

GEORGIA UPDATE

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- Georgian Figure Skater Wins Third Place at European Championships



A Georgian parliamentary delegation led by Speaker Bakradze (left) held meetings in Brussels with officials from NATO, the European Commission, and the European Parliament. Bakradze delivered a speech at an enlarged session of the European Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee in which he highlighted the situation in Georgia's occupied territories, relations with Russia, issues of state security and the internal political reforms in the country. He also met with the Secretary-General of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen (right); the Alliance this week approved Georgia's 2010 Action Plan.

CIVIL GEORGIA: [Parliamentary speaker visits Brussels](#)

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“Two points about the war in Georgia in 2008 have stuck in outsiders’ memories. One is that it was quite unexpected. The other is that Georgia started it. Both, in American scholar Ronald Asmus’s view, are wrong. The real cause of the war, he argues in a new book, was Russia’s determination to block Georgia’s American-educated and America-loving president, Mikheil Saakashvili.”

—*The Economist*, reviewing “A Little War That Shook the World”

“This signal is very dangerous because it means that a country can invade a neighbor and commit ethnic cleansing as has been proven and still purchase a powerful warship without being asked any question.”

“We’d like to believe that Russia can become a constructive partner. We’d love to see the success of the reset policy, launched by the US administration. But, unfortunately, the past, the very recent one, here shows the opposite.”

—The Secretary of Georgia’s National Security Council, Eka Tkeshelashvili, on France’s proposed sale of Mistral warships to Russia

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Jan. 27-28: FM Vashadze attends NATO conference on Afghanistan in London

Jan. 28: Next round of Geneva peace talks

Feb. 1-3: Tajik FM visits Georgia

Feb. 2-4: State Minister Yakobishvili visits Strasbourg to begin global round of discussions on Georgia’s plan for the occupied territories

Feb. 8-9: FM Vashadze visits Rome

Feb. 9-12: Parliament Speaker Bakradze in Ankara

Feb. 15-18: State Minister Yakobishvili visits Paris

Feb. 17: Acting Head of OSCE Mission in Georgia

Mar. 1-3: Greek Parliament Speaker visits Georgia

TOP STORIES

Georgian Cabinet Adopts Visionary Plan for the Occupied Territories of Abkhazia, S. Ossetia

The Georgian government yesterday approved a strategy for cooperation with the Russian-occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and vowed to avoid armed conflict 17 months after Russia's invasion. "We approved this document because we believe in a peaceful resolution," said Temur Iakobashvili, Georgia's reintegration minister. "There won't be a war with these regions. It's time to engage people through education as well as social, economic and business projects, instead of isolating them." The strategy document, which underscores Georgia's claim to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, sets out broad goals for promoting "grassroots-level trade" with the two regions and agriculture as well as job creation. It proposes the creation of "dedicated funds" to support joint business activities. Iakobashvili said money received from international donors and the Georgian budget will be allocated to implement the strategy. He added that the document will be presented to the residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as to the UN, EU, Council of Europe, NATO, and the OSCE, among others.

[BLOOMBERG: Georgia Seeks Cooperation With Rebel Regions, Forswears War](#)

Russian Troops Prevent Georgian Students From Crossing Border

Russian troops occupying Abkhazia prohibited Georgian students from crossing the administrative borders to attend school last week, drawing concern from government and local school officials. The school's principal, Vakhtang Gogokhia, said Russian border guards refused to allow 12 children from the Abkhaz village of Saberio to cross into Georgia proper to attend class. Shota Utiashvili, of the Georgian interior ministry, met immediately with Russian and de facto Abkhaz officials to discuss the incident and demand unrestricted access for Georgian children. Utiashvili said all sides agreed that children are subject to special rules and should be able cross the border in any sector.

[RFE/RL: Russian Troops Keep Georgian Students From Crossing Border](#)

Sweden to Open Embassy in Tbilisi; EU Mission in Georgia to Expand Into Embassy

Expanding its relations with Georgian, Sweden last week announced plans to open an embassy in Tbilisi. "We want to be where we can make the best possible use of the money that a Swedish presence costs," said Swedish FM Carl Bildt, underscoring that Georgia is one such place. Meanwhile, the EU announced that it would transform 54 of the European Commission's 136 foreign delegations into embassy-type missions authorized to speak for the entire Union. Eight of the new-model units are in Europe: Armenia, Georgia, Macedonia, Moldova, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, and Ukraine.

[THE SWEDISH WIRE: Sweden to open ten embassies and close six](#)
[EU OBSERVER: EU commission 'embassies' granted new power](#)

Georgia to Freeze Military Spending in 2010, Target \$3 Billion in Foreign Investment

Georgia will freeze its military spending this year and hopes to make \$3 billion over the next two years with a string of sell-offs and privatizations, said Georgian Finance Minister Kakha Baidurashvili. In an interview, Baidurashvili also said Georgia had lucrative plans to sell the rights to build a major new port on the Black Sea at Anaklia, new rail and hydro electric projects, and a swathe of government building sell-offs. "For 2010 I expect revenue gained from privatization to be around \$1 billion," said Baidurashvili. "In 2011, if everything goes well with the world economy and it recovers fully by at least mid-2011, then \$2 billion is something we can reach."

[REUTERS: Georgia to freeze military cash, eyes \\$3 bln sell-off](#)



Elene Gedevanishvili won Georgia's first major figure skating medal on Saturday after an unusual training session—with President Saakashvili. The President, on an official visit to Tallinn, popped in to watch the European championships. He got in the mood for the competition by having a skate-around with Gedevanishvili before she won the women's bronze medal. "Before the short program, the Georgian president called me and we skated on the outdoor ice rink in the old town," she said. "He is a pretty good skater." The 20-year-old will now head to Vancouver to compete in the 2010 Olympic Games.

Georgian Airline Says Russia Refuses Request to Resume Flights

Russia last week refused a request from Georgia's leading airline to resume regular direct flights between Moscow and Tbilisi. "We have received an official refusal to both requests, on charter flights as well as on scheduled ones," said Nino Giorgobiani, a spokeswoman for Airzena Georgian Airways. "The explanation from Russia was the need for more negotiations." A Georgian plane flew from Tbilisi to Moscow in early January, marking a brief restoration of air services after Russia severed transport links following its invasion of in August 2008.

[BLOOMBERG: Russia Refuses Request to Resume Flights](#)

US-Georgia Meet for Talks on People-to-People Contacts

Georgian and US officials met in Tbilisi last week to discuss expanding people-to-people and cultural exchange programs as envisaged by US-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership signed in January 2009. The working group on people-to-people contacts is one of four bilateral groups that address the Charter's priority areas. "The goal of this strategy is to facilitate people-to-people contacts between our co-citizens living in the occupied territories and rest of the Georgian citizens, including through offering education opportunities to those living in the breakaway regions," said Georgian Deputy FM Giga Bokeria. "We hope our US partners will help us in this." Expanding education exchange programs and English-language training—as well as issues related with promoting economic, social and cultural integration of ethnic minorities within Georgia—were also discussed during the session.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: U.S.-Georgia Talks on People-to-People Contacts](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

THE ECONOMIST: Georgia and Russia—Ungodly suffering

Two points about the war in Georgia in 2008 have stuck in outsiders' memories. One is that it was quite unexpected. The other is that Georgia started it. Both, in American scholar Ronald Asmus's view, are wrong. The real cause of the war, he argues in a new book, was Russia's determination to block Georgia's American-educated and America-loving president, Mikheil Saakashvili. Saakashvili had embarked on "a crash course to turn Georgia from a semi-failed state into a reform tiger that could become the catalyst for creating a democratic pro-Western corridor in the southern Caucasus...it was a breathtaking vision." The book's detailed inside accounts of Georgian and Western maneuvering before, during and after the war are gripping. Mr. Asmus is caustic about the outside world's failure to forestall the conflict. Hundreds of people died and many thousands of people lost their homes because of that. In particular he highlights the weakness of NATO (crippled by feuding over the Iraq war) and of the self-centered and complacent EU.

www.economist.com

LE MONDE: Backlash against the sale of Mistral warships to Russia

Doubts about the sale of Mistral warships by France to Russia are growing across the Atlantic. In Washington, six senators wrote to the French ambassador and did not mince their words: "We are afraid that this sale sends to Russia the message that France supports its increasingly bellicose and illegal behavior." Warns one analyst: The Russians are using the Mistral deal to generate acceptance of the principle that France and other NATO should be allowed to sell arms to Russia." Doubts are rising at the Quai d'Orsay, where French foreign ministry officials have strong reservations about the Mistral sale. "The ideal scenario would be for the Russians to renounce to the purchase," said one high-ranking diplomat. Said another diplomat: "We are opposed to anything that could feed the Russian will to divide us in NATO and the European Union."

www.lemonde.fr

JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION: No let-up for Georgia—The Kremlin is escalating its "terrorism" rhetoric against Tbilisi

Apart from verbal denunciations and counterclaim, the Georgian government could make use of several other mechanisms to counter the escalating trajectory of Russian accusations. The Georgian government should double its efforts to raise international awareness about ethnic cleansing, brutal persecutions, kidnappings, and other acts being committed by the Russian forces and their local proxies in the occupied Georgian territories. Also, the Georgian government could demand from the Russian Federation to present verifiable evidence and a detailed account of Georgia's "terrorism activity" so that the international community could see where the truth lies. Overall, the international community's closer engagement and more alert attitude toward the deteriorating situation in the Caucasus could positively influence Russia's behavior now and turn it into a more responsible actor in the coming future.

jamestownfoundation.blogspot.com/

RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY: Polish president supports Georgia's EU, NATO ambitions

Poland's president has reiterated that he supports Georgia's aspirations of NATO membership and closer ties with the EU. "It is known that I'm a supporter of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic ambitions," said President Kaczynski. "Because despite all its weaknesses, NATO is a guarantor and an exporter of relative stability. It's a region that for a lot of reasons needs to be stabilized." Speaking alongside Kaczynski, Czech President Vaclav Klaus also said the doors of the EU should remain open.

www.rferl.org

DEFENSE NEWS: Bildt—Consensus over post-Soviet borders is gone

Sweden's FM Carl Bildt said last week that the basic consensus on post-Soviet borders has disappeared since the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008. Speaking at the launch of a book by the German Marshall Fund's Ron Asmus entitled "A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia and the Future of the West," Bildt said that "either one border after another will now be questioned or we say that this was a mistake and we need to seek solutions." Asmus said Russia's aim in invading Georgia was "regime change." He added that he was not sure if Moscow had abandoned that aim.

www.defensenews.com

BLOOMBERG: Russia copies US radios seized in Georgia war, Vedomosti says

Russia is developing battlefield communications systems based on US equipment seized from the Georgian army in 2008, the Russian newspaper Vedomosti reported. The captured equipment provides secure voice communications and transmits data necessary for artillery targeting and other command functions. Officials from Russian defense contractor OAO Sozvezdie said the company is testing "analogous" equipment for the Russian military. PM Vladimir Putin, who visited the Sozvezdie plant in Voronezh last week, said the Russian army's communications systems are outdated and need to be overhauled.

www.bloomberg.com

DEUTSCHE WELLE: In Caucasus, EU monitors must deal with tensions alone

In the conflict-prone Caucasus, concern is mounting about a security vacuum following the end of the UN and OSCE's observer missions. Since Russia vetoed the extension of both the UN and OSCE observer missions in Georgia, the EU has been left alone with around 200 monitors, who are unable to enter either S. Ossetia or Abkhazia. "In sum, Russia has blinded the international community to what it is doing in the occupied Georgian territories," David Smith, director of the Georgian Security Analysis Center. "Behind its veil of secrecy, Russia can continue to strengthen military logistics, perhaps preparing another armed attack on the rest of Georgia."

www.dw-world.de

BLOOMBERG: Ex-Georgian premier leads expansion of Rwanda's Bank of Kigali

Former Georgian PM Gurgenzidze is heading efforts to make Rwanda's Bank of Kigali a regional leader in east-central Africa. Said Kigali's managing director: "We want to expand regionally, to become the main player. This is where Gurgenzidze comes in with his international experience." Meanwhile Gurgenzidze commented, "I am enjoying immensely the challenge of helping the talented team at Bank of Kigali in steering the bank, already dominant in its home market, on the path of modernization and growth and regional expansion."

georgiandaily.com

ASSOCIATED PRESS: Georgia gives passport to American figure skater, third in family to compete for another country

Georgia's figure skating federation says it has granted citizenship to Allison Reed, an American who competes in ice dance with Georgian skater Otar Japaridze. The move makes the New Jersey native the third in her family to skate for another country; Reed's parents are ice dancers representing Japan. Reed was presented her new passport by President Saakashvili last week while he was visiting Estonia, where the European Figure Skating Championships took place.

www.baltimoresun.com