

GEORGIA UPDATE

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“Changing leadership is possible, seizing a parliament is spectacular, and waving flags in the street is gorgeous—but changing systems and institutionalizing those changes is profoundly difficult,” President Saakashvili said in a speech Monday at Harvard’s Kennedy School. “Nevertheless, this process of reform is what constitutes a true revolution, not the colorful images on TV.” He added: “We have demonstrated that the choice of governance is not limited to either unpredictability and chaos, or authoritarian order—that a third path is possible. Georgia’s example proves that the only way to achieve lasting stability is to base it on respect for fundamental freedoms. Ironically, the Kremlin’s persistent hostility to our democratic experience has turned Georgia into a laboratory for the region.”

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“We appreciate the Government’s efforts to adopt the juvenile justice strategy and the new Code of Imprisonment prioritizing rehabilitation of young offenders and increased reliance on non-custodial sentences”

—Roeland Monasch, UNICEF Representative in Georgia, applauding the country’s judicial reform efforts

“Security cannot be separated from democracy. There is no true security where you cannot rely on the rule of law. Having good elections and enhancing democratic elections is what makes Georgia more secure.”

“There is no way back to the Soviet Union... There is no way out other than total social transformation and integration into Western society.”

“Governments are not smarter than markets. Our experience has been that with less intervention in the economy, there has been more energy.”

—President Saakashvili speaking on Georgia’s reforms at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government

UPCOMING MILESTONES

May 2-5: Pre-election Observer Mission of the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities visits Tbilisi

May 3-5: Parliament Speaker Bakradze visits Sweden

May 20-21: FM Vashadze visits Malta

May 26: Georgian Independence Day

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

Jun. 8: Next round of Geneva talks

Jun. 10-12: Bakradze attends IPU Assembly meeting in Cyprus

TOP STORIES

S&P Upgrades Georgia, as Preliminary Figures Forecast 2010 Economic Growth for Georgia

Standard & Poor upgraded Georgia's credit score last week, raising its rating from B to B+—the first country to be thus upgraded in eastern Europe. "The government's focus on market-oriented reforms is likely to improve economic and fiscal indicators over the medium term," S&P analysts said. Meanwhile, preliminary annual economic figures show that Georgia's economy started to grow in the fourth quarter of 2009, promising signs for economic expansion for 2010. According to Georgia's National Statistics Office, the country's GDP expanded by 0.4% in Q4 of last year. President Saakashvili last week also raised the economic growth forecast from 3 percent to 5 percent, basing his improved forecast on investment plans, including at least two \$100 million investments in the Black Sea region and Tbilisi.

[BLOOMBERG: Georgia Braces for "Rapid" Output Surge, Finance Minister says](#)

[REUTERS: S&P Upgrades Sovereign Credit Rating for Georgia](#)

New IRI Polling Finds Strong Support for President, Mayor

Results from the International Republican Institute's newly released public opinion poll finds strong support for President Saakashvili and incumbent Mayor of Tbilisi, Gigi Ugulava. The poll, conducted in March, found that the governing United National Movement has the support of 36 percent of Tbilisi residents, with the Christian Democratic Movement, a moderate pro-Western party, second at 10 percent, followed by the Labor Party and Irakli Alasania's Alliance for Georgia with 8 percent and 6 percent, respectively. Nino Burjanadze's party had a 1 percent approval rating. Meanwhile, in the mayoral contest, Ugulava was the most popular candidate, with 46 percent support, with Alasania second at 11 percent. Georgia's May 30 local elections will mark the first time that Tbilisi residents directly elect their mayor.

[JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION: IRI's Public Opinion Research in Georgia—Pro-Russian Politicians Show Dismal Ratings](#)

Georgia Aims at Visa-Free Travel with EU by 2013

President Saakashvili last week expressed his ambition to achieve visa-free access to Europe for Georgian citizens before the end of his presidential term in 2013. "We are moving towards having a simplified visa regime, then a visa-free agreement with Europe, and finally towards having a free trade regime between Georgia and rest of the Europe," Saakashvili said at an opening ceremony of the European House in Tbilisi. "It is possible to achieve," he said, adding that the process to finalize the visa-free travel agreement was underway. Georgia has already negotiated visa facilitation and readmission agreements with EU; the treaties are currently being processed by EU officials prior to their implementation. According to the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, the EU will soon launch discussions with Georgia on an Association Agreement, which will include a deep and comprehensive free trade treaty.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Georgia Aims at Visa-Free Travel with EU by 2013](#)

ELECTION UPDATE

Georgia Prepares for Democratic Elections, IATF Re-established

The Government has re-established the Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections (IATF) in the run-up to the forthcoming local elections on May 30. The IATF is a rapid-reaction working group created to monitor and ensure a transparent and fair environment for May's municipal elections. "The IATF will endeavor to actively engage and cooperate with domestic and international election monitoring organizations and missions, as well as other stakeholders," a government statement read. "In a spirit of constructive cooperation, the body will address issues raised by interested parties." IATF members include the foreign ministry; the ministries of the interior, justice, and finance; the state ministry for infrastructure and regional development; and the National Security Council.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Inter-Agency Group to "Secure Fair Elections"](#)

President Addresses Concerns on Use of Administrative Resources

Speaking at the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based think-tank, President Saakashvili last week discussed the potential abuse of administrative resources in advance of Tbilisi's upcoming municipal elections. He underscored that the Government was doing everything possible to ensure that the ruling party did not have any unfair advantages in the election, including with respect to administrative resources. He also mentioned other reforms meant to ensure that the elections are free and fair, including allowing more airtime to opposition parties, a consensual process to select the head of the Central Election Commission, and the presence of hundreds of international observers.

3 Blocs, 26 Parties Register

Underscoring a vibrant campaign season, the Central Election Commission (CEC) has registered 26 political parties to run in Tbilisi's local elections. Ten of the 26 parties have been grouped into three election blocs and will run in the upcoming elections on a joint ticket. The deadline for formal nomination of mayoral candidates, as well as candidates for the City Council membership expires on April 30. Georgia's Labor Party, the National Forum and Nino Bujanadze's Democratic Movement-United Georgia have chosen not to participate in the local elections.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Three Election Blocs Registered for Local Elections](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: 26 Parties Registered to Run in Local Elections](#)

OSCE Deploys Mission

The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) last week deployed 16 experts to Tbilisi to monitor the pre-election campaign ahead of next month's local elections. Twenty-four long-term observers will also be deployed this weekend, and stationed across the country to ensure free and fair elections. In addition, ODIHR intends to send 350 short-term observers immediately before election day to monitor the polls, vote tabulation, and other election-related procedures. "The upcoming municipal elections will be an important test for Georgia's continued commitment to holding democratic elections in line with OSCE commitments," Ambassador Audrey Glover, the mission head and former ODIHR director, said. The mission will assess the legislative framework and its application, electoral campaign activities, the media coverage of the campaign, the performance of the election administration and relevant government bodies, as well as the resolution of election-related disputes. The OSCE's monitoring mission will produce two interim reports and a report on preliminary findings, which will be available the day after the elections. A final report will be released eight weeks after the election process is completed.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: OSCE Deploys Mission to Observe Local Elections](#)



INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

FOREIGN POLICY: Failed no longer—How Georgia came back from the brink

“Our Rose Revolution in 2003 was not just about waving flags and storming the Parliament,” President Saakashvili wrote in *Foreign Policy*. “It was a decision to move our state from failed to functioning,” he said. “Even more, it was an attempt to change the very relationships between our citizens and their state, and among our people.” Saakashvili further discussed the roots of Georgia’s democratic transformation: “It was, simply, the start of an audacious process to create a new Georgian society,” he said. “Georgia has chosen to be a country that lives its values at home and abroad.... I would also suggest it is what makes us a reliable partner in the new efforts to build cooperation on crucial matters of global security.”

www.foreignpolicy.com

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: A top US lawmaker slams France-Russia warship deal

France should abandon its proposed sale of four advanced warships to Russia, which could inflict “irreparable damage” on NATO and transatlantic ties, a top US lawmaker warned last week. “This sale threatens to shake the NATO alliance to its core, bolstering Russia’s offensive military capabilities as it intensifies its campaign of intimidation against neighboring countries,” Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee said. Writing in *The Hill*, the Florida lawmaker urged her colleagues to back a non-binding resolution she authored declaring “unequivocal opposition” to the transaction.

news.yahoo.com

BUSINESS NEW EUROPE: Constructing steel in Georgia

An Indian steelmaking joint venture in Georgia is hoping to spearhead the rejuvenation of the country’s metallurgical industry and boost its economy by using local scrap metal to produce construction materials. “This steel plant in Rustavi is a step towards the revival of the steel industry of Georgia and towards improving the economic and social conditions of the residents of Rustavi,” Bipin Sharma, the president of Georgia’s GeoSteel mill, said in an interview last week. Opened by President Saakashvili, the new mill employs 500 people, and a further 1,000 in spin-off services.

businessneweurope.eu

THE SCOTSMAN: Caucasus on the rise despite troubled past at crossroads

“It is fitting that Scotland is the venue for the University of St. Andrew’s conference on the Caucasus,” Georgian ambassador to the UK, Giorgi Badridze, wrote last week in the *The Scotsman* newspaper. “Today in Georgia we are faced with the tragic reality that Russia has annexed two of our territories and occupies 20 percent of the country,” he said. “Hundreds of thousands of Georgians and people of other ethnicities have been made refugees in their own country.... Ethnic Abkhaz and Ossetians are now sharing the grim realities of Russia’s ‘care’ with the residents of the N. Caucasus. But while Georgia’s trouble with Russia has been making headlines for years, our success in transforming our country since the Rose Revolution through political and economic reforms has not been given the attention it deserves.”

news.scotsman.com

RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY: Georgia files Europe suit over soldier’s alleged torture, killing

Georgia filed a case against Russia in the European Court of Human Rights over the torture and killing of a Georgian soldier taken prisoner during the countries’ August 2008 war. “The Russian soldiers are accused of violating the basic human right to live, as well as the principles of freedom and the prohibition on torture,” Nino Khaindrava of the Georgian Young Lawyers, said. Forty-two Georgian soldiers were captured and 162 killed by Russian forces during the invasion.

www.rferl.org

RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY: Georgian parliament urges countries to recognize Russia as occupier

Georgia’s parliament has sent an appeal to more than 50 countries urging them to recognize Russia as an occupying force in Georgia’s territories of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia. Giorgi Kandelaki, the deputy head of the foreign affairs committee, last week told RFE/RL: “We think this action will increase the Russian occupants’ responsibility towards Georgia.” The committee sent the appeal to every European country’s parliament, as well as to the legislative bodies of the US, Canada, Israel, India, New Zealand, and several African countries. Russian forces have patrolled the administrative line between the two occupied regions and the rest of Georgia since Russia’s invasion in August 2008.

www.rferl.org

REUTERS: Caucasus insurgency casts pall over Russian Olympics

Suicide attacks that killed 40 on the Moscow metro last month have fueled fears Islamists will target the 2014 Winter Olympics, to be staged in the mountain range near Sochi, Russia, where the militants have their strongholds. “Sochi’s geographical proximity to these regions means that it will be potentially easier for insurgents to travel to this area and the high-profile nature of the event itself means it’s a tempting target,” Matthew Clements, a Eurasia analyst, said. Sochi residents fear their coastal town could become a target even before tight Olympic security is imposed. “The word Sochi now means Olympics. The feeling here is an attack could happen any day. It’s freaky,” Arman, a 32-year-old local teacher said.

www.washingtonpost.com

JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION: Georgians fear Russia’s revanchism as Noghaideli forecasts “uprising”

Georgian multi-millionaire and former PM-turned-pro-Moscow-activist Zurab Noghaideli first mentioned an “uprising” in February as a means to come to power if the “public mood is not reflected” in the outcome of May’s local elections. But ever since the results of the public opinion poll conducted by the International Republican Institute came out March 31, his conduct and rhetoric have become more aggressive and even pugnacious. When Vano Merabishvili, Georgia’s minister of internal affairs, predicted in an April interview the pro-Russian force’s imminent defeat in the local elections, Noghaideli immediately warned Merabishvili against ballot fraud and responded: “This may cost him his life.”

jamestownfoundation.blogspot.com

NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO: President Saakashvili on US aid, summit

“The whole world has taken interest in global security, and I think Georgia, personally, has been working on those issues,” President Saakashvili said in an interview with NPR on the sidelines of last week’s Nuclear Security Summit in Washington. “In order to combat nuclear proliferation, you need an efficient, transparent, and democratic state,” he said. “And I think we’ve been trying to construct exactly that.” He also expressed his appreciation for the billion dollars in humanitarian and reconstruction aid pledged by the US following Russia’s 2008 invasion: “That was very timely aid, because we have up to half-a-million refugees and IDPs after numerous Russian intrusions over the years,” Saakashvili said.

www.npr.org

WEBSITES & GEORGIA

Civil Georgia: Leading independent English-language news website

Georgia Update: Official government information service

Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies:

Leading NGO 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