

GEORGIA UPDATE

WEEKLY EDITION • 25 March 2010

A Publication of the Government of Georgia

www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge

TOP STORIES

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- European Union on Track to Sign Visa Facilitation Deal With Georgia in June
- Georgia Justice Minister Briefs ICC Prosecutors on Russian War Crimes
- IMF Sees Signs of Recovery in Georgia, Disburses New Funding
- EBRD Commits €180 Million to Georgia for Major Highway, Energy Infrastructure Projects
- United Nations Condemns Russia Over Sochi Olympics Construction

GEORGIA UPDATE IS TAKING AN EASTER BREAK * * * THE UPDATE WILL NEXT APPEAR ON APRIL 8



Members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) visited Georgia last week to discuss the upcoming local elections, constitutional and electoral reforms, media freedom, and minority issues. President Saakashvili and other senior officials met with Mátyás Eorsi of Hungary (left, with Parliament Speaker Bakradze) and Kastriot Islami of Albania, who are co-mediators on Georgia from PACE's monitoring committee. Georgia's security and occupation concerns are expected to be discussed at PACE's next session in April. Eorsi has especially positive comments on Georgia's efforts with respect to minority issues. "It was a wonderful idea to establish the Council of Ethnic Minorities in the Public Defender's Office," he said. "There are a lot of ethnic and confessional groups in Georgia and one shouldn't be made more important than another as this would create conflict between them."

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

OXFORD ANALYTICA: Nogaideli's Kremlin ties turn political game

FINANCIAL TIMES: Moscow tightens grip on Abkhazia

RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY: Interview—Garry Kasparov talks about Putin's endgame

EURASIANET: Tbilisi trying new way to woo Abkhazia, South Ossetia

PROJECT SYNDICATE: The Kremlin temptation

BLOOMBERG: Georgia offers ports to Kazakhstan for grain exports to Europe

CANADIAN PRESS: Family of luger killed at Olympics will receive insurance money from Games

THE INDEPENDENT: Eating with the enemy—why Russia loves Georgian food

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"We are grateful to the government of Georgia for joining our efforts to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay."

—US State Department Spokesman Crowley on Georgia's decision to accept three Guantanamo detainees

"The strengthening of relations between Georgia and the EU is a stimulus for Georgia to deliver on further democratic reforms.... The EU expects Russia to fulfill all its commitments from the ceasefire agreements."

—Herman Von Rompuy, President of the European Council

"We welcome Georgia's ongoing cooperation with my office and the prospect that Georgian institutions could operate with the Court in a complementary way."

—ICC Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Mar. 24-25: State Minister Yakobashvili visits Berlin

Mar. 25: President Saakashvili participates in the European People's Party assembly in Brussels

Mar. 26-29: State Minister Yakobashvili in Brussels

Mar. 27-28: US House of Representatives Democracy Commission visits Georgia

Mar. 29-30: EU Parliamentary delegation visits Georgia

Mar. 30: Next round of Geneva talks

Mar. 30: Romanian FM visits Georgia

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

President Saakashvili to Attend Nuclear Summit in Washington Next Month

President Saakashvili will visit the US next month to take part in an international Nuclear Security Summit hosted by President Obama in Washington. He will also meet there with senior Administration and Congressional officials, and speak at the Brookings Institution, the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, and at Harvard's Kennedy School. Meanwhile, President Saakashvili is in Brussels this week to participate in the European People's Party, summit where his ruling National Movement Party is an observer member. Saakashvili met with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen to discuss Georgia's integration into the Alliance.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Saakashvili to Participate in Nuclear Security Summit in Washington](#)**European Union on Track to Sign Visa Facilitation Deal With Georgia in June**

The EU is on track to sign a landmark visa facilitation deal with Georgia this June, highlighting Tbilisi's growing relations with the EU. The president of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, last week said EU-Georgia relations were "strengthening rapidly," adding that Georgia is the only S. Caucasus country to have successfully negotiated visa facilitation and readmission agreements with the EU. "The strengthening of relations between Georgia and the EU is a stimulus for Georgia to deliver on further democratic reforms," Van Rompuy said, adding: "We hope that we can soon fix a date for signature, possibly in early June." In addition to the visa deal, Georgian and EU authorities are also finalizing negotiations on a comprehensive free trade agreement. Van Rompuy concluded his statement reiterating the EU's steadfast support for Georgia's territorial integrity: "The EU expects Russia to fulfill all its commitments from the ceasefire agreements."

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Van Rompuy-EU-Georgia Ties "Strengthening Rapidly"](#)**Georgia Justice Minister Briefs ICC Prosecutors on Russian War Crimes**

Justice Minister Adeishvili last week briefed International Criminal Court (ICC) chief prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo on Moscow's prolific human rights violations of ethnic Georgians during Russia's 2008 invasion. Adeishvili was accompanied by Tina Burjaliani, the Georgian first deputy justice minister, and Payam Akhavan, a Canadian professor and legal advisor to the Georgian government. "The delegation presented Georgia's views on the alleged crimes perpetrated during the armed conflict that took place in Georgia in August, 2008, including forced displacement of civilians," the ICC said. "They also briefed the prosecutor on the ongoing investigations in Georgia into grave violations committed by all parties to the conflict." Moreno-Ocampo's office announced in August 2008 that it was examining possible war crimes, days after Russia's invasion and subsequent militarization of Georgia's territory of S. Ossetia. The ICC can only prosecute suspected war criminals if countries are unable or unwilling to do so. Unlike Russia, Georgia is a state party to the Rome Statute, hence the ICC has jurisdiction over war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide possibly committed in Georgia.

[DUTCH NEWS: Georgian officials brief ICC prosecutors on war](#)**IMF Sees Signs of Recovery in Georgia, Disburses New Funding**

The IMF last week agreed to disburse \$148.7 million of new funding to Georgia under the country's IMF loan program, saying there were signs the economic recovery was gaining steam. With the economy on the mend, the IMF said Georgia's 2010 economic program would focus on improving the fiscal situation, with a focus on "preserving debt sustainability, macroeconomic stability and facilitating the exit from IMF balance of payments support." According to the IMF, further strengthening of Georgia's economy will require more foreign direct investment and credit growth.

[REUTERS: IMF Approves \\$148 Million Loan Disbursement](#)**EBRD Commits €180 Million to Georgia for Major Highway, Energy Infrastructure Projects**

The European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) last week committed €180 million to help finance two major infrastructure development projects in Georgia. They include a new double-track railway route located on Tbilisi's periphery, helping to divert cargo traffic—including Caspian Sea petroleum products en route to the Black Sea—around the capital. Another €80 million loan has been allocated to the Georgian State Elektrosystem, a state-owned electricity transmission company, to finance the construction of a 315-km, high-voltage electricity line between western and eastern Georgia. The project will include the construction of a converter station in Akhaltsikhe, close to Turkish border, which will interconnect the Georgian and Turkish power networks. "This project will open the door to future investments in the electricity generation sector, in particular in renewable energy, for which the Caucasus region has huge potential," EBRD President Thomas Mirow said last week in Tbilisi. President Saakashvili said that both of the projects were of "historic" importance.

**[CIVIL GEORGIA: EBRD, Georgia Sign Two Projects of EUR 180mln](#)
[EURASIANET: EBRD to Sponsor Tbilisi-Bypass Railway Project](#)****UN Condemns Russia Over Sochi Olympics Construction**

The UN criticized Russia for ignoring the ecological impact of construction projects for the 2014 Sochi Olympics. According to a newly released UN Environment Program report, Russia's government assessments do not take into account the effects that various projects will have on the unique wildlife in the Black Sea region. Environmental activists say the ecosystems have already sustained irreversible damage, and bird and bear habitats have been destroyed. The Kremlin says it is aware of the concerns and accuses the activists of trying to sabotage the Games as a public relations stunt. The UN report was based on the body's three-day trip to Sochi in January, which involved visits to ecologically sensitive road and railway construction sites. "The mission observed that decisions taken at the political level are taking too long," the report said, recommending that Russia conduct a "comprehensive assessment of the overall impact of the Olympic and tourism projects on the ecosystem."

[WASHINGTON POST: Russia Criticized over Sochi Olympics Construction](#)

The Georgian rugby team, Lelos, walloped Russia on Saturday. Its whopping 36-8 victory in the last round of the European Nations Cup earned the team the top spot in Division One. A day after the match, President Saakashvili awarded the team the Order of Honor, thanking them for dedicating their victory to the memory of fallen soldiers of the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia. "I do not want to politicize sports," he told the team during the ceremony. "We should not carry hatred toward athletes and we do not have any. Sports are about friendship, but not a single Russian television station reported on your victory."

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

OXFORD ANALYTICA: Nogaideli's Kremlin ties turn political game

As things stand, the opposition will hand victory to the government candidate in the Tbilisi mayoral race. Parties close to Nogaideli have already spoken of “thunder and lightning” if the elections are rigged, which in Georgian political parlance means “if the opposition fails to win.” Winning the local elections is not Nogaideli's objective. He is betting on the Alasania moderates losing to the government humiliatingly and clearly. Nogaideli (potentially backed by Burjanadze) would then try to emerge as the Georgian version of Ukraine's Yanukovich—a mainstream figure with passable Western credentials and the Kremlin's backing for the 2013 presidential election.

www.oxan.com

FINANCIAL TIMES: Moscow tightens grip on Abkhazia

Russia has signed a package of military and economic deals with Georgia's Russian-occupied territory of Abkhazia that will tighten Moscow's grip. State-owned Russian Railways plans to lease the Abkhaz railroad, while other Russian companies will take control of a port and airport near the Abkhaz capital. Eka Tkeshelashvili, the head of Georgia's National Security Council, said the agreement was a “dangerous signal that Russia was very seriously planning to bolster its military presence in Georgia and the Black Sea region.”

www.ft.com

RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY: Interview—Garry Kasparov talks about Putin's endgame

“I reckon that there won't be a Russian intervention in the South Caucasus in the near future, because Georgia's military adventure revealed the weakness of the Russian army,” former world chess champion Garry Kasparov told RFE/RL. “Furthermore, the international repercussions were shattering to some extent—there is no intention to repeat operations of such kind in the future.” Kasparov also discussed the future of democracy in Georgia, highlighting the necessity to maintain democratic structures: “The situation in Georgia is determined by the Russian occupied regions of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia,” he said. “While we must acknowledge the reforms initiated by President Saakashvili that drastically lowered the level of corruption and authoritarian structures in the Georgian state, the ruling elite must keep a firm grip on the country.” The Kremlin dissident also highlighted PM Putin's underlying ambitions in occupying Georgia's territory of Abkhazia, expressing concern about security during the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia: “Putin aimed at moving hot spots of possible conflict farther from the site of the Olympic Games, which are to be held a stone's throw from Abkhazia—that is, in de jure Georgia,” Kasparov said. “He intended to provide for a broad safety corridor,” he said. “That's why Abkhazia was a more important and desired goal of Russian aggression against Georgia than S. Ossetia, which merely served as a pretext.”

www.rferl.org

PROJECT SYNDICATE: The Kremlin temptation

France's warship sale to Russia plays into the hands of Putin's effort to reinforce his policy of domination over Russia's “near abroad;” the sale will not positively affect the balance of power within Russia, but it will affect the regional balance of power—in favor of Russia. What is clear is that any ambition to define a common European energy and security policy toward Russia is slowly disappearing. From Berlin to Paris, and from Paris to Rome, European leaders may ultimately be doing the same thing, but they are all doing it separately, as competitors vying for Russian favor rather than as partners within a supposedly tight-knit Union.

www.project-syndicate.org

EURASIANET: Tbilisi trying new way to woo Abkhazia, S. Ossetia

The Georgian government has developed a new strategy for re-engaging with—and ultimately re-incorporating—the Russian occupied territories of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia, and is working to gain international support and funding for its plan. “The Strategy is part of Georgia's overarching determination to achieve the full de-occupation of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia, reverse the process of annexation of these territories by the Russian Federation, and peacefully reintegrate these territories and their populations,” the strategy document states. Adds Georgia's State Minister for Reintegration Yakobashvili: “Status and security, those two issues are deliberately not part of the strategy. It's about people.” US and western authorities praised Georgia's engagement plan: “The strategy is a constructive step towards easing tensions and a way to reach out to all residents of the regions of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia,” the US embassy in Tbilisi said.

www.eurasianet.org

BLOOMBERG: Georgia offers ports to Kazakhstan for grain exports to Europe

Georgia is offering existing ports as well as a planned new port to Kazakhstan for the construction of a terminal for grain exports to Europe. “We're offering several possibilities, such as Batumi, Poti, and Anaklia, where we plan to build a new port,” said Georgian FM Vashadze after talks with his Kazakh counterpart, Kanat Saudabayev.

georgiandaily.com

CANADIAN PRESS: Family of luger killed at Olympics will receive insurance money from Games

The family of Georgian luger Nomar Kumaritashvili, who died at the 2010 Winter Olympics, will receive insurance money from the Vancouver organizing committee. “We had a program that will cause a benefit to be paid to the family at some point,” John Furlong, the CEO of the Vancouver committee said. The committee had insurance policies for the 5,000 athletes and officials who were at the Games, as well as other members of the Olympic family. The committee is also looking at whether it will also donate to a campaign begun by the international luge federation to help Kumaritashvili's family.

www.metronews.ca

THE INDEPENDENT: Eating with the enemy—why Russia loves Georgian food

At the newly opened Café Khachapuri located in the heart of Moscow, young Muscovites tuck into plates of coriander-infused chakhokhbili chicken stew, spicy lobio beans, and the eponymous khachapuri—gooey cheesy bread. Georgian food, perhaps the tastiest and most exciting of cuisines in all the former Soviet countries, has long been popular in Russia, and as new restaurants spring up across the capital, its popularity is going from strong to stronger. “Everybody in Moscow loves Georgian food,” says Tina Kandelaki, a Georgian who is one of Russia's leading television presenters. “All the best parties in Moscow these days end with Georgian dancing and Georgian food.”

www.independent.co.uk

WEBSITES & GEORGIA

Civil Georgia: Leading independent English-language news website on Georgia

Georgia Update: Official government information service

Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies:

Leading non-governmental organization that focuses on Georgian domestic and foreign policy

Georgian Mission to NATO

Georgian Parliament

Government of Georgia

Local Government: Official website of Georgia's capital, Tbilisi

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

National Investment Agency

President Saakashvili's official website