

GEORGIA UPDATE

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- NATO Reaffirms Commitment to Georgian Membership in the Alliance



The EU's new enlargement commissioner, Stefan Füle, arrived in Georgia yesterday for his first official visit. "Georgia is an important partner country within the European Neighbourhood Policy," he said. "This important visit will provide me with one more opportunity to stress the EU commitment to territorial integrity of Georgia." Füle met with President Saakashvili, as well as with State Minister for Euro-Atlantic Integration Giorgi Baramidze; the two signed a memorandum of understanding on the allocation of €180 million in support from the EU for the period 2011-2013.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"President Obama appreciated President Saakashvili's continuing commitment to democratic and economic reforms in order to fulfill the promise of the Rose Revolution... and also relayed the US's strong support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

"The President also thanked Georgia for its significant contribution to the international effort in Afghanistan, as the Georgian battalion deploys this month alongside American Marines in Helmand."

—From a White House statement after President Obama phone call to President Saakashvili on Tuesday

"Georgia expresses our condolences to the families of victims and hope that culprits of this terrible crime will be arrested and punished."

—President Saakashvili on the Mar. 29 subway bombings in Moscow

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Apr. 5-9: NATO PA Delegation visits Georgia

Apr. 10-15: FM Vashadze visits Washington, DC

Apr. 12-13: President Saakashvili participates in Nuclear Security Summit in Washington

Apr. 15 -17: FM Vashadze visits New York

Apr. 19-20: Parliament Speaker Bakradze visits Rome

May 3-5: Parliament Speaker Bakradze visits Sweden

May 20-21: FM Vashadze visits Malta

May 30: Tbilisi's local elections, marking first direct election of the capital's mayor

TOP STORIES

On Eve of President Saakashvili's Visit to Washington, President Obama Calls to Thank Georgia for Troops

US President Obama called President Saakashvili on Tuesday to thank him for Georgia's "significant contribution" to the international effort in Afghanistan, as the Georgian battalion prepares to deploy next week alongside American Marines in the dangerous Helmand province. The presidents also discussed next week's Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, where Saakashvili will join leaders and senior officials from 47 countries.

Obama also "relayed the US's strong support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity," the White House said in a statement, referencing Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia and subsequent occupation of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia. Obama also commended Georgia's dedication to pursuing reform: "The president appreciated President Saakashvili's continuing commitment to democratic and economic reforms in order to fulfill the promise of the Rose Revolution."

Saakashvili leaves this weekend for Washington, where he will meet dozens of US Senators, Congressmen, and Administration officials, while also appearing at Brookings and the Atlantic Council; he will also travel to New York City, where he will speak at the Council on Foreign Relations, and to Boston for an address at Harvard.

[AGENCE FRANCE PRESS: Obama thanks Georgia for Afghan deployment](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Obama Thanks Georgia for Afghan Deployment](#)

Georgia Applauded for Accepting Guantanamo Detainees

The international community applauded Georgia for accepting three prisoners from the Guantanamo Bay detention facility. "We're grateful to the government of Georgia for joining our efforts to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay," US State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said. According to US officials, the three prisoners do not pose a serious danger to Georgia and will not be held in detention, though their movements will be "strictly monitored" and they will not be permitted to leave the country. Deputy FM Bokeria said the decision to house the detainees illustrated Georgia's strong commitment to the US-Georgia partnership. "We have a strategic partnership with the US and this is one part of that cooperation," he said. "We consider this the normal behavior of an ally."

[BLOOMBERG: Guantanamo Prisoners Moved to Georgia Will Lead 'Normal' Lives](#)

[FOREIGN POLICY: From Gitmo with Love-How a Detainee Release Happens](#)

Georgian Economy Expected to Grow 5%, Outpaces Eastern European Nations

President Saakashvili raised the economic growth forecast for 2010 from 3 percent to 5 percent, as the country emerges from recession and the devastating impact of Russia's 2008 invasion. The President, speaking to investors in Tbilisi, based his improved forecast on realistic investment plans, including at least two \$100 million investments in the Black Sea region and Tbilisi. The government estimates that the \$12.8 billion economy contracted as much as 4 percent in 2009; in 2007, gross domestic product grew 12.3 percent. The government has pursued liberal economic reforms while campaigning globally to attract foreign investors, successfully netting a projected \$1 billion of investment from the United Arab Emirates within the next two to three years. The effort has helped Georgia's economy perform better than its E. European counterparts.

[BLOOMBERG: Georgian Economy may Expand 11% Next Year, Saakashvili Says](#)

EUMM Welcomes Georgia's Release of Six Ossetian Detainees in Gesture of Goodwill

Georgian authorities last week released six Ossetian detainees in a gesture of goodwill, receiving praise from the international community. Four S. Ossetians and two N. Ossetians with Russian citizenship were serving prison terms for criminal offenses or were facing criminal charges. The EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) welcomed the release of the alleged criminals as an "important step in resetting the overall detainee issue." EUMM urged S. Ossetian de facto authorities to follow Georgia's lead: "In order to de-escalate the situation on the ground and contribute to raising the confidence of the population living along the administrative boundary lines, the EUMM calls upon the de facto S. Ossetian authorities to take similar action." Officials in Tbilisi say no other Ossetians arrested since Russia's August 2008 remain in Georgian prisons. Russian proxies in S. Ossetia have not yet announced any plan to reciprocate by releasing jailed Georgians.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: EUMM Welcomes Release of Six Detainees by Tbilisi](#)
[RADIO FREE EUROPE: Georgia Releases Jailed Ossetians](#)

NATO Reaffirms Commitment to Georgian Membership in the Alliance

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen told President Saakashvili in Brussels last week that the promise of eventual membership for Georgia in NATO made in April 2008 still stands. "NATO's policy toward Georgia has not changed," he said. "We will continue to support Georgia in its Euro-Atlantic aspirations." He added that Georgia can join as soon as it meets the relevant conditions.

[RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY: NATO Reassures Georgia on 'Open Door Policy'](#)



Believers carry candles around the cathedral in Tbilisi on the night of Holy Saturday during an Orthodox Easter ceremony on April 3. The ritual precedes the symbolic resurrection of Christ at midnight.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

REUTERS: Pentagon programs to bolster Georgian, Baltic forces

The Pentagon last week said it would build the military capabilities of Georgia and Baltic states bordering Russia to ready them for Afghan operations. In notifications sent to Congress, the Pentagon said military assistance programs for Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Croatia, and Hungary were designed to build their capacities "to conduct stability operations alongside U.S. forces in Afghanistan."

uk.reuters.com

THE GUARDIAN: Saakashvili had no involvement in the Russian invasion hoax

The Georgian government for several years has been focused on fostering freedom of speech and a pluralistic democratic society. It has opened up the media and passed laws that give political parties generous free access to the airwaves during elections. Georgia is a young democracy; everything cannot be done overnight. But the aspirations and hopes enshrined in the peaceful Rose revolution are as alive and well today as they were six years ago.

www.guardian.co.uk

RFE/RL: Georgians in Abkhazia protest against Russian guards

Georgians in the Russian-occupied territory of Abkhazia are planning a protest against arbitrary border crossing restrictions that prohibits residents from entering Georgia proper via the Inguri River. Residents of Otobaia village wrote to Russian proxy and de facto Abkhaz leader Sergei Bagapsh to complain about the intimidating behavior of Russian border guards, but have received no reply. The villagers plan to stage a peaceful demonstration early this week to demand "a narrow access path" across the border, enabling them to purchase food and other basic necessities without traveling to the Russian-regulated single point-of-entry located miles away.

www.rferl.org

DPA: Negotiators conclude 10th round of Russia-Georgia talks

Negotiators last week completed the 10th round of peace talks since Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia, making little concrete progress. Georgian and Russian officials and de facto authorities from Georgia's Russian-occupied territories of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia attended the EU/UN/OSCE-mediated session in Geneva. The two-day talks on security and humanitarian issues in the Caucasus region made some movement to address specific issues rather than past issues of contention. The next round is scheduled for June 8.

www.earthtimes.org

TORONTO STAR: Georgia grieves for son lost at Olympics

Nodar Kumartishvili was a boy with the delicate art of luge in his blood, one who spent half his young life preparing to reclaim a storied family legacy of three generations of Soviet-era champions. "Winter athletics was our way of life in our village," said Nodar's uncle and coach, Felix Kumaritashvili. "But the modern history of Bakuriani's fame came from my father, Aleko," Felix said. "He was a biathlete, and during the Soviet era he was able to go to E. Germany to train in lugging." Assuming the family tradition, Nodar mapped every meter of the world's most dangerous luge run on his single most prized possession, a laptop computer.

olympics.thestar.com

RADIO NETHERLANDS: NGO praises Georgia over Guantanamo

London-based NGO Reprieve, which advocates the rights of prisoners, has praised Georgia for accepting three former Guantanamo detainees who arrived in the country last week. "Reprieve would like to thank Georgia for offering homes to three Guantanamo refugees," said the group's executive director. "I sincerely hope that Georgia's exceptional hospitality inspires more European countries to follow suit." Georgia said the three detainees will be free and live like "normal citizens" of Georgia.

www.rnw.nl

RFE/RL: Georgia protests Russian plans for heliports in S. Ossetia

Georgia has protested Moscow's plans to build heliports in Georgia's Russian-occupied territory of S. Ossetia. The Kremlin recently announced a tender for construction of facilities located in the S. Ossetian districts of Djava and Akhagori. The Georgian foreign ministry condemned the announcement as part of Russia's broader military buildup in S. Ossetia, adding that enhanced militarization could lead to a further violation of the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe.

www.rferl.org

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Franco-Russian warship deal receives winks and nods in Brussels and Washington

US National Security Advisor General James Jones was asked French daily Le Figaro whether the sale of Mistral warships to Russia could become a destabilizing factor, replying: "We ourselves are engaged in an active warming of relations with Russia; therefore, I do not think that this deal should be of any particular concern to us. I have never raised this issue with my French counterpart, and the President has not done so either." At this stage, such deals seem to receive, if not a green light, at least a green wink in Brussels and Washington.

www.jamestown.org

JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION: Moscow Treats the Occupied Georgian Regions as Russian Provinces

Contrary to the terms of the ceasefire accord between Russia and Georgia, Moscow is increasing its military grip over Georgia's occupied regions. Recognition of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia, which is tantamount to the recognition of Russia's "sphere of privileged interests," has already been endorsed by Venezuela, Nicaragua and Nauru. Meanwhile, Moscow is luring other nations in Latin America, Africa and Micronesia to gain international recognition of its sphere of influence. Interestingly, the Kremlin's allocation of the \$101.5 million to Abkhazia is charged to Russia's ministry of regional development, which takes care of the economic development in Russia's regions. This is more proof that Russia is treating Abkhazia and Tskhinvali as if they were Russian regions. It remains to be seen what the world community and first and foremost the EU, as the guarantor of the ceasefire agreement, will do to make Russia comply with its international obligations

jamestownfoundation.blogspot.com

SWISSINFO.CH: Georgian director wins Fribourg film prize

Georgian director George Ovashvili has won the grand prize at Fribourg's international film festival for his film, "The Other Bank." The acclaimed director also won the audience award for his film, which tells the story of a young refugee and his mother fleeing Russian ethnic cleansing in the Georgian region of Abkhazia. Ovashvili was also honored with the Le Regard d'Or award for what judges called "the poetry and humanity of his gaze on a child and the discovery of life in wartime."

www.swissinfo.ch

FINANCIAL TIMES: International investors seek opportunities in Georgian hydropower

The Georgian government is in the middle of a big push to attract foreign investors into its rapidly-expanding hydropower sector. The country currently has over 90 hydropower projects in the pipeline, including a three-cascade plant with 220MW of capacity, and another \$250 million four-cascade plant, of which 100% is for sale to private investors. One important factor in attracting strategic investors to Georgian hydropower is the construction of the new Black Sea Transmission Line, which is due to run from the Azeri border in the east to Turkey in the west. The new line not only represents increased revenue for the government from sales to Turkey, but also better reliability and security of supply for Georgia.

www.ft.com