

# GEORGIA UPDATE

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[www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge](http://www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge)

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- EU Report Highlights Georgia's Progress With Neighborhood Action Plan
- Georgia, Azerbaijan & Romania Take First Step in Establishing Vital New Energy Corridor to Europe



In a debate that was marked by serious, substantive exchanges on local policies, five Tbilisi mayoral candidates vied for the support of the city's voters. The landmark 90-minute session was televised throughout the nation and allowed the leading contenders to address five sets of issues: employment, municipal infrastructure, social services, health care, and utility costs. All five sought to differentiate themselves based on their programs for Tbilisi. The debate—the first of its kind—marks another step in the evolution of the country's democratic practices.

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## QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“Several opposition parties have, in their contacts with the OSCE/ODIHR EOM, expressed cautious satisfaction with the Central Election Commission chairperson for his perceived openness and transparency.”

“The Georgian Public Broadcaster, as well as national and regional private broadcasters, have been airing regular talk shows and debates among candidates and political parties, providing candidates with an important forum for an exchange of views.”

—Report by the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights on pre-election developments in Georgia

“I want those itching to restore the Soviet empire to know that era of the Soviet Union is over in Georgia.”

—President Saakashvili

## UPCOMING MILESTONES

**May 20-21:** FM Vashadze visits Malta

**May 26:** Georgian Independence Day

**May 26:** International concert in support of IDPs

**May 30:** Municipal elections nationwide, including first-ever direct election of Tbilisi's mayor

**Jun. 8:** Next round of Geneva talks

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

## TOP STORIES

**Candidates for Tbilisi Mayor Vie for Votes in First-Ever Televised Debate**

The top five candidates running in Tbilisi's upcoming mayoral race participated last Saturday in the city first-ever campaign debate. The landmark 90-minute exchange was televised throughout the nation, and brought together incumbent Gigi Ugulava; the leader of the Alliance for Georgia, Irakli Alasania; Zviad Dzidziguri, leader of Conservative Party, nominated by National Council coalition; Giorgi Chanturia, nominated by Christian-Democratic Movement and Gogi Topadze, leader of Industrialists. The candidates laid out substantive ideas and policy proposals on the country's most pressing challenges: employment, municipal infrastructure, social services, health care, and utility costs.

"Tbilisi is a better city, than it was five years ago," Ugulava said. "But we all agree that a lot still remains to be done, especially in terms of employment." Despite their differences, all the candidates encouraged civic engagement in the capital's first direct election of a mayor and rallied Georgians to the polls. "This election is an opportunity to change your future and you should be active and come at polling stations," Alasania said. Georgian Public Broadcasting, which televised the event, also hosted a separate TV debate in for the four remaining candidates. The debates were co-funded by the US Agency for International Development and GPB.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Tbilisi Mayoral Candidates' TV Debates](#)

**NDI Polling shows Georgians Positive About Upcoming Elections, Media, Municipal Services**

The National Democratic Institute, a widely respected international NGO, this week released new polling data on Georgia's democratic progress and the upcoming local election. A 36% plurality nationwide believe the May 30 local elections will be conducted "well," compared to only 9% who believe the elections will be "falsified" (the remained think the elections will be conducted neither well nor falsified, or do not know, or decline to answer). By a 46-17% margin, more Georgians evaluate the work of the Central Election Commission positively rather than negatively; meanwhile, 59% of Georgians believe they get enough information from the media on the political party they support.

Jobs remain the most important national concern, followed by territorial integrity. The most important local issue is the cost of communal services. Majorities or pluralities see improvement in many local services since January 2008, including on: roads (70% better than 2008), streetlights (64%), gas (49%) crime (47%), and trash collection (46%). Finally, majorities of Georgians disapprove of the recent trips to Moscow by Zurab Noghaideli (62%) and Nino Burjanadze (59%).

[NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE: Public Attitudes Towards Elections in Georgia](#)

**EU Reports Highlights Georgia's Progress With Neighborhood Action Plan**

Georgia made strong progress in the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Action Plan priorities throughout 2009, but challenges remain in consolidation of democratic institutions, according to an EU report released Wednesday. The report notes progress in areas such as rule of law, reform of the justice system, fight against petty corruption, trade facilitation and improvement of business climate. "Georgia will need to continue its democratic reform efforts and consolidation of democratic institutions, especially political pluralism and media freedom," the report notes. "Other major future challenges include poverty reduction, employment and social policies, agricultural development including sanitary and phytosanitary issues and civil service reform."

[RADIO FREE EUROPE: EU Showcases Neighborhood Policy Successes](#)

**OSCE Observer Mission Underscores Georgia's Electoral Progress in First Report**

The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) this week released the first interim report on Georgia's electoral and legislative processes, as the upcoming local elections approach. The Election Observation Mission (EOM) commended the country for adopting previous recommendations on electoral reform: "The Unified Election Code was significantly amended in December 2009, addressing some previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations." The EOM also confirmed the Central Election Commission's advances in promoting a transparent and legitimate election at the local level, illustrating the county's steadfast commitment to democracy.

The report reads: "Several opposition parties have, in their contacts with the OSCE/ODIHR EOM, expressed cautious satisfaction with the CEC chairperson for his perceived openness and transparency," adding that the CEC's voters' list re-checking process was "helpful and effective." While shortcomings remain, the report also highlighted positive trends in media coverage of the election campaign, praising last week's debate, which was televised by Georgian Public Broadcasting (GPB): "The GPB, as well as national and regional private broadcasters, have been airing regular talk shows and debates among candidates and political parties, providing candidates with an important forum for an exchange of views." The ODIHR mission last month deployed to 39 observers to Tbilisi, at the invitation of Georgian authorities. A second interim report is due on May 20.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Int'l Observers Release Interim Election Report OSCE-ODIHR: Interim Report No. 1](#)

**Georgia, Azerbaijan & Romania Take First in Establishing Vital New Energy Corridor to Europe**

The energy ministers of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Romania signed a protocol in Tbilisi this week on forming a joint venture to export liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Europe. Georgian Energy Minister Aleksandre Khetaguri told reporters the project could prove very profitable. Azerbaijani Energy Minister Natiq Aliyev said the protocol envisages the construction of new Black Sea coast terminals in Romania and Georgia that will be linked to pipelines. "It is a new corridor for Azerbaijan," Aliyev said. "This corridor will enable us to independently deliver our gas to Romania, also to Ukraine and Bulgaria. At the same time, we can cross to the Mediterranean Sea."

[RADIO FREE EUROPE: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania Sign Protocol On Gas Exports](#)



Pope Benedict XVI hosted President Saakashvili last week at the Vatican. The President expressed gratitude towards the Vatican for its support during Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia. Meanwhile, the Pope highlighted Georgia's role in Christian history, and encouraged "a peaceful coexistence among believers of different religions for the common good." After his audience with the pope, the President met with Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, who was accompanied by Msgr. Dominique Mamberti, Vatican Secretary for Relations with States.

[RUSTAVI: Georgian President Meets with Pope Benedict XVI](#)

## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

**FOREIGN POLICY: Black hole on the Black Sea**

Georgia's Russian-occupied territory of S. Ossetia is precisely the kind of jurisdictional "black hole" that experts say poses such a great risk to nuclear proliferation. In fact, in an announcement largely ignored during Washington's recent Nuclear Security Summit, President Saakashvili revealed that in March, Georgia had once again intercepted smugglers with weapons-grade uranium—the country's eighth such bust in the last decade. If the Russians are, in fact, occupying S. Ossetia, then they are responsible for controlling proliferation.

[www.foreignpolicy.com](http://www.foreignpolicy.com)

**OPEN DEMOCRACY: Georgian overtures to Abkhazia, Tskhinvali**

"I know that reintegration brings responsibilities," Georgia's minister for reintegration, Temur Yakobashvili, said on re-engaging with the country's Russian-occupied territories. "I am aware that I have a great deal of work to do to convince the peoples of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia that their future is brighter as part of Georgia," he said, referring to the territories current oppressed and Russian-militarized state. Added Yakobashvili: "But I am determined to work day and night to achieve a lasting peace in the Caucasus built on mutual respect and greater dialogue."

[www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net)

**MOSCOW TIMES: Another Munich agreement**

The EU's report on the origins of Russia's 2008 war with Georgia is still very important today—in some sense, even more important than the war itself. The report, overseen by Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini, is a blatant appeasement to Russia—a new Munich Agreement of sorts. Tagliavini has created nothing short of a revolution in global politics by introducing a new definition of war. It now turns out that wars are started by those who respond to the actions of aggressors. So, when the Red Army dropped bombs on Helsinki, that wasn't war. But when Finland responded, it qualified as war.

[www.themoscowtimes.com](http://www.themoscowtimes.com)

**EURASIANET: Tbilisi busts enriched uranium smugglers**

The Georgian government is charging an undisclosed number of individuals with criminal conduct in connection with last month's thwarted attempt to sell highly enriched uranium (HEU) on the black market in Tbilisi. A reported 70 percent of the nuclear material is highly enriched, a high enough quality to create a crude nuclear bomb. "The fact is that once there were multiple attempts, there were these things going around in Georgia's Russian-occupied regions and we all should be vigilant," President Saakashvili said, adding: "We are very well equipped, but with black holes nobody can guarantee security fully."

[www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org)

**JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION: Council of Europe's Georgia policy ignores realities on the ground**

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) was scheduled to adopt a resolution on the consequences of the war between Russia and Georgia during last month's spring session. While Moscow has neglected all of PACE's very specific conditions, PACE failed to adopt a new resolution. No matter how one would interpret the events of 2008, there is solid evidence that Russia invaded Georgia and now occupies 20 percent of Georgia's sovereign territory. The Council of Europe was until this past session the only forum that could at least issue resolutions reminding Moscow of its international obligations. Unfortunately, this avenue has also been blocked by Russian demands and is increasingly answered in Europe by deafening silence.

[jamestownfoundation.blogspot.com](http://jamestownfoundation.blogspot.com)

**CNN: Unearthing Georgia's wine heritage**

Vinification, or winemaking, is deeply ingrained in the culture of Georgia; the world's most ancient example of winemaking was discovered in the southern region of Shulaveri. There, archaeologists revealed evidence of wine residue inside ceramic jars that were dated back some 8,000 years. "Grapes are grown from the earth and great wine is made in the earth. And great wine should be drunk from the earth," Georgian wine-maker Malkhaz Patalashvili says.

[www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com)

**RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY: Pressure on S. Ossetian prime minister intensifies**

The campaign to force the resignation of Vadim Brovtsev, de facto PM of Georgia's Russian-occupied territory of S. Ossetia, and of his cabinet that began earlier this month is gaining in intensity. Criminal cases for corruption have been brought against two government officials, both Russians, whom Brovtsev—a former businessman from Chelyabinsk, Russia—brought with him to Tskhinvali when he was appointed premier in August last year. Meanwhile, the region's parliament—which is wholly loyal to Moscow proxy and de facto President Eduard Kokoity—has begun collecting the required number of signatures to bring a formal vote of no confidence against Brovtsev.

[www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org)

**AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: English ousts Russian in Georgia's schools**

At schools across Georgia, English is ousting Russian as the pro-Western government mounts an ambitious campaign to promote the language of Shakespeare. Keen to build closer ties with the West and amid continued tensions with Moscow after Russia's 2008 invasion, Georgia's government seems determined to end Russian's dominance as the country's most-spoken foreign language. Earlier this year, Georgia's education ministry launched a program to bring 1,000 native English teachers to schools across the country starting in September. Meanwhile, Tbilisi's municipal authorities are also offering free English lessons for adults aimed at boosting their career prospects.

[www.timesofmalta.com](http://www.timesofmalta.com)

**BLOOMBERG: Georgia ready to export 300,000 Sheep a year to Middle East**

Georgia is ready to export as many as 300,000 sheep a year to Middle Eastern countries including Jordan, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, according to the agriculture ministry. "Georgia is fully capable of exporting 300,000 sheep to the Middle East, and we're seeing huge demand," said Beqa Gonashvili, head of the Georgian Sheep Association. "It's time to sign concrete agreements." Qatar plans to begin importing as many as 70,000 sheep a year from Georgia in 2010 and is willing to pay as much as \$250 per animal. At present, Georgia regularly ships sheep only to Armenia.

[georgiandaily.com](http://georgiandaily.com)

**THINK TANKS/NGOs****EUROPEAN STABILITY INITIATIVE: Georgia and Freedom—From liberalism to libertarianism? Portraits of member-state builders**

The European Stability Initiative (ESI), a non-profit research group, this year concluded three years of field research in Georgia to study the country's libertarian revolution, aiming to apply Georgia's democratic transformation as a model for other transitioning nations. "It is one of the most extraordinary stories of state-building and economic reform in the post-Soviet world," ESI writes. ESI followed the momentous impact of the Rose Revolution, studying the new generation of leaders and their ability to transform their country. ESI presented its Georgia research at Harvard's Kennedy School, the George Marshall Foundation, and the Carnegie Endowment in Washington.

[www.esiweb.org](http://www.esiweb.org)