

GEORGIA UPDATE

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The transmission of First Caucasian, a new Russian-language station focusing on the Caucasus and the wider region, suddenly ended recently when Europe's leading satellite operator apparently succumbed to Russian pressure and took it off the air. As a result, the Georgian Public Broadcaster, which operates First Caucasian, has taken Eutelsat to the French courts to seek redress (see story on page 2).

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"We have repeatedly called on Russia to honor the terms of its ceasefire agreement with Georgia, and we refuse to recognize Russia's claims of independence for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. More broadly, we object to any spheres of influence claimed in Europe in which one country seeks to control another's future. Our security depends upon nations being able to choose their own destiny."

—US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

"I think the verdict of the international community on the declared independence of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia is pretty clear, which is to say that the overwhelmingly vast majority of countries around the world do not recognize their independence and have no intention of recognizing their independence. I think you have Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Nauru, which have stepped forward. That's not exactly a resounding endorsement. We have a different view from Russia on this issue. And we—and our view is shared by, as I note, the vast majorities of countries around the world."

- US Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Feb. 5: US Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg visits Tbilisi

Feb. 5-7: Munich International Security Conference

Feb. 8-9: FM Vashadze visits Rome

Feb. 9-12: Parliament Speaker Bakradze in Ankara

Feb. 20-27: State Minister Yakobashvili visits NYC, Washington

Feb. 22-27: National Security Advisor Tkeshelashvili visits Washington

Feb. 17: Acting Head of OSCE Mission in Georgia

Mar. 1-3: Greek Parliament Speaker visits Georgia

TOP STORIES

Leading European Satellite Operator Censors Georgian Station Under Pressure from Russia, Draws International Outrage

Eutelsat, the leading European satellite operator, suddenly took Tbilisi-based First Caucasian off the air last month and renege on its contract to transmit the Russian-language station. The move by Eutelsat came shortly after it signed a lucrative agreement with a Russian company, Kremlin-allied Gazprom Media Group, that sought to dominate transmissions into Russia. First Caucasian, launched in January by the Georgian Public Broadcasting Service (GPBS), was the first Russian-language station that could reach large parts of Russia but that was not controlled by Moscow. After fruitless negotiations, GPBS started legal proceedings yesterday in French courts, accusing Eutelsat of having broken a commercial agreement and also of censorship. The satellite operator has been implicated before in similar, politically motivated actions, most recently in 2008 when it banned an independent Chinese station.

[WALL STREET JOURNAL: Editorial—A Clear Signal From Eutelsat](#)
[LE FIGARO: Rumeurs sur l'arrêt d'une chaîne géorgienne antirusse](#)

EU, US Applaud Georgian Strategy for Occupied Territories

The Georgian government's new strategy toward the country's Russian-occupied territories of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia was praised this week by US and EU officials. In its "State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation," the government endorsed close interaction between residents of the occupied territories and of the rest of Georgia. "The key element of the document is that we say no to any type of isolation of these regions; residents of those regions are residents of Georgia so we cannot isolate them," said Temur Yakobashvili, the Georgian state minister for reintegration, who is responsible for developing the strategy. "We cannot allow a situation wherein the fate of the residents of these regions will depend solely on the occupying power," he added. "So we plan to take active steps to provide the local population with an opportunity to have a normal education, healthcare, to engage in economic projects." The US embassy in Tbilisi said it "strongly supports" the objectives of the strategy, noting that it "is a constructive step towards easing tensions and a way to reach out to all residents of the regions of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia." Meanwhile, the French embassy described the strategy as an "important" and "constructive" initiative and called on all stakeholders to take "a positive" approach and to facilitate implementation of the strategic objectives.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: France, U.S. Welcome Tbilisi's Abkhaz, S.Ossetia Strategy](#)

[IRISH TIMES: Georgia plans for ties with Abkhazia and S Ossetia](#)

President Saakashvili Proposes Enhanced Supply Route Through Georgia to Afghanistan

Next month, Georgia will send nearly a thousand troops to Afghanistan to fight alongside NATO soldiers in the most dangerous reaches of that conflict zone, the Helmand Province; they will join a company of their fellow Georgians who have been serving under French command since autumn. Now President Saakashvili is offering additional support to NATO, by offering to expand a supply route to Afghanistan that NATO already has been quietly using for the past year. In an interview with the Associated Press, the President discussed the possibility of using Georgian territory as a route for sending additional supplies to NATO troops. In 2005, Georgia and NATO signed an agreement envisaging use of Georgia's air space, road and rail infrastructure by NATO for transit purposes to send supplies to Afghanistan. The President initially presented the proposal to Vice President Biden during his visit to Tbilisi last July, offering Georgia's Black Sea ports for the Alliance's shipping and refueling needs. Said President Saakashvili to the AP: "The best containment of Russia's adventures in this region is political."

[AP: Georgian President Saakashvili proposing supply route for US arms to Afghanistan](#)

Residents of Tbilisi Approve of Progress in Their City, Mayor's Performance, IRI Survey Finds

In May, for the first time, residents of Tbilisi will vote directly for their mayor. Until now, the mayor was elected by the members of the city council; President Saakashvili proposed the direct ballot last autumn as a way to further strengthen Georgia's democracy. If recent polls are any indication, the current mayor, Gigi Ugulava, enters the campaign in a strong position. Last week, the International Republican Institute (IRI) released its latest survey of Tbilisi public opinion. The USAID-sponsored poll, conducted last November and December, found that 67 percent of city residents believe the general situation in Tbilisi has improved over the past four years. Ugulava is given high marks by Tbilisi residents for improving the general welfare of the city, fixing its roads and its buildings, and improving the educational system. The survey also found that unemployment ranks as the top issue concerning residents and job creation is a high priority.

[IRI: New Survey of Public Opinion in Tbilisi](#)

Geneva Talks Stall as Russia Continues to Obstruct Negotiations

Georgian, Russian, and American officials, together with representatives from Georgia's Russian-occupied territories of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia, failed to make a progress on a non-use of force and security mechanism agreement during the ninth round of Geneva peace talks last week. Negotiators at the EU/OSCE/UN-mediated discussions participated in two working groups focusing on security and humanitarian issues. Moscow obstructed the talks by insisting that a non-use of force treaty should be signed between Georgian officials and Russian-occupied territories of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia; Georgia strongly opposed this, instead offering to sign such a treaty with Moscow. Georgian negotiators also underscored the need for international monitors to access the Russian-occupied territories to help ensure security. The participants agreed to hold the next round of discussions on March 30.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: No Progress Reported in Geneva Talks](#)

Russian Lessons Wins International Acclaim at Sundance, Rotterdam Film Festivals

"Russian Lessons," a documentary by Andrei Nekrasov (below) about Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia, created tremendous interest at the Sundance Film Festival and the International Film Festival Rotterdam over the past two weeks. The bible of the film industry, *Variety*, called the documentary "exceptionally instructive" and praised its success in proving Russia's responsibility for "the ethnic cleansing of neighboring Georgians," while also slamming "the international news media for disregarding the evidence." Added *Variety*: "Georgia's desire to join the West as a fully independent nation gave rise to a Russian secret war after the Soviet Union's collapse. Wrenching images [in Russian Lessons] include those of dead and severely injured Georgian children, and of a jet packed full of refugees in the minutes before its being shot down by Russian fighter planes."

[VARIETY: Russian Lessons](#)



INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

WASHINGTON POST: Critics say proposed sale of French Mistral ship to Russia will harm region

France's proposed sale of Mistral warships to Russia, which the French Defense Ministry said is under negotiation, would mark the Russian military's first major arms purchase abroad in modern history. It would also be a seminal moment for France and the West. The sale would be the largest and most sophisticated by a NATO country to Russia and would dramatize the evolving role of an alliance conceived to counter Soviet military power. The Obama administration has remained silent on the matter, in public at least, as part of an effort to improve relations with Moscow. But six Republican senators, including John McCain, wrote a letter in December to the French ambassador in Washington, Pierre Vimont, complaining that the sale would be inappropriate because it would suggest that France approves of Russia's conduct, which the letter called increasingly aggressive and illegal.

www.washingtonpost.com

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Paris s'excuse—French officials rationalize naval rearmament of Russia

Representatives of French authorities at various levels are invoking justifications for the sale of the French-built Mistral warship to Russia, ranging from the politically expedient to the crassly commercial. Meanwhile, NATO member and partner countries in the Baltic and Black Seas are concerned about the possible appearance of Mistral-class ships in the respective Russian fleets, if the French sale goes ahead. France's intentions ultimately amount to a program of naval rearmament for Russia, an openly revisionist power in Europe and on its periphery.

www.jamestown.org

INNER CITY PRESS: At UN, France's Araud refuses question on Mistral ship sale to Russia

As France's Permanent Representative Gerard Araud took questions from reporters at the UN's Security Council stakeout on topics ranging from Cote d'Ivoire to Iran and Chad, one answer, in particular, raised concern. When asked "about the Mistral" — the billion-dollar amphibious warship that France plans to sell to Russia, Araud immediately walked away from the microphone and UN television camera. "That's not the UN," he said. But isn't it?

innercitypress.blogspot.com

BLOOMBERG: Clinton rejects Russia's call for new Europe security treaties

US Secretary of State Clinton rejected Russia's calls for new European security treaties and said American forces will remain on the continent to "deter attacks and to respond quickly if any occur." Clinton said that a "cornerstone" of European security is the "sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states." She repeated US calls on Russia to honor the terms of a ceasefire agreement that ended the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war and the administration's refusal to recognize Russia's claims of independence for the occupied Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

www.bloomberg.com

TIME: Energy wars—Russia's neighbors get even

A sense of defiance to Russian aggression has grown in the post-Soviet space since the Russian-Georgian war, which proved that Moscow would not stop at economic bullying in its efforts to maintain influence over its neighbors. "This conflict totally changed the defense paradigm. It became clear that having both true independence and national security was impossible in Russia's sphere of influence," said former Ukrainian Defense Minister Anatoly Gritsenko. According to Gritsenko, one method of surviving in this environment is to build closer security ties with other ex-Soviet states, as Georgia and Ukraine did after pro-Western leaders came to power in the two countries in 2004 and 2005, respectively.

www.time.com

RFE/RL: Interview—MEP sees stronger EU role in South Caucasus

Should the EU take a more active role in the South Caucasus? Evgeni Kirilov, a Bulgarian member of the European Parliament, thinks so. "Generally, a bigger EU presence is recommended and of course there are enough programs through which the EU could help in their development," said Kirilov in an interview. "We simply need to progress and to conclude new agreements in the near future," he said.

www.rferl.org

WORLD POLICY REVIEW: Georgia targets US ties with Afghan deployment

If Georgia is certainly well aware of its slim NATO chances, the Georgian leadership also recognizes that, at its core, the Afghan war is an American one. With many NATO allies balking at contributing more combat units, Tbilisi's deployment is a direct appeal to Washington. Georgia is also emerging as a key transit conduit in Afghanistan's vast supply chain, via the Georgian Black Sea ports of Poti and Batumi. Georgia is keen to expand these operations, knowing that these lifelines are of greater importance—and probably offer greater leverage—than a few hundred additional troops in Afghanistan's troubled Helmand province.

www.worldpoliticsreview.com

THE TELEGRAPH: Georgian homage to The Simpsons—The Samsonadzes

It looks like The Simpsons, but the creator of Georgia's new hit cartoon series, The Samsonadzes, says the Simpson's show was a source of inspiration and is not a copy. "The Samsonadzes is a native Georgian serial about a Georgian family," said Shalva Ramishvili, creator of the cartoon. Like The Simpsons, the Samsonadzes recounts the trials and tribulations of an ordinary family. Georgian people can relate to the Samsonadze family, says Ramishvili, because the cartoon deals with social and other themes relevant to Georgian life.

blogs.telegraph.co.uk

FINANCIAL TIMES: US urges shared cyber-attack defense

The US and its NATO allies have been urged to collaborate more intensely to fend off cyber-attacks. NATO set up a joint defense operation to focus on cyber-threats after massive attacks on Estonian government websites in 2007 were traced to computers within Russia. That type of assault has been repeated against sites in Georgia and others out of favor with the Kremlin, while Chinese hackers have been accused of stealing as much data from US military employees and contractors, in just one operation, as is contained in the Library of Congress.

www.ft.com

THE INDEPENDENT: Stuck in the middle of Abkhazia

Only 3,500 of the 55,000 people who live in Georgia's Russian-occupied Gali region have been given the Abkhaz passports that would entitle them to vote. The process of granting passports in the region was stopped amid fears that Abkhazia would be destabilized by such a large number of ethnic Georgian citizens. "Their position is horrible," says a foreign NGO worker who used to work in Abkhazia. "The Abkhaz think that they're potential traitors, and if a war starts they'll fight with Georgia; the Georgians also see them as traitors for living inside the separatist state."

www.independent.co.uk

THINK TANKS/NGOs**Japan helping Georgia eliminate traces of Russia's military presence**

The Japanese government has made a major grant to Georgia to assist in mine-clearing of areas once occupied by Russian military bases in Mtskheta and Sagarejo. The grant agreement was signed last month by Japan's ambassador to Georgia and representatives of the British organization Halo Trust, which has been working for many years in Georgia. Special equipment for mine clearing of the area will be purchased with the Japanese grant.

eng.expertclub.ge/