

GEORGIA UPDATE

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With the May 30 local elections approaching, PM Gilauri yesterday emphasized the need for the process to be open and transparent. “Our aim is to ensure that international principles are fully upheld,” he said. “I categorically warn and ask all civil servants to adhere to the electoral code,” adding: “It is very important that administrative resources are not used for campaigning during this election.” Meanwhile, Tbilisi’s mayoral candidates prepared for Saturday’s televised mayoral debate, the first in the city’s history.

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

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—PM Gilauri, speaking Wednesday about the upcoming local elections on May 30

UPCOMING MILESTONES

May 8: Tbilisi mayoral candidates participate in city’s first-ever electoral debate

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

PM Underscores Need for Free & Fair Elections, as Candidates Prepare for Landmark Debate

Prime Minister Gilauri made an impassioned call yesterday for all Georgians—especially those working in the public sector—to do everything possible to ensure that the May 30 local elections are open and free. “I would like to emphasize that one of the main priorities of the Government during the current electoral period is to make sure that the May 2010 election process is executed in a correct and transparent way,” he said. “Our aim is to ensure that international principles are fully upheld. We are doing everything we can to meet this goal, and we have already done a lot.” He added: “I categorically warn and ask all civil servants to adhere to the electoral code. Violations of the code are punishable by law. It is very important that administrative resources are not used for campaigning during this election. We want to prove to the world that once Georgia has stepped onto the road of democracy, and that it is not going to turn in any other direction.”

Meanwhile, five Tbilisi mayoral candidates prepared for this Saturday's mayoral debate, the first ever in the city's history. The landmark event will be televised at 9 pm by Georgian Public Broadcasting (GPB) and moderated by Eka Mishveladze. Candidates will be asked questions in five key issue areas—including employment, municipal infrastructure, social services, health care, and utility costs. Each will have a two-minute opening statement and a one-minute closing statement, and will be asked one question in each area. In order to make it available to as broad an audience as possible, GPB will re-broadcast the debate on additional channels as well as on radio; GPB also will stream it live online.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: PM Warns Public Officials Against Electoral Wrongoings](#)

Council of Europe Human Rights Chief Visits Georgia

The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg (below), this week visited Georgia in an effort to clarify the fate of persons missing after Russia's 2008 invasion and to resolve the detainee issue. In a meeting with Hammarberg, Georgian officials proposed establishing a UN human rights office—similar to one previously operating in Sukhumi—in Abkhazia's Gali district, a region predominately populated by ethnic Georgians before the invasion. The office would aim to ensure that human rights are respected. Russian proxies in Tskhinvali and Sokhumi, however, rejected Tbilisi's the proposal. Meanwhile, Hammarberg was helped negotiate the release of several Georgian detainees in S. Ossetia who had been held for illegally crossing the border crossing. Georgia last month released four S. Ossetian residents and two Russian citizens from N. Ossetia detained by the Georgian police following Russia's invasion. About nine Georgians remain in captivity in Tskhinvali.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Sokhumi, Tskhinvali Reject Tbilis's Offer on Human Rights Missions](#)



“Booming Quarter” Propels Georgia to 4% Growth in First Quarter

Georgia's economy grew 4 percent in the first quarter from the year earlier, showing promising signs for economic growth in 2010. “It's been a booming quarter,” PM Gilauri told reporters this week. The economy will grow as much as 5 percent this year, after a 3.9 percent contraction in 2009 because of declines in trade, services and the hospitality industry, he predicted. Georgia's economy grew slightly in the fourth quarter of 2009, reflecting the first economic expansion since the second quarter of 2008, just before Russia's invasion.

[BLOOMBERG: Georgian Economy Probably Grew 4% in First Quarter](#)

EU-Georgia Readmission, Travel Facilitation Agreements Approved

The European Commission last week approved visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Georgia, calling on the European Parliament to approve them. “These agreements will allow for close political association between each of the partners in the S. Caucasus and the EU, building on common values and shared principles,” said Stefan Fule, EU commissioner for enlargement and European neighborhood policy. “Georgians can soon benefit from lower fees and easier visa rules.” The agreements will ease travel requirements, particularly on multiple-entry visas, and cut visa and waiver fees. The readmission agreement is designed to ensure the return of Georgians who illegally stay in the EU.

[DPA: Brussels proposes easing of EU visa regime for Georgia](#)

ELECTION UPDATE

CEC Announces Final List of Nominated Mayoral Candidates

The Central Election Commission last week announced the final roster of candidates qualified to run for Tbilisi mayor. The nine contenders include incumbent mayor Gigi Ugulava; Irakli Alasania, leader of Alliance for Georgia; Giorgi Chanturia of the Christian-Democratic Movement; Gogi Topadze, leader of the Industrialists; Zviad Dzidziguri, leader of the Conservative Party; Davit Iakobidze, nominated by MP Gia Tortladze's Democratic Party; Nika Ivanishvili, former traffic police chief, nominated by the newly established Public Democrats party; Tamaz Vashadze, who briefly held Tbilisi mayor's post 20 years ago, and Giorgi Lagidze, leader of the Future Georgia party. Meanwhile, 11 parties and three blocs submitted candidates lists for positions on Tbilisi's City Council.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Nine Candidate Run for Tbilisi Mayor](#)

Edison Research Commissioned for Exit Polls

Georgia's leading national TV stations, Rustavi 2 and Imedi, have commissioned Edison Research, a leading US polling firm, to conduct exit polls for the May 30 local elections. In an effort to ensure transparency and legitimacy, Edison was chosen because of its “huge international credibility,” said Giorgi Dzidziguri, executive director of Rustavi 2 TV. The exit polls will include estimates of Tbilisi's mayoral vote and the share of party vote for Tbilisi City Council. The firm says it expects to survey approximately 7,500 voters at a random sample of 75 polling stations in Tbilisi. Rustavi 2 and Imedi will announce the results as soon as polling ends at 8 pm local time on May 30.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Edison Commissioned for Exit Polls](#)

Media Monitoring Firms Announced

The Central Election Commission has hired three Georgian companies to monitor the media during the May 30 local election period—Prime Time, BCG and IPM—and also invited expert media monitoring firm pro.mova from Ukraine to participate as well. The firms agreed on the parameters to conduct a transparent and accurate analysis, based on recommendations from international experts. The monitoring process will be conducted in two stages to both quantitatively and qualitatively assess media content. Researchers will evaluate all news programs, talk-shows, and paid-for and free political ads.

[CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION: Three Georgian and Ukrainian Companies to Conduct Media Monitoring for Upcoming 2010 Elections](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

THE GUARDIAN: Abkhazia—Counting the costs of conflict

Fears of Russian domination now expand into a vacuum left by the removal of the “Georgian threat” in Georgia’s Russian-occupied region of Abkhazia. Russians might take over the best resorts by investing in hotels, restaurants, and nightclubs. The presence of Russian troops threatens the demographic balance, especially if servicemen start to settle down, marry, and bring up children in Abkhazia. Russia-sponsored development projects attract teams of labor migrants, and, according to this logic, Moldovans and Tajiks can begin to replace the expelled Georgians. This is hardly desirable.

www.guardian.co.uk

CNN: President Saakashvili on a “miraculous transformation”

On a CNN special feature, President Saakashvili last week praised the citizens of Georgia for the “miraculous transformation” of the country, underscoring that its people were Georgia’s greatest resources. Saakashvili said his government had helped, but praised “the talent and hard-working nature of the people” for “an amazing achievement,” in an interview with CNN’s Jim Clancy. “This was a country that was considered to be failing years ago and now it is making it,” adding: “Georgia needs to bring back the best of the past, but also show the way to the future,” he said. “It’s about education, healthcare, opportunities, democracy, social transformation, meritocracy which can reverse the old corrupt, planned society that we inherited from Soviet times.”

www.cnn.com

FOX: US praises Georgia for interdicting smuggled nuke materials

US officials praised Georgia for seizing highly enriched uranium that Georgian officials say was being smuggled through two of its Russian-occupied regions. State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said the US is “grateful” Georgia showed it is a responsible partner in trying to prevent nuclear materials from getting into the hands of terrorists or rogue states. “It’s instances like this that reinforce how important it is to put strict safeguards on the flow of nuclear material. No one can afford to have this stuff fall into the wrong hands for the wrong motives,” one US official said.

www.foxnews.com

BLOOMBERG: Georgia braces for “rapid” output surge

Georgia is braced for “rapid” economic growth as it pours funds into an overhaul of its infrastructure and corporate investment grows. “We managed to weather the global financial and economic turbulence, and the economy is now bracing for the resumption of rapid growth,” Georgian Finance Minister Kakha Baidurashvili said. “We expect private sector-led growth, driven by the deep and far-reaching structural reforms implemented in recent years.” Meanwhile, S&P analysts expect Georgia’s per-capita growth to outpace expansion rates “in most peers over the medium term.”

www.bloomberg.com

BLOOMBERG: Azerbaijan’s Socar to spend \$50 million on Georgian expansion

The State Oil Company of Azerbaijan will invest \$50 million this year to expand its presence in Georgia, a key transit country for Azeri exports to Europe. “Georgia’s a perfect country for us to invest in, and we’ll spend a minimum of \$50 million this year,” Mahir Mamedov, general director of Socar’s Georgian unit, last week. “This will include development of infrastructure, expansion and other projects.”

asbarez.com

RADIO FREE EUROPE: Former S. Ossetian official held

The former economics minister of the pro-Georgian Provisional Administration of S. Ossetia has been jailed. Teymuraz Jerapov has been charged by de facto S. Ossetian authorities with treason and with illegally crossing the internal border.

www.rferl.org

JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION: Success of Georgia’s police reform is a function of sovereignty

Georgia’s de-Sovietization has been manifested in several ways, but comprehensive police reform has been by far the most illustrative example. Although the reforms carried out in the education, justice, economic, and the public-service systems are no less significant, the transformation that the Georgian police have undergone under Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili truly leaves nothing to remind of the Soviet past or Russia’s present. Instead of the Soviet-styled force having almost no public support and deeply marred by corruption that existed six years ago, now Georgia has a police trusted by 81 percent of the public, according to a recent opinion poll conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI).

jamestownfoundation.blogspot.com

DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR: Red Cross looking for 47 missing from Russia-Georgia war

The Red Cross said last week it was searching for 47 people unaccounted for since Russia’s 2008 invasion of Georgia. The group arranged a meeting between Russia and Georgian officials and de facto authorities from S. Ossetia to coordinate a hunt for those missing. “Under humanitarian law, families have the right to know what happened to their missing relatives,” said an ICRC forensic adviser said.

www.earthtimes.org

RADIO FREE EUROPE: Abkhaz leader will not allow international observers in region

Russian proxy and de facto leader Sergei Bagapsh last week said he will not allow international observers to enter Georgia’s Russian-occupied region of Abkhazia. Bagapsh told journalists that instead of being in Sukhumi, the Abkhaz capital, UN and EU observer missions should go to Georgia proper because it “is a source of international conflict.” Meanwhile, Russia said that it will increase security off Abkhazia’s coast, deploying extra patrol guards and four extra security boats.

www.rferl.org

CNN: Georgia pipeline fuels new hope and old tensions

Linking Europe with the oil reserves of the Caspian Sea, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline was one of the largest engineering projects ever undertaken in the region. Traversing three countries, the BTC pipeline is nearly 1,800 km long—one of the world’s longest—and passes through areas of strategic importance that were previously controlled by the former Soviet Union. Its construction received the enthusiastic support of the US government and from western nations, who welcomed the opportunity to reduce dependence on the Middle East and Russia for oil supply. Pumping up to one million barrels of oil per day, the pipeline provides the West with a secure energy supply.

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