

GEORGIA UPDATE

WEEKLY EDITION • 11 March 2010

A Publication of the Government of Georgia

www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge

TOP STORIES

- Mayoral Race in Tbilisi Heats Up as New Candidates Emerge
- Armenian, Georgian Presidents Pledge Closer Cooperation
- Finnish Diplomat Becomes New UN Envoy for Georgia
- European Union Signs Comprehensive Aviation Agreement With Georgia
- Economic Diplomacy by Prime Minister Yields New Investments from Middle East
- Georgia's Looks to Bring Unique Cuisine to World's Tables
- Georgia Books Itself Rugby World Cup Spot



Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk (right) met with Prime Minister Gilauri of Georgia during a visit to Tbilisi aimed at boosting economic ties and regional security. Tusk also held talks with President Saakashvili, who hailed Poland for its successful economy and for having initiated the EU's Easter Partnership program. Tusk also visited Polish members of the European Union Observer Mission in Georgia. The EUMM, comprising some 225 members, is the only international mission monitoring areas near Georgia's Russian-occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

METRO: Interview—Mikheil Saakashvili

LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR: The television channel that gets on Putin's nerves

THE GUARDIAN: Georgia's olive branch, Russia's call

AFP: Georgia president vows democratic, economic reforms

BLOOMBERG: Putin warned Georgia two years before war, Saakashvili says

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Medvedev in Paris—vive la Georgie, monsieur?

REUTERS: US warship conducts joint training with Georgia

BLOOMBERG: Ex-Saakashvili ally meets Putin in Moscow; accused of betrayal

THE TELEGRAPH: Georgia's 2014 Sochi Olympics appeal

EURASIANET: Judges in Georgia learn to "just say no" to outside influences

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"Significant human rights achievements included the passage of a reformed criminal procedure code providing for fair trial protections and for the introduction in Tbilisi of a limited jury trial system; and passage of an amended election code calling for the first direct election of the Tbilisi mayor."

—The US State Department in its Annual Human Rights Report on Georgia, released March 11

"The United States encourages Georgia's democratic reform process and the desire for an open, transparent, and free process during Georgia's upcoming local elections."

—US Vice President Biden

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Mar. 11-12: Parliament Speaker Bakradze visits Lithuania

Mar. 24-25: State Minister Yakobashvili visits Berlin

Mar. 16-18: Slovak FM visits Georgia

Mar. 18-20: State Minister Yakobashvili in Vienna

Mar. 26-29: State Minister Yakobashvili in Brussels

Mar. 29-30: EU parliamentary delegation visits Georgia

Mar. 30: Next round of Geneva talks

Apr. 4: Orthodox & Catholic Easter

Apr.5-9: NATO PA Delegation visits Georgia

Apr.12-13: President of Georgia participates in the Nuclear Summit in Washington, DC

Apr.19-20: Parliament Speaker Bakradze visits Rome

TOP STORIES

Mayoral Race in Tbilisi Heats Up as New Candidates Emerge

The Tbilisi mayoral race—set for May 30 and heralded as an important milestone in Georgia's democratic progress—saw the entry of several new candidates over the past week. Among them is Irakli Alasania, the leader of Alliance for Georgia, who launched his campaign on March 4. Other mayoral candidates include Giorgi Chanturia of the Christian-Democratic Movement, Gogi Topadze of the Industrialist party, former finance minister Davit Iakobidze, and political neophytes Nika Ivanishvili and Tamaz Vashadze. Meanwhile, Georgia's Conservative Party, the Party of People, and the Movement for Fair Georgia have announced plans to select a common candidate on April 9. The May 30 election marks the first time that Tbilisi's mayor will be elected directly by city residents—a fact the US State Department called a "significant human rights achievement" in its annual human rights report, released today. The government has urged the international community to send monitors to observe the fairness of the election. Said President Saakashvili last week: "We want Georgia to become closer to Europe through these elections."

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Alasania Launches Campaign for Mayor](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: One More Mayoral Candidate to be Named in April](#)

Armenian, Georgian Presidents Pledge Closer Cooperation

President Saakashvili and Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan last week pledged to deepen already close bilateral ties after meeting in Georgia's Black Sea coastal region of Ajara. Saakashvili described his Armenian counterpart as "a very brave person" and applauded Armenia's progress toward reform. "Our two countries have never had such cloudless relations and close partnership," Saakashvili said. The Presidents discussed issues related to the Kazbegi-Zemor Larsi border reopening between Georgia and Russia, a measure that provides Armenia with land access to Russia via Georgia.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Armenian, Georgian leaders pledge closer ties](#)

Finnish Diplomat Becomes New UN Envoy for Georgia

A Finnish diplomat, Antti Turunen, has been appointed as the UN representative for Georgia, replacing Johan Verbeke of Belgium. "Ambassador Turunen is an accomplished diplomat whose skills were necessary in dealing with Russia's 2008 invasion during our OSCE chairmanship," Finnish FM Stubb said. Before this appointment Turunen had been Finland's ambassador to the OSCE since 2007. Turunen welcomed last week the reopening of the Kazbegi-Zemor Larsi border crossing point between Russia and Georgia. "There are still many years ahead before you can talk about normalization of the situation," he said, "but it's a good thing that the border is open."

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Finnish Diplomat Named UN Envoy for Georgia](#)

EU Signs Comprehensive Aviation Agreement With Georgia

Georgia and the EU last week signed a comprehensive air services agreement that will open and integrate their aviation markets. A common aviation area will gradually be put in place, with Georgia's legislation being brought into line with EU standards—particularly on aviation safety, security, the environment, consumer protection, traffic management, and competition. The agreement is expected to generate opportunities for additional traffic, as it will enable all EU airlines to operate direct flights to Georgia from anywhere in the Union and vice versa for Georgian carriers. The agreement will remove all restrictions on prices and on the number of flights.

[EUROPOLITICS: Comprehensive EU-Georgia Aviation Agreement](#)

Georgia Books Itself Rugby World Cup Spot

Georgia has qualified for the 2011 Rugby World Cup in New Zealand after a hard-fought 17-9 victory over Spain. Georgia won seven out of eight matches during the 2010 European Nations Cup and the World Cup's European qualification tournament, earning the Georgian team a top ranking. The World Cup kicks off on September 9.

[AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Georgia Books Rugby World Cup](#)

Economic Diplomacy by Prime Minister Yields New Investments from Middle East

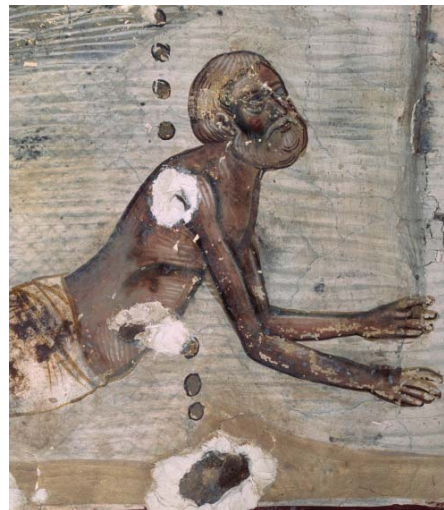
Georgian PM Gilauri returned from a visit to the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Qatar to promote investment opportunities in Georgia. While in Dubai, Gilauri met with many senior officials and executives, including from the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC). Said DIFC chief executive officer Abdulla Mohammed Al Awar: "We are very keen to explore new linkages with the Georgian financial services industry. Prime Minister Gilauri's visit gave us a chance to discuss ways of initiating new financial industry ties with Georgia." President Saakashvili last year turned to the Middle East to revive foreign investment that slowed to a trickle following Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the global economic slump. Last October, Georgia netted as much as \$1 billion of investment from the UAE within the next two to three years. A month later, a trip to Qatar yielded a pledge to "invest heavily" in Georgia.

[BLOOMBERG: Georgian PM in Middle East in Search of Investment](#)
[CIVIL GEORGIA: PM Gilauri visits UAE, Kuwait](#)

Georgia Looks to Bring Unique Cuisine to World's Tables

Georgian officials are planning to trademark a wide range of national dishes and products to boost the presence of the country's unique cuisine and agricultural products in international markets. "Georgia has exceptional agricultural breeds, organic products, and distinctive cuisine and we are increasing efforts to tighten their quality control and promote them on international markets," Georgia's patent office chief Irakli Gvaladze said. Inspired by the EU's system of labeling and protecting regional foods, the trademark project will establish food-quality commissions to ensure that producers observe standards when making, for example, khachipurri, a Georgian cheese pie. Georgia has already taken steps to trademark its wine, registering 18 local appellations with international bodies. The trademark project is expected to launch as soon as Georgia's parliament and agriculture officials endorse the trademark package and finalize an export agreement with the EU, respectively.

[AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Georgia Looks to Bring Unique Cuisine to World's Tables](#)

**Besik Kharanaouli in Paris**

Quidam Publisher and the Georgian Embassy in France hosted an exhibition in Paris this week showcasing Georgian author Besik Kharanaouli's newly translated work, *The Book of Amba Besarion*. The volume was translated from Georgian by Maria Frering and Omar Tourmanaouli and was published with the help of the National Book Center.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

METRO: Interview–Mikheil Saakashvili

"My government is trying to accomplish major reforms," President Saakashvili told Metro, the daily newspaper published worldwide. "We're in a hurry and are impatient." Saakashvili dismissed Russian criticism about him: "The Russians want people to believe that all Georgians are hotheaded and unpredictable and that nobody except Russia can rule the region," he said. "So when the president of Georgia, especially an outspoken one, dares to challenge Russia, Putin says, 'Saakashvili, he's hotheaded.'" Added Saakashvili: "Russia has a long tradition of calling people they don't like crazy and sending them to mental hospitals." He also invoked the months-long opposition rallies in front of the presidential palace last year. "I gave them space in the middle of the capital, and they protested against my alleged hotheadedness, but their protests failed completely. If you needed a scientific experiment of my coolheadedness, this was it."

www.metro.us

LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR: The television channel that gets on Putin's nerves

First Caucasus, a channel run by a young team in love with justice and freedom, disturbs Moscow so much that it has been thrown out of French satellite operator Eutelsat's network. The new channel is independent of Moscow and transmits news in Russian to ex-Soviet republics. Eutelsat told Georgian Public Broadcasting that there was no space on the previously allotted satellite after forming an alternative agreement with Moscow. "The Kremlin calls us 'terrorists,' but our goal is only to give other information in the Russian language," Ekaterina Kotrikadze, the editor-in-chief said, adding: "We want to tell the facts the way they really are and give all the points of view. It is very simple but, for the Russians, it has the effect of a bomb."

tempsreel.nouvelobs.com

THE GUARDIAN: Georgia's olive branch, Russia's call

It is extraordinary that George Hewitt's article in the Guardian hardly mentions Russia: the country with thousands of troops stationed in both territories; that is forcing the remaining inhabitants to take Russian citizenship and has systematically ejected more than 350,000 Georgians, the largest ethnic group in Abkhazia, and other nationalities in a brutal ethnic cleansing campaign. Georgia has offered the olive branch. I do hope it will be accepted, but it is wishful thinking to believe this decision will be made in S. Ossetia or Abkhazia. It is the Kremlin that calls the shots in both territories.

www.guardian.co.uk

AFP: Georgia president vows democratic, economic reforms

President Saakashvili last week vowed to pursue democratic and economic reforms during the annual state of the nation address before Georgia's parliament. "Our choice is a European, civilized, modern, and democratic Georgia," he said, adding that Georgia's foreign policy was aimed at "our return to the European family and integration into NATO and the EU." He also announced plans to offer a tax amnesty to all the country's TV channels "so Georgia's democracy and political culture can be developed with their help." Meanwhile Saakashvili said municipal elections this spring would be held fairly and called on Western nations to send monitors to observe the vote. "We want Georgia to become closer to Europe through these elections," he said.

www.google.com

BLOOMBERG: Putin warned Georgia two years before war, Saakashvili says

Vladimir Putin warned Russia would occupy part of Georgia two years before Russian forces invaded, President Saakashvili said last week in an interview with the Russian magazine *Vlast*. "In 2006, Putin told me he will create a northern Cyprus for us," he said. "It was a concrete war scenario, he really warned us." War broke out in August 2008 because Putin got the "wrong signal" from the West.

www.bloomberg.com

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Medvedev in Paris–vive la Georgie?

Paris is rapidly developing a special bilateral relationship with Moscow, in some respects at the expense of the EU and ultimately NATO. Russian President Medvedev visited Paris last week for a three-day official visit to launch a new Franco-Russian "privileged" or "strategic" partnership. Meanwhile, official French policy has clearly abandoned any pretense of implementing the August 2008 ceasefire in Georgia, which President Sarkozy co-signed and France undertook to "guarantee" on the EU's behalf, after the Russian invasion of that country. The issue of Georgia is far too insignificant in official French eyes to be allowed to affect the latest grand design of French foreign policy.

www.jamestown.org

REUTERS: US warship conducts joint training with Georgia

US naval forces launched exercises with Georgia's coast guard last week along the Black Sea coast, in a sign of Washington's support for the government of President Saakashvili. "We'll show the Georgian team how the warship is made and what kind of equipment we use," Commander Lavan said. The two-day training will include law enforcement and ship-boarding drills.

www.rferl.org

BLOOMBERG: Ex-Saakashvili ally meets Putin in Moscow; accused of betrayal

Georgian opposition leader Nino Burjanadze traveled to Russia in a bid to rebuild relations destroyed by Moscow's August 2008 invasion and occupation of Georgia's territories. "Her behavior is nothing but a small betrayal of her country," parliamentary member Gabashvili said. "She's there to find allies for her own political ambitions." Commented Alex Rondeli, head of a Tbilisi-based think-tank: "As long as Russian troops remain on Georgian territory, the opposition must remain united with the government. Only after the Russians withdraw can Georgia resume normal talks."

www.bloomberg.com

EURASIANET: Judges in Georgia learn to "just say no" to outside influences

A training school for prospective judges is winning cautious acclaim for fostering improvements in Georgia's much-maligned judicial system. The state-run High School of Justice (HSOJ), established in 2006, is an attempt to improve judicial performance and alter perceptions of the system. All Georgian lawyers hoping to become judges must now first complete the HSOJ curriculum. The 14-month program emphasizes practical experience; students hold mock trials and intern with Tbilisi City Court judges. Their regular coursework includes seminars with visiting foreign judges. HSOJ Director Shota Rukhadze affirms that the school's curriculum teaches students to examine every relationship and transaction for a potential conflict of interest -- not an easy task in a culture where personal and family relationships play a vital role in day-to-day life. Representatives of Western donor organizations that have worked with the HSOJ generally express satisfaction with the school's results, but declined to be cited.

www.eurasianet.org

THE TELEGRAPH: Georgia's 2014 Sochi Olympics appeal

Just before the Olympic flag was passed from Vancouver to Sochi, Russia, where the 2014 Winter Olympics will be held, the Georgian Olympic team issued a statement imploring the world "not to forget that just a few miles from Sochi, Russian troops have invaded a sovereign country and brutally seized and occupied an entire region that is not theirs." It also makes you wonder about the wisdom of awarding the Games to a city which has such a distance to go in preparing for them: "We will accomplish in 3 years what would normally be accomplished in a century," said Sochi's mayor.

blogs.telegraph.co.uk