

GEORGIA UPDATE

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US special envoy Richard Holbrooke visited Georgia this week, hailing Georgia for its contribution to the Alliance's mission in Afghanistan. "We appreciate the fact that like the American troops, like the British and Canadian troops, the Georgians go to Afghanistan without any national caveats," he said after touring the Krtsanisi Military Center, where Georgian troops are being trained before deploying to Afghanistan. Holbrooke also told President Saakashvili that Washington is giving careful consideration to Georgia's offer to use the country as part of an arms supply route. "This is a very important effort to reduce the dependency on a single lifeline into Afghanistan, and again we are very grateful to Georgia for having opened up these opportunities," Holbrooke said. Georgia has already deployed 170 soldiers to Afghanistan, and has plans to expand its contingent by about 700 this spring. "We Georgians understand that in many ways the future of Georgia, the country's unity, depends on the success of the mission in Afghanistan," Saakashvili said.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"Georgian troops are going to play a vital role in the effort to combat terrorism around the world."

— Richard Holbrooke, US Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan

"We have real differences with Russia on several issues. And we intend to use the NATO-Russia Council as a forum for frank discussions about areas where we disagree. We will use it to press Russia to live up to its commitments on Georgia and to reiterate our commitment to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states."

—US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

UPCOMING MILESTONES

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

Feb. 26: President Saakashvili to deliver State of the Nation address

Mar. 1-3: Greek Parliament speaker visits Georgia

Mar. 4: FM Vashadze visits the Netherlands

Mar. 4-5: Latvian Parliament speaker visits Georgia

Mar. 11-12: Parliament Speaker Bakradze visits Lithuania

Mar. 15-17: State Minister Yakobashvili visits Berlin

Mar. 16-18: Slovak FM visits Georgia

Mar. 30: Next round of Geneva talks

TOP STORIES

In Landmark for Political Pluralism, 13 Parties Agree on Terms to Launch Dedicated Political Channel

Thirteen political parties and the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) agreed this week on the launch of a new political channel, which will become available on GPB's Second Channel. The station, modeled in part on BBC Parliament in the UK and C-Span in the US, will launch today. The memorandum of understanding that governs its operations was drafted over the course of several months in a process facilitated by the National Democratic Institute, a widely respected international NGO. The channel will be broadcast nationally via satellite and will provide live coverage of the Parliament's plenary sittings and committee sessions, as well as of "daily, non-edited and live coverage of the opposition parties." According to the agreement, the channel also will organize debates at least once in a week on the draft laws being discussed in Parliament. During non-session periods, it will air debates on various political issues and offer daily time to opposition parties to use as they wish, without any editorial interference. The memorandum will be in force until next parliamentary elections scheduled for 2012.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: 13 Parties Agree on Terms of Political Channel](#)

French Sale of Tanks to Russia Raises New Alarms, in Wake of Mistral Deal

In the wake of France's proposed sale of elite Mistral-class warships to Moscow becomes official, a new deal to sell French tanks to Russia has intensified concerns about a NATO nation arming Moscow. In London, President Saakashvili said the Mistral sale was "very usual and very risky" and could lead to a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia in the Black Sea. Yet Saakashvili said he was even more worried by proposals by France's Panhard to sell armored personnel carriers to Moscow. "The tank issue is 10 times bigger," he said. These light-weight tanks are far superior to anything Russia currently has and are a threat not only to Georgia but all its neighbors. "This will enable Russia to invade any Eastern European country or any country in the Commonwealth of Independent States which they would normally need weeks to do, within hours," Saakashvili said.

[THE TIMES: Georgia denounces French sale of tanks, warships](#)
[CIVIL GEORGIA: Saakashvili: Russia-France arms deal 'very risky'](#)

Georgian NGOs Take Russia to Court Over 2008 Invasion

Georgian citizens filed a complaint last week with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, alleging that Russia violated European human rights law during Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia. The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) and the London-based European Human Rights Advocacy Centre (EHRAC) submitted 32 groups of full applications to the Court on behalf of 134 Georgian citizens. They charge that Russia committed scores of serious violations of the European Convention on Human Rights. The applications primarily concern cases of shelling and air attacks on villages; destruction of property; the killing or injuring of civilians; and the deliberate burning and looting of houses located primarily in Georgia's Russian-occupied territory of S. Ossetia. The complaints have been lodged against Russia based on the principle of "effective control," which the Russian forces have been exerting on Georgia's territories. According to senior EHRAC lawyer Joanna Evans, the evidence is strong: "Russia had 'effective control' over S. Ossetia over an extended period of time because of the assistances given in a number of ways militarily, politically and economically," she said. "In addition, Russia had occupied vast areas of undisputed Georgian territory for a considerable period after the eruption of the conflict in August." According to a GYLA litigation lawyer, Moscow will be held responsible if the Court finds it was Russia's obligation to protect the ethnic-Georgian population in occupied territories.

[RADIO NETHERLANDS: Georgia takes Russia to court over war](#)
[CIVIL GEORGIA: Georgians Lodge Suit Against Russia at ECHR](#)

IMF Sees Signs of Georgia Recovery, Says Economy Should Grow at Least 2 Percent

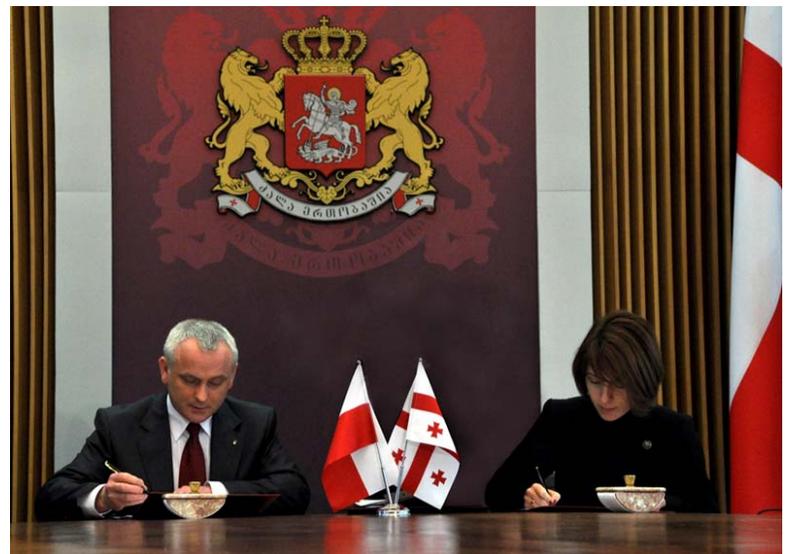
Georgia's economy is likely to grow more than 2 percent in 2010 if the country restores foreign investor confidence and maintains political stability, a senior IMF official said. "The 2 percent growth projection for 2010 is the one that we think is realistic, it's even conservative in some ways," said Edward Gardner, the International Monetary Fund's senior representative in Georgia. "The worst of the confidence crisis in Georgia is behind, but the process of turning to steady growth is still some ways ahead," he added. "It depends critically on attracting private capital." Meanwhile PM Gilauri also expressed confidence in the country's recovery as positive trends in Georgia's business sector indicate future economic growth. "Companies' turnover last month increased by 10 percent compared to last January," he said. "I hope that this positive trend will continue, enabling Georgia to show figures of economic growth by the end of the first quarter."

[REUTERS: IMF sees signs of Georgia recovery, more to be done](#)
[CIVIL GEORGIA: PM says Signs of Growth Emerge](#)

Nodar Kumaritashvili Is Buried in Bakuriani, As Georgia Announces Plans to Honor Fallen Luger

Nearly 2,000 people gathered last week to pay their last respects to Nodar Kumaritashvili, the 21-year-old Olympian luger athlete who died during a practice run hours before the opening of the Vancouver Olympics. The funeral was held at a local church in Kumaritashvili's hometown of Bakuriani. The mourners, including President Saakashvili, paid tribute to his prowess as a luger and to his hometown of Bakuriani's tradition of producing exceptional winter athletes. Dozens of wreaths piled up outside the house, shops town displayed large posters of luger in their windows, and a makeshift shrine was set up outside the tourist-information office. President Saakashvili said plans were under way to build a luge track in Bakuriani in honor of Kumaritashvili. Saakashvili said Bakuriani is at the center of the country's efforts to revive a winter sports tradition, and plans are under way to build new ice skating rinks, ski lifts, and other facilities. Three of the eight members of Georgia's Olympic Team come from Bakuriani and all attended the same school.

[NEW YORK TIMES: In Georgian Village, Plans to Honor Luge Athlete](#)
[WALL STREET JOURNAL: Georgians Pay Final Respects](#)



Georgia's National Security Advisor, Eka Tkeshelashvili, and her Polish counterpart, Aleksander Shchiglo last week signed a security cooperation agreement in Tbilisi. The document covers cooperation plan for on energy and cyber threats, the fight against terrorism, and military cooperation. The presence of Russian troops on Georgian soil, Tkeshelashvili said, was the greatest threat facing the country. "The fact of occupation means that Russia is prepared to violate the norms of international law again," she emphasized. "Therefore, this fact is a danger not only for Georgia, but for Europe as well."

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

THE GUARDIAN/LE MONDE/DIE WELT/EL PAIS:**Don't cosy up to Russia, Europe**

In an article published by nearly a dozen European newspapers (including *The Guardian*), 18 Russian dissidents—Garry Kasparov and Elena Bonner-Sakharov among them—unleashed a blistering critique of Moscow's efforts to silence dissent of its authoritarian regime. Having stifled internal criticism at home, they write, the Russian government is now turning its attention to those who criticize them from abroad—and it is being abetted in this project by businesses and governments in Europe. The last victim of Moscow's censors and their western friends is called Perviy Kavkazskiy (First Caucasian).

This young Russian-language television station was, until the end of January, freely available to people living in Russian-speaking areas. Now, Eutelsat—the leading European satellite provider based in Paris—has taken the channel off the air and refuses to implement the contract negotiated with First-Caucasian.

www.guardian.co.uk

www.welt.de

www.lemonde.fr

www.elpais.com

WASHINGTON POST: Editorial-France's valentine to Russia

We find it surprising that Sarkozy's response to Russia's near-complete failure to implement the ceasefire he himself negotiated after Moscow's invasion of Georgia is to furnish the Russian navy with a vessel that, if deployed to the Black Sea, would make Russia far more capable of inflicting damage on Georgia the next time around—or on any other neighbor that has a coastline and happens to offend Putin's sense of imperial entitlement. Some French officials have attempted to soften the blow by pointing out that the French navy has used this class of ships—bristling with formidable weaponry of a technological caliber not available in Russia today—for humanitarian missions. The rationalization is so ludicrous that even those proffering it must be embarrassed.

www.washingtonpost.com

THE TIMES: French warships for Russia—storms ahead

So the stage is set for France to resume its role—at least in American eyes—as an unreliable ally. But France's foreign ministry is unhappy for all the obvious diplomatic reasons. Selling Mistral to Russia would make France the bad boy again with the US and upset the old Soviet bloc states which are now in NATO and the EU. Then there are those who think that Russia does not really mean to buy any Mistral but is playing the French along to cause trouble in the western Alliance.

timescorrespondents.typepad.com

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Little war, big consequences in Georgia

Former State Department official Ronald Asmus demonstrates in his new book that there is no evidence of any American or Western encouragement of Tbilisi to act militarily and that President Saakashvili's move was one of desperation by a leader who felt cornered, abandoned by the West, and with his and his regime's survival threatened. Asmus argues that the record shows that at every level US officials gave Georgia a clear message: If you decide to get drawn into a military conflict, you'll be alone. Unfortunately, these signals may not always have been interpreted as clearly as Washington wished. "This was the clash between a 21st-century Western world that saw the extension of democratic integration closer to Moscow's borders as a positive step toward greater stability and a Russia that was returning to the habits of 19th-century great power thinking and viewed it as a threat."

online.wsj.com

JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION: An unintended effect of Russia's open game—Major schism in the Georgian opposition

To Moscow's chagrin, a major new schism has appeared in the Georgian opposition "monolith." Ex-premier Zodar Noghaideli's rendezvous with Russia's PM Putin in late December and, even more significantly, the agreement he inked with United Russia—the party without any democratic credentials—caused a major rupture in Georgia's opposition camp. Two of the three leaders in the Alliance for Georgia tri-party coalition came out with harsh criticism against Noghaideli last week and proposed the "all minus one formula" to exclude the openly pro-Moscow Noghaideli from the opposition unity in the run-up to the local election.

jamestownfoundation.blogspot.com

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Saakashvili slams French plan to sell warship to Russia

President Saakashvili told reporters in London, where he met British officials, that if Russia "gets tanks, ships, missiles—technology which he's also shopping for—then we are getting into a very, very risky zone." He said Georgia has had an "informal exchange of opinions" with Paris about the warship deal but hadn't made an official protest. Saakashvili warned that the "very unusual and very risky" warship deal could be seen as a "reward" to France from Moscow for not forcing Russia to fully comply with the terms of the ceasefire—a ceasefire mediated by Sarkozy himself.

online.wsj.com

THE ECONOMIST: Habsburgs' new empire—The princess & the bear

Georgia struggles to make its case in Germany, which sees trade ties with Russia as vital and the ex-Soviet Caucasian republic as troublesome. So who better to burnish Georgia's image there than a German-educated Habsburg? Georgia's new ambassador to Berlin, once she presents her credentials to the president next month, will be Gabriela Maria Charlotte Felicitas Elisabeth Antonia von Habsburg-Lothringen, princess Imperial and Archduchess of Austria, Princess Royal of Hungary and Bohemia. An accomplished artist who has lived in Georgia for nearly a decade, Ms. von Habsburg will not, despite her titles, have the cash to match the efforts of Russia's ambassador to Germany. But she may still help Germans think again about Georgia's European roots and future.

www.economist.com

HOLLYWOOD REPORTER: Renny Harlin goes to war for love

Renowned filmmaker Renny Harlin unveiled footage of "Georgia," his latest action thriller, at the European Film Market last week, calling the war film the "most personal movie of my career." Harlin expressed his excitement in Berlin: "I had 40 tanks, eight helicopters, four fighter jets and 2,000 troops, all in one scene sometimes," he said. "What filmmaker gets this? Ever?" But, with Andy Garcia as real-life President Saakashvili making impassioned speeches and scenes of crowds chanting "Georgia! Georgia," will the movie find an audience in Russia? "It's not pro-Georgia, it's anti-war," Harlin said.

www.hollywoodreporter.com

THINK TANKS/NGOS**CENTER FOR EUROPEAN POLICY & ANALYSIS: Ukraine—the neighbor and the neighborhood**

It would be more productive to use money spent on propping up public finances in Ukraine elsewhere. A good example comes from Tbilisi, where Georgian authorities have opened a landmark House of Europe, hosting exhibitions, lectures and events to boost the public's exposure to European culture and ideas. As the EU sets up its own multi-billion-euro "External Action Service," it could do a lot worse than use a sliver of the budget to set up similar institutions in every city in Ukraine.

www.cepa.org