

# GEORGIA UPDATE

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

## TOP STORIES

- Parliament Set to Debate Constitutional Amendments to Create Better Balance of Powers
- ICJ to Begin Hearings on Ethnic Cleansing of Georgians by Russian Troops & Proxies
- United Nations Set to Vote on Georgian IDP Resolution
- Russian Missiles in Occupied Territories Draw International Condemnation
- Buoyant Georgian Economy Poised to Reach Pre-Invasion Levels of Growth
- Flights Between Georgia, Russia Resume for First Time Since Invasion



### Tbilisi's Bridge of Peace Undulates in Glass & Steel

Covered with crisp wafers of glass encased in a steel membrane, the pedestrian Bridge of Peace is photographic eye candy. Designed by Italian architect Michelle de Lucchi, the bridge has a bow-shaped sunroof that glitters by day and comes ablaze with neon lighting by night. Georgia's presidential palace—as well as an ancient fortress wall, a cliff-top church and a statue of the city's legendary founder, King Vakhtang Gorgasali—all overlook the new sparkling marvel on the block. Meant to symbolize a new, transparent Georgia, the bridge connects two banks—a historic café district and an upcoming modern promenade the structure. [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org)

## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

**THE ECONOMIST:** Georgia's mental revolution

**THE GUARDIAN:** Don't let Georgia down, Cameron

**WALL STREET JOURNAL:** Reset the Russian reset policy

**HUFFINGTON POST:** World Court decision on Kosovo reinforces Georgia's case

**WASHINGTON POST:** Georgia needs US help to rebuild, stand up to Russia

**OPEN DEMOCRACY:** Georgia, two years on—a future beyond war

**CONSERVATIVE HOME:** The international community must stand with Georgia

**JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION:** Optimism prevails as Georgia commemorates two-year anniversary of Russian invasion

**BLOOMBERG:** Michel Platini in Georgia to discuss hosting Europa League final

**NEW YORK TIMES:** Pungent harmonies drawn from ancient traditions

## QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“The deployment of such a weapon system in Abkhazia would be in contradiction with the six-point ceasefire agreement, as well as implementing measures, and would risk further increasing tensions in the region. I call on Russia to fully implement all its obligations under the ceasefire agreement.... The EU also recalls that official visits to the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia should be made in full respect of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

—Catherine Ashton, EU foreign policy chief, after reports of new Russian missiles in Abkhazia

“Today Georgia has reinvented itself as the star of the Caucasus. It is less corrupt than most former Soviet republics and one of the easiest places in the world to do business, according to the World Bank. Its liberalised economy has weathered Russian embargoes, and the state held together during the war with Russia. Its police do not take bribes and electricity is no longer a luxury. Most important, people are no longer surprised by such success. The biggest transformation is in their minds.”

—*The Economist*, issue of August 19, 2010

## UPCOMING MILESTONES

**Sep. 6-8:** Estonian FM visits Georgia

**Sep. 7:** FM of Finland visits Georgia

**Sep. 8:** OSCE General Secretary visits Georgia

**Sep. 10-11:** FM Vashadze visits Latvia

**Sep. 13:** ICJ hearings begin on ethnic cleansing of Georgians by Russian troops and proxies

**Sep.13-18:** Economy Minister Kobalia in California

**Sep.14-17:** Parliament Speaker Bakradze, Vice PM Baramidze, and Deputy FM Gordadze in Washington

**Sep. 23:** President Saakashvili addresses the UN General Assembly

**Oct. 14:** Next round of Geneva talks

## TOP STORIES

**Parliament Set to Debate Constitutional Amendments to Create Better Balance of Powers**

Parliament this month will launch debates on proposed constitutional amendments that limit presidential powers, institute greater checks and balances within the government, and redistribute executive authority to Parliament. "The proposed amendments to the constitution will introduce a European model of governance in which no one, including myself, will be able to rule Georgia single-handedly," President Saakashvili last week said in an interview with Russian radio station *Ekho Moskvy*. While the president would remain head of state and a commander-in-chief, the prime minister and the cabinet would have the power to direct and exercise domestic and foreign policy of the state—a power currently retained by the president—under the new draft. The PM also will have the authority to appoint provincial governors. Meanwhile, the legislative body would select the PM, approve cabinet members, and have greater authority to overturn a presidential veto. A 36-member group, led by parliamentary chairman, Davit Bakradze, last month hosted a series of town hall meetings to engage the public on the proposed changes. If adopted, the proposed amendments would take effect in December 2013.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Parliament to Launch Constitutional Debates](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Constitutional Amendments Initiated](#)

**ICJ to Begin Hearings on Ethnic Cleansing of Georgians by Russian Troops and Proxies**

The International Court of Justice will hold four public hearings, beginning Sep. 13, on the ethnic cleansing of Georgians by Russia's occupying troops and proxies. Georgia is seeking to bring justice to Georgian victims of gross human and civil rights violations carried out by Russian forces in the occupied territories of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia. Georgia initiated the case shortly after Russia's 2008 August invasion, claiming Russia had incurred "serious violations of its fundamental obligations" under the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination during its illegal occupation of Georgia. Georgian lawyers will present their arguments to the high Court in The Hague on September 13 where the case will be heard for four days.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: ICJ to hold public hearings on Georgia v. Russia](#)

**United Nations Set to Vote on Georgian IDP Resolution**

The United Nations General Assembly is set to vote next Tuesday on a resolution calling for the right of return for Georgia's internally displaced persons. State Reintegration Minister Yakobashvili was in New York last month to secure support for the resolution and for Georgia's action plan for engaging the residents of the occupied territories. He met representatives from the African Union; the CARICOM grouping of 15 Caribbean nations; the Andean trade bloc of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru; as well as with officials from a number of Pacific island nations. Similar resolutions have been passed by the UN in the last two years. Georgia is aiming to increase the number of member states in favor of the resolution.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Tbilisi's Efforts to Secure UN Backing for its IDP Resolution](#)

**Buoyant Georgian Economy Poised to Reach Pre-Invasion Levels of Growth**

Georgia's buoyant economy is poised to reach pre-invasion levels of growth, according to PM Gilauri, "We estimate growth of 5 percent this year and as much as nine percent in 2011," he said. "Double-digit growth is possible from 2012." Meanwhile, President Saakashvili's efforts to attract foreign investment from the Middle East and Latin America in a bid to fuel growth have seemed to pay off. "We expect \$400 million of foreign investment in the energy sector alone next year," Gilauri said. The government plans to develop Georgia's role as an energy corridor linking the Caspian and Black seas.

[BLOOMBERG: Georgia's Economy May Expand at Pre-Russia-War Pace by 2012, Premier Says](#)

**Russian Missiles in Occupied Territories Draw International Condemnation**

Russian missiles deployed in Georgia's occupied territories of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia have drawn harsh international condemnation, as Moscow continues to violate the 2008 international ceasefire agreement. "The deployment of such a weapon system in Abkhazia would be in contradiction with the six-point ceasefire agreement, signed in September 2008, as well as implementing measures, and would risk further increasing tensions in the region," EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said after learning of the missiles' deployment in August. "I call on Russia to fully implement all its obligations under the ceasefire agreement," she added. "The EU reiterates its firm support for the security and stability of Georgia, based on full respect for the principles of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, recognized by international law."

Ashton's strong criticism of Moscow came on the heels of a senior Russian military official's public announcement that Russia had deployed the advanced surface-to-air system, known as the S-300, in Abkhazia. Called the SA-20 in the West, the S-300 is one of Russia's most advanced air defense systems. Georgian officials also have said Moscow is illegally deploying the long-range missile system in Russian-occupied S. Ossetia as well. "Although Russia is not saying this, be sure that S-300s have already been deployed in the Tskhinvali region," FM Vashadze said. Georgian Reintegration Minister Yakobashvili also criticized Russia's bellicose foreign policy: "Russia is completely uninterested in the fates of Abkhazians and Ossetians," he said. "It simply needs territory on which to play its military games."

[NEW YORK TIMES: Russia Moves Missiles Into Breakaway Region](#)

[AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Russia Has Deployed S-300 Missiles](#)

[DEUTSCHE WELLE: Abkhazia power games with Russian missiles](#)

**Flights Between Georgia, Russia Resume for First Time Since War**

Direct flights between Georgia and Russia resumed last month, marking the first non-chartered air travel since Russia's 2008 invasion. Georgian Airways and Russia's Sibir Airlines agreed to each conduct three flights per week between the two capitals. The airlines were granted permission to conduct cross-country flights from Georgian and Russian airline authorities. Russia cut regular direct air flights with Georgia in October, 2006, following a spy row between the two countries. The flights were restored in late March 2008, but were again suspended after the Russia's August 2008 invasion.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Georgian, Russian Airlines to Share Flights](#)



EurasiaNet contributing photojournalist and documentary photographer Justyna Mielnikiewicz is exhibiting her recent work from Georgia and the S. Caucasus at the "Visa Pour l'Image" photojournalism festival in the southern French town of Perpignan. Her recent project, "Shared Sorrows, Divide Lines," opened last week at the Couvent des Minimes exhibition hall during Pro Week and will be on display for four weeks.

## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

### THE ECONOMIST: Georgia's mental revolution

Today Georgia has reinvented itself as the star of the Caucasus. It is less corrupt than most former Soviet republics and one of the easiest places in the world to do business, according to the World Bank. Its liberalized economy has weathered Russian embargoes, and the state held together during the war with Russia. Its police do not take bribes and electricity is no longer a luxury. Most important, people are no longer surprised by such success. The biggest transformation is in their minds. The mental shift which has occurred in Georgia will make it hard to turn the country backwards.

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

### THE GUARDIAN: Don't let Georgia down, Cameron

The reset button has yielded tangible benefits for global security, but has not been at the expense of Georgia or other US allies in the Caucasus and former CIS. Last month, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Georgia to defy the notion that better relations with Russia means the White House is dumping Georgia. Far from it. Secretary Clinton reaffirmed American support for the Georgian government, led by Saakashvili, on her visit to Tbilisi. The UK government should do likewise. Georgia has been praised by the international community, financial institutions and NGOs for its progress on democratic reforms, including the opposition in drafting a new constitution and election code.

[www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

### WALL STREET JOURNAL: Reset the Russian reset policy

While the Obama administration praises soft power, Russia still speaks the language of arms. In the past two years it has built five military bases in Abkhazia and S. Ossetia. To roll back the Kremlin's growing regional influence, Washington should expand its cooperation with the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus; lift the de facto weapons embargo on Georgia; and engage in meaningful efforts in the realms of energy, security and good governance.

[online.wsj.com](http://online.wsj.com)

### WASHINGTON POST: Georgia needs US help to rebuild, stand up to Russia

Despite all the damage Russia has done to Georgia, and its threats to do more, Moscow has failed to achieve its strategic objectives: The democratic government of Georgia has survived and is thriving. The US-Russia relationship should enhance this success, not jeopardize it. We have an opportunity to support Georgia's emergence as a strong, whole and free nation—but only if we remember who our friends are.

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

### HUFFINGTON POST: The World Court's decision on Kosovo reinforces Georgia's case

Analysts have underscored that the World Court's opinion on Kosovo's declaration of independence resonates far beyond Kosovo, yet it is also worth noting that the ICJ's ruling unambiguously confirms that Russia's continuing occupation of Georgian territory is a flagrant violation of international law. The decision only strengthens Georgia's case that victims of ethnic cleansing have an undeniable right return to their homes and villages and that Russia's illegal occupation of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia must end.

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

### OPEN DEMOCRACY: Georgia, two years on—a future beyond war

Two years after the disastrous Georgian-Russian war over S. Ossetia in August 2008, the situation from Tbilisi's perspective looks far better than anyone dared hope—or, in the case of some Russian politicians, would have wished. Saakashvili's penchant for cabinet reshuffles has brought to prominence another cluster of ambitious young colleagues, and for the first time the president has a PM who is not a disposable lightning-conductor but acts as if he leads the government.

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

### CONSERVATIVE HOME: The international community must stand with Georgia

Prime Minister Cameron must join the likes of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and French FM Kouchner in calling for Russia to come to the negotiating table and find a solution to this poisonous conflict before more blood is spilled. Without international pressure, Russia has no intention of either fulfilling its obligations made under the ceasefire agreement or working constructively with the Georgian government to find a solution to the ongoing conflicts in Abkhazia and S. Ossetia.

[conservativehome.blogs.com](http://conservativehome.blogs.com)

### JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION: Optimism prevails as Georgia

commemorates two-year anniversary of Russian invasion  
An emphasis on diplomacy, development and modernization, and a keen awareness of Russia's "unfinished business" in Georgia, are closely intertwined in the Georgian leadership's mindset. It remains to be seen whether a strategy of modernization would help the Georgians avoid another Russian invasion or only convince the Russians that now is the time, before Georgia becomes unrecognizable. Since the times of Athens and Sparta, it has been a well-known belief that one country's economic development could be, for various reasons, as threatening for a neighbor as its military build-up.

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

### BLOOMBERG: UEFA's Michel Platini in Georgia to discuss hosting Europa League final

Michel Platini, the head of European soccer's ruling body, was in Tbilisi last month to discuss the possibility of the Black Sea country hosting the Europa League final in 2013. "I am here for a protocol visit," Platini said, referring to discussions on the prospect of Tbilisi hosting the widely-popular soccer match final. "This will be the perfect investment opportunity for Georgia, now all we have to do is to modernize the conditions of our stadiums," Tengiz Sichinava, a former Georgian national team player and president of the Georgian Football Federation, said.

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

### NEW YORK TIMES: Pungent harmonies drawn from ancient traditions

The six-concert series at the Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival in New York City opened last month with two programs featuring music of Bach, Gyorgy Ligeti, Iannis Xenakis and Elliott Carter. But it was the male Ensemble Basiani from Georgia, singing two sets of Georgian polyphony descended from an ancient tradition that stole the main show at Tully Hall against strong competition. Conductor Pierre-Laurent Aimard said from the stage that he had first heard recorded examples of this tradition 30 years ago and had always wanted to hear it live. The rest of us could only be grateful for his obsession.

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

### THINK TANKS/NGOs

#### ATLANTIC COUNCIL: Atlantic Council launches Republic of Georgia task force led by Senators Shaheen and Graham

On the second anniversary of the Russia-Georgia war, the Atlantic Council is launching a high-level, bipartisan task force on Georgia, co-chaired by Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC). The task force aims to encourage a bipartisan consensus on policy toward Georgia. Over the coming months, the task force will visit the region and develop recommendations for policy-makers in Washington, Tbilisi, and Brussels. "Two years ago this weekend, war began in the South Caucasus between Russia and Georgia shattering the transatlantic consensus in support of a Europe whole, free and at peace which could include Georgia and remain open to Russia," the co-chairs said. "Now we need a new effort to forge a renewed bipartisan consensus on how to support Georgia's reforms, preserve its territorial integrity and advance its aspirations, while preventing renewed conflict in the region."

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