfilov, the head of the Moscow-based Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations, and Alla Dudayeva, the widow of Dzhokhar Dudayev—the first president of the secessionist Chechen Republic of Ichkeria.

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

**BLOOMBERG: NATO tells Russia to stop fighting "ghosts of past"**

NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen last month refuted the perception in Moscow that NATO is encircling Russia. He said: "What is actually the basis for portraying NATO in key Russian documents as a major threat? Is Russia fully aware of the message sent by military exercises that rehearse the invasion of a smaller NATO member?" Meanwhile, Rasmussen emphasized that while the alliance isn't actively soliciting new members, it will consider any European democracy that applies.

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

**RFE/RL: Paul Goble on "playing into Moscow's hands"**

Few in Georgia—or indeed anywhere else—can have any doubts that recent claims by Moscow's Federal Security Service that Tbilisi is providing training for Islamist and nationalist militants in the North Caucasus are absurd provocations. But even fewer in the Georgian capital seem to recognize that far more is riding on their responses than whether the international community accepts, or at least does nothing in response to, this latest example of political duplicity from the Russian powers-that-be.

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

**MISSOURIAN: Georgian officials look to model after U.S. democratic system**

Georgian government officials met with local officials in Columbia, Missouri, recently as part of the Open World Program, attending workshops to learn about local government, finance, education, and infrastructure. "It is a new democracy, and there is a lot to learn," said Konstantine Kavtaradze, a finance official from Georgia's industrial city of Kutaisi. Kavtaradze was greatly impressed by the democratic system, especially the decentralization between the local and state government. "I have no illusions that what we saw here will be implemented right away, but step-by-step," Kavtaradze said. The focus of their program is decentralization and accountable governance.

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

**THE INDEPENDENT: Georgia's answer to "The Simpsons"**

Brainchild of a celebrated local filmmaker, The Samsonadzes burst onto Georgian TV screens a few weeks ago, bearing more than a passing resemblance to their more famous American counterparts, the Simpsons. Gela Samsonadze, the Homer Simpson figure, works in a Georgian bank, and each week the program covers his escapades at work and at home with the family. Shalva Ramishvili, the show's producer and creator said: "We have tried to make the program relevant to Georgian reality and touch on social issues that will resonate with a Georgian audience."

[www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)