

GEORGIA UPDATE

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TOP STORIES

- European Commission Calls for Closer Ties to Georgia Through Visa Facilitation
- U.S. Hails Georgia for Seizure of Highly Enriched Uranium, Cooperation on Interdiction
- NATO Secretary-General Underscores Support for Georgia as Alliance Meets in Estonia
- Draft Law Introduced to Trademark National Dishes, Foods

ELECTION UPDATE: TI Praises Government's Response to Report on Administrative Resources > CEC Reviews Voter Lists > Parties Meet with OSCE Observers > Ugulava Launches Formal Campaign for Re-election



Ties between Amman and Tbilisi took centre stage on Monday as Georgian Prime Minister Gilauri arrived in Jordan, where he signed an economic and trade cooperation agreement. During his visit, Gilauri and his counterpart, Samir Rifai, discussed forging closer economic ties. Discussions also included facilitating visas for businessmen and tourists, as well as establishing direct flights to encourage travel between the two nations. Gilauri called for continued private-sector cooperation, stressing the need to promote bilateral investment and tourism cooperation. He also extended an invitation to Rifai to visit Georgia to learn more about the potentials of the Georgian market.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR: President Saakashvili—Georgia can be an eastward anchor of democratic ideals

THE HILL: Time to reinvigorate the Transatlantic partnership

RADIO FREE EUROPE: Construction workers go on strike in S. Ossetia

BLOOMBERG: Georgia to court South America in bid to halt rebel recognition

OIL & GAS JOURNAL: EU energy chief touts “Southern Corridor” from Caspian

HARVARD CRIMSON: Georgian President touts his country's business

WINDOW ON EURASIA: Moscow's efforts to improve Russia's image abroad a costly failure, experts say

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Russia flexes regional muscle with Ukraine fleet deal

CNN: Nina Ananiashvili—Georgia's 47-year-old prima ballerina

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“Transparency International Georgia values this kind of engagement on the part of the Government of Georgia. This is a significant improvement over the past elections. We have been monitoring the abuse of administrative resources since the 2006 local elections and this was the first time that the government provided detailed feedback on our assessment.”

—Transparency International this praising Georgia's Inter-agency Task Force on Free & Fair Elections

“We are very grateful for the efforts that Georgia has made, not just recently, but over an extended period of time interdicting the flow of dangerous materials out of the region.”

“That's the reason that Georgia was invited to the Nuclear Security Summit—because they have demonstrated both a responsibility and, obviously, a capability of interdicting, helping to interdict the flow of dangerous materials to people who do not have the right to have them.”

—US State Dept. Spokesperson Philip J. Crowley

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Apr. 27-1: FM Vashadze meets with Turkish President Abdullah Gül in Ankara, as well as Turkey's FM

Apr. 30-1: President Saakashvili visits Romania

May 2-5: Visit to Tbilisi by the pre-election Observer Mission of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

May 3-5: Parliament Speaker Bakradze visits Sweden

May 20-21: FM Vashadze visits Malta

May 26: Georgian Independence Day

May 30: Municipal elections in Tbilisi and nationwide; first direct election of the capital's mayor

Jun. 8: Next round of Geneva talks

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

TOP STORIES

European Commission Calls for Closer Ties to Georgia Through Visa Facilitation

Georgia's citizens should enjoy easier access to the EU's Schengen zone, the European Commission urged Tuesday, as it called upon member states and the European Parliament to endorse a visa facilitation deal. The agreement—to be accompanied by a parallel agreement on repatriation of Georgians caught staying illegally on EU territory—would speed up procedures and drop visa prices. “To reduce visa barriers is a way of bringing people closer to one another and to enable citizens to travel, and connect all over Europe,” the EU's Home Affairs commissioner, Cecilia Malmstrom, said in a statement. “With these agreements in place, Georgia will be more closely connected to the European Union,” she said.

[DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR: Brussels proposes easing of EU visa regime for Georgia](#)

U.S. Hails Georgia for Seizure of Highly Enriched Uranium, Cooperation on Interdiction

The US last week applauded Georgia's efforts to intercept highly enriched uranium (HEU), which the Georgian authorities said was smuggled by a group of foreign nationals in March. “We are very grateful for the efforts that Georgia has made, not just recently, but over an extended period of time interdicting the flow of dangerous materials out of the region,” said Philip Crowley, the US Department of State spokesman. “That's the reason that Georgia was invited to the Nuclear Security Summit—because they have demonstrated both a responsibility and, obviously, a capability of interdicting, helping to interdict the flow of dangerous materials to people who do not have the right to have them.” President Saakashvili last week confirmed Georgia's success in thwarting an attempt to sell a small amount of HEU on the black market during a sting operation conducted last month. Said Zaal Lomtadze, head of Georgia's Nuclear and Radiation Safety Service: “I can confirm that there were attempts to smuggle highly enriched uranium which originated from Russian territory, and there were attempts involving Russian citizens, and also involving the occupied territories.” Georgia said eight attempts of illicit trafficking of enriched uranium have been foiled during the last 10 years.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: US Hails Georgia for Uranium Seizure](#)

[FOX: U.S. Praises Georgia for Interdicting Smuggled Nuke Materials](#)

[AP: Georgia confirms highly enriched uranium seizure](#)

Draft Law Introduced to Trademark National Dishes, Foods

The Georgian Government introduced a draft law that will trademark national dishes, aiming to open new markets in the US and Western Europe for Georgian cuisine and food products. Georgian officials are seeking to obtain trademark protection for traditional Georgian dishes such as *khachapuri*, a cheese-filled Georgian pastry that has a lip-smacking fan base throughout the former Soviet Union. Under the law—currently in review at the National Intellectual Protection Center—Georgia would adopt the EU's Traditional Specialty Guaranteed trademark-protection system, which certifies that agricultural products or foodstuffs are produced using location-specific ingredients and traditional processing methods. No creative liberties would be allowed. Similar certification would also extend to other Georgian dishes, including *sulguni*, a relatively sour, salty cheese that is the key ingredient for *khachapuri*, and to *tkemali*, a sour plum sauce served alongside beef or as part of other dishes. Trademarking wine has been the main focus of the Government's certification activities; 18 brands for export bear certifications linking their characteristics and reputation to their Georgian origin.

[EURASIANET: Tbilisi prepares to trademark national dishes](#)

NATO Secretary-General Underscores Support for Georgia as Alliance Meets in Estonia

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen last week reiterated the Alliance's support for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty during NATO's foreign ministerial summit in Estonia, and called on Russia to fulfill its peace-treaty obligations. According to Rasmussen, NATO's door remains open for Georgia, as the Alliance originally stated at its 2008 Bucharest Summit.

[RUSTAVI: Secretary-general reiterates NATO support for Georgia](#)

ELECTION UPDATE

Transparency International Praises Government's Response to Report on Administrative Resources

Transparency International on Monday lauded the Government's response to the group's report, released earlier this month, on the alleged use of administrative resources in advance of May's local elections. “Transparency International Georgia values this kind of engagement on the part of the Government of Georgia,” the group said, after receiving a detailed reply to its concerns from the Inter-agency Task Force on Free and Fair Elections. “This is a significant improvement over the past elections. We have been monitoring the abuse of administrative resources since the 2006 local elections and this was the first time that the government provided detailed feedback on our assessment.”

CEC Reviews Voter Lists

The Central Election Commission is continuing to review voter lists submitted by political parties for next month's elections, verifying the accuracy of each list. CEC Chairman Zurab Kharastishvili expects the number of voters to reach just over 3,500,000. Inaccuracies reported by political parties have mainly included removing duplicate records and 8,500 deceased persons, as well as 60 cases where 20 or more voters were registered at a single address. Stressing the CEC's commitment to accuracy and transparency, Kharastishvili also noted that the Civil Registry, in cooperation with the CEC, corrected mistakes on 133,000 entries. The deadline for making list corrections is May 20.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: CEC reviews voter lists](#)

Parties Meet with OSCE Observers

Representatives of the ruling United National Movement and of opposition parties met with OSCE observers last week, reporting on the ongoing pre-election campaign and the rechecking of voter lists. Central Election Commission Chairman Kharastishvili also met with the head of the OSCE monitoring mission, presenting updated figures on the voter lists. The OSCE mission will hold meetings with all political actors. The mission last week deployed 16 experts to Tbilisi and another 24 throughout the country to monitor the pre-election process, and plans to send another 350 observers in advance of the May 30 elections.

[RUSTAVI: Ruling party reports pre-election situation to OSCE mission](#)

[RUSTAVI: National Council leader meet OSCE observation mission](#)

Ugulava Launches Formal Campaign for Re-Election

The United National Movement last week formally nominated Tbilisi's incumbent mayor, Gigi Ugulava, as its candidate for mayor. “For the next 34 days we will try to explain to Tbilisites what we plan to do, based on what we have already been doing,” Ugulava said. “Our promises will be business-like and realistic.” Ugulava launched his campaign the same day he was nominated, focusing his speech to an outdoor rally on tackling unemployment: “For the next four years, the Tbilisi Mayor's Office and each of its units will turn into a kind of employment bureau and the Tbilisi mayor will be an advocate for employment,” he said. “Tbilisi needs a mayor who has already done much, and who also acknowledges that a lot still remains to be done,” he said.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Ugulava launches formal campaign for re-Election](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR: President Saakashvili—Georgia can be an eastward anchor of democratic ideals

“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 wrote in the *Christian Science Monitor*. “Nevertheless, this process of reform is what constitutes a true revolution, not the colorful images on TV.” He highlighted Georgia’s steadfast commitment to democracy in the face of mounting obstacles and foreign occupation: “We pursued our reform agenda while facing serious external threats to our security, including the August 2008 invasion by Russia,” he wrote, adding: “Georgia’s example proves that the only way to achieve lasting stability is to base it on respect for fundamental freedoms.” He also called on the support of friends: “Building democracy requires consistent engagement and support from allies and friends. Georgia can be an eastward anchor of democratic ideals—a bridge to other eastern neighbors aspiring to transatlantic integration. But for this to succeed, our security and democracy must be viewed as two parts of the same challenge—both by ourselves and those who would help us.”

www.csmonitor.com

THE HILL: Time to reinvigorate the Transatlantic partnership

Russia’s continued occupation of parts of neighboring countries and its massive invasion of Georgia illustrates the danger of highly capable military equipment flowing eastward to Russia from all parts of Europe, writes Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, ranking Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Congress must use all available means to impress upon France the potentially disastrous consequences of the Mistral sale and urge it to reconsider. France must not enable Russia to menace NATO allies.

thehill.com

RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY: Construction workers go on strike in South Ossetia

Dozens of construction workers have gone on strike in Georgia’s Russian-occupied territory of S. Ossetia, protesting four months of unpaid wages. Russian proxy and de facto president of S. Ossetia, Eduard Kokoity, last week met with the workers, advising them to write an official letter against the management of the Russian company. Meanwhile, Tskhinvali residents have also voiced their unhappiness with the pace of construction of new apartment buildings that were damaged during Russia’s 2008 invasion of Georgia; many still live in temporary shelters awaiting the reconstruction of the homes.

www.rferl.org

BLOOMBERG: Georgia courts S. America to halt rebel recognition

Georgia plans to cultivate support in S. America in an attempt to persuade countries not to recognize the independence of Georgia’s two Russian-occupied and militarized regions, Abkhazia and S. Ossetia. “Georgia expects to improve diplomatic relations with Latin American countries” when officials travel to the region next month, Deputy FM Jalaghania told reporters in Tbilisi last week. “Russia must stop buying recognition of the regions once and for all.”

www.bloomberg.com

OIL & GAS JOURNAL: EU energy chief touts “Southern Corridor”

EU Energy Commissioner Gunther Oettinger—on a tour of energy-rich nations in the Caspian last week—highlighted Turkmenistan as a supplier of energy to the EU. He said the EU aims to reduce Russia’s control over its energy security through Southern Corridor projects, which—in addition to the Nabucco gas pipeline—includes White Stream from Georgia and the Interconnector among Greece, Turkey, and Italy. Propelling efforts to reduce Europe’s energy dependence, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Romania last week signed a memorandum of understanding to transport Azeri LNG to the EU.

www.ogj.com

HARVARD CRIMSON: Georgian President touts his country’s business

President Saakashvili last week highlighted Georgia’s advances in pursuing democratic and liberal economic reforms during a speech at Harvard’s Kennedy School. “Security cannot be separated from democracy,” Saakashvili said. “There is no true security where you cannot rely on the rule of law.” He continued: “Having good elections, and enhancing democratic reforms, is what makes Georgia more secure.” Saakashvili touted Georgia’s efforts in establishing a free-market economy: “Governments are not smarter than markets,” Saakashvili said. “Our experience has been that with less intervention in the economy, there has been more energy.” Students said they were surprised and impressed by Georgia’s commitment to modernization.

www.thecrimson.com

WINDOW ON EURASIA: Moscow’s efforts to improve Russia’s image abroad a costly failure, experts say

Despite spending “significant sums” in recent years to promote a positive image of Russia abroad, experts say the Russian government has largely failed to achieve its goal because it has forgotten that while a country might be able “to purchase ‘an image,’” its “reputation” will usually reflect reality. At a roundtable on “Images of Russia: Stereotypes, Paradoxes and Reality,” Nikolay Levichev, the head of the Just Russia faction in the Duma and meeting chair, said bluntly that Moscow’s efforts in recent years to “create a positive image of Russia” have not succeeded. According to Levichev, certain countries associate the words “Russian” and “Russia” with disasters and the absence of democracy.

windowoneurasia.blogspot.com

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Russia flexes regional muscle with Ukraine fleet deal

Ukraine agreed to extend the lease of Russia’s Black Sea base in return for sharply lower natural-gas prices, a long-term trade-off that reasserts Moscow’s influence over its former Soviet neighbor after years of tension. President Saakashvili called last week’s moves a further sign of Moscow’s expansionist agenda. Saakashvili said in an interview that Vladimir Putin “doesn’t make any secret of trying to restore some kind of Soviet empire,” adding: “I hear lots of talk in the US that the Cold War is over,” he said. “It might be over for America, but certainly it’s not over for Putin.”

online.wsj.com

CNN: Nina Ananiashvili—Georgia’s 47-year-old prima ballerina

At the age of 47, Nina Ananiashvili is still performing star roles in grueling ballets—and winning rave reviews as Georgia’s prima ballerina. Born in Tbilisi, Ananiashvili moved to Russia at the age of 13 and was soloing with the Bolshoi Ballet just five years later. Though Ananiashvili is a product of the Soviet Union’s most elite ballet schools, she insists Georgians bring something different to dance, and art in general. “The people inside are very artistic,” she says. “They are singing, dancing. It’s in the blood.” In 2009, Ananiashvili completed a 16-year run as prima ballerina with the American Ballet Theater in New York.

www.cnn.com

THINK TANKS/NGOs**UNICEF: Georgia is approaching international standards in juvenile justice**

UNICEF and the EU reviewed last week the mid-term achievements of their two-year partnership with the Government of Georgia aimed at reforming the juvenile justice system, applauding the country’s reform progress. “The EU has been significantly promoting and supporting the reforms in the field of juvenile justice,” Per Eklund, head of the EU’s office in Georgia. “The progress made in the field is noticeable.” Added Eklund: “The cooperation of the main stakeholders of the Government of Georgia, UNICEF, and the Georgian NGOs has proved to be successful and the EU shall be supporting the reforms in this sector in the future. UNICEF expertise and EU assistance of €1.2 million proved to be an important contribution in the reform process undertaken by the Government.”

www.unicef.org