

GEORGIA UPDATE

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The UN General Assembly on Tuesday, by a vote of 50-17, adopted a resolution affirming the right of return for over 400,000 Georgian IDPs and refugees driven out of the occupied territories of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia. "Together, we have just adopted a resolution that lifts the hopes of hundreds of thousands of IDPs and refugees who were forced—by violence and fear—to flee their homes and communities," said Georgia's Ambassador Alexander Lomaia. "It is with my mind on these brave men, women, and children—Georgians of many ethnic origins and creeds—that I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to you."

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"The Georgian Armed Forces and the people of Georgia are making vital contributions to realizing our shared objectives under NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. The US deeply appreciates and respects Georgia's contributions, and the sacrifices that come with them. We will honor 1st Lt. Shukvani's memory in continuing our work to build a peaceful, stable Afghanistan."

—The US Embassy in Tbilisi on the death of the first Georgian soldier in Afghanistan

"Despite countless calls by the international community, and the tireless efforts of our government, these men, women, and children have been prevented from returning to their communities. All told, the IDPs represent a staggering 75% of the pre-conflict populations of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali. It is a testament to the indomitability of the human spirit that today they continue to live in the hope of a better future."

—Georgia's UN Ambassador Alexander Lomaia prior to a UN vote on a resolution calling for the right of return of Georgia's IDPs

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Sept. 10-11: FM Vashadze visits Latvia

Sept. 13: ICJ begins hearings on ethnic cleansing of Georgians by Russian troops and proxies

Sept. 14-16: Parliament Speaker Bakradze visits Washington

Sept. 16: Venice Commission head Bukikio visits Georgia

Sept. 19-25: President Saakashvili visits NYC, attends UN General Assembly

Oct. 14: Next round of Geneva talks

TOP STORIES

United Nations General Assembly Adopts Resolution Calling for Right of Return for Georgian IDPs

The United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday adopted a resolution on the right of a safe and dignified return of all IDPs and refugees to their homes in the Abkhazia and S. Ossetia regions of Georgia. Despite Moscow's determined efforts to oppose the resolution, it gained more support than similar ones over the previous two years. The final tally of 50 to 17 was a clear margin of victory and showed that support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity continue to grow. Along with the right to return clause, the resolution recognizes the need to respect the property rights of all IDPs and refugees, underlines the unacceptability of forced demographic changes, and calls upon all parties involved to take immediate steps to create favorable security conditions conducive to the "voluntary, safe, dignified and unhindered return of all IDPs and refugees to their places of origin." There are over 400,000 IDPs and refugees who have been driven out from the two Georgian regions by Russia and its proxies since the early 1990s. While practical implementation of the resolution is a challenge given Russia's heavy military presence in the occupied territories, it remains important on numerous levels—including by explicitly declaring Abkhazia and S. Ossetia as Georgian territories, by addressing the humanitarian needs of Georgia's IDP, and by underscoring that a vast majority of the international community rejects the Russian claim to a sphere of influence.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: UN General Assembly Passes IDP Resolution](#)

Georgia Mourns Death of its First Soldier in Afghanistan

Georgia this week suffered its first casualty in Afghanistan since joining the NATO-led mission last November. A company commander from the 31st infantry battalion, 1st Lt. Mukhran Shukvani, 28, was killed by a homemade bomb; 25-year-old Cpl. Alika Gitolendia lost both of his legs in the same incident. Georgia has 925 troops in Afghanistan, including 750 in the southern province of Helmand, the most violent region of the country. "This cannot and will not lessen our resolve to achieve our mission in Afghanistan," the Georgian government said in a statement. The US embassy in Tbilisi expressed condolences on the soldier's death. "We mourn his loss, even as we salute the ongoing dedication and sacrifice of his fellow members of the 31st Battalion," the embassy said. "The Georgian Armed Forces and the people of Georgia are making vital contributions to realizing our shared objectives under NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. The US deeply appreciates and respects Georgia's contributions, and the sacrifices that come with them."

[REUTERS: First Georgian Soldier Killed in Afghanistan](#)

UK's Ryanair In Discussions to Start Flying to Georgia in 2011

Irish low-cost airline Ryanair might start flying to Georgia next year, according to Economy Minister Kobalia. "Ryanair is very much interested" in launching flights to Georgia starting next summer," she said after meeting with Ryanair executives in Ireland to discuss future aviation agreements, Georgia's progress towards upgrading its second largest airport in Kutaisi, and the adoption of the common EU-aviation agreement. According to Kobalia, pursuing airport infrastructure upgrades and signing onto the EU's aviation agreement would pave the way for Ryanair's entry into Georgia. Passenger traffic between the EU and Georgia has increased by an average of 10 percent annually over the past five years. Georgia and the EU last March finalized an air services agreement, aiming to integrate Georgia into a wider European Common Aviation Area. Georgia must harmonize its legislation with European standards and implement EU aviation rules in areas of security, safety, and consumer protection before the agreement can be signed.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Economy Minister Says RyanAir Interested in Georgia Entry](#)

Ministry Pledges Permanent Assistance to Evicted IDPs; Abkhaz Leader Says Return "Impossible"

Georgia's Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons last week underscored its commitment to provide permanent assistance to a group of IDPs evicted in August from government-owned buildings in Tbilisi slated for other purposes. Eka Gulua, a ministry spokeswoman, said the government sponsored many dwelling locations that are available for IDP ownership. The Ministry also said the government is providing long-term assistance to all IDPs in need of basic social benefits. "These dwelling spaces will be transferred in ownership to displaced persons; in addition, we will provide them permanent assistance to include healthcare and other issues," Gulua said, adding that IDPs could choose their new home from a variety of government-designated shelters located throughout the country. "With their consent we are ready to help them with transportation right now." The government has offered alternative accommodation in various provincial districts, including Chkhorotsku, Khobi, Zugdidi, Tsalenjikha and Abasha in the western region of Samegrelo, as well as Bakurtskikhe, in the Kakheti region. The ministry also pledged to cooperate fully with the ombudsman's office and to "leave no recommendation and letter of the Public Defender without a response."

Meanwhile the de facto leader of Russian-occupied Abkhazia denied the right of return for Georgian refugees, saying their return is "currently impossible" until Georgia officially recognizes the region's independence: "Those who want to return to Abkhazia, but consider it a part of Georgia cannot return, and we cannot give them the same false promises given by the Georgian authorities," Sergei Shamba said.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Ministry Pledges "Permanent Assistance" to IDPs](#)
[RADIO FREE EUROPE/ RADIO LIBERTY: Abkhaz Leader Says Georgian Refugee Return 'Currently Impossible'](#)

**The Puppet Master of Tbilisi Takes New York**

The Lincoln Center's Out of Doors Festival welcomed back "The Battle of Stalingrad: A Requiem," marking a third NYC appearance for Georgian director and writer Rezo Gabriadze. In July 2002, the works of Gabriadze made their New York debut at the Lincoln Center Festival, with rotating performances of "The Battle of Stalingrad" and "Autumn of My Springtime," marionette works that sold out, earned rave reviews, and became a kind of stealth sensation. Gabriadze, who is also the author of such screenplays as "Mimino" and "Don't Grieve," is scheduled to reopen his puppet theater and café in Tbilisi this fall after renovations are complete. Founded in 1981, the theater was designed to serve as a personal laboratory, where Gabriadze could develop stories and techniques freely, without being under the pressure of official censorship.

[www.eurasianet.org](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL: Georgia and the limits of Russian power

The Abkhaz and S. Ossetians will learn that freedom from Tbilisi but dependence on Moscow is no freedom at all. As they watch American, European, Turkish, Kazakh, Israeli, and other investors turn their freer democratic neighbor into a booming Western-style economy while their own territory stagnates behind barbed wire, the process will take care of itself. Russian passports and handouts and pseudo-elections managed by Moscow are no substitute for a real future. "The invasion proved the limits of Russian power," Georgia's Minister for Reintegration Yakobashvili said. "They couldn't take over our country or remove our government, and they've failed to drag us into their sphere of influence."

online.wsj.com

FOREIGN POLICY: Resetting Georgia

The fact that Georgians aren't living in fear of a Russian invasion for the first time in years is an unexpected fringe benefit of President Obama's "reset" policy with Moscow. Among those praising Obama is Giga Bokeria, Georgia's deputy FM and a close confidant of President Saakashvili. "The immediate danger of a large-scale attack by Russia has been—if not completely eradicated—significantly reduced by a very active position by the US administration," he said. Meanwhile senior Georgian officials say Obama was even tougher behind the scenes, claiming he warned Medvedev and Putin that the US wouldn't stand on the sidelines if they launched another attack against Georgia.

www.foreignpolicy.com

FINANCIAL TIMES: How to square the Caucasian circle

While Moscow insists that Abkhazia and S. Ossetia are now fully independent states, Washington reaffirms its support for Georgia's claims on the territories. S. Ossetia, with a population of about 30,000, will never be independent, but the bloodshed of Russia's 2008 invasion has set back any rapprochement with Georgia by many years. That said, the August war actually weakened Russia's position in the Caucasus. The recognition policy for Abkhazia and S. Ossetia damaged Moscow internationally and no other post-Soviet state followed its example. The questions remains: Could Russia make Georgia part of the "reset" in relations with the west?

www.ft.com

AOL: Georgia shines two years after Russians rolled

Analysts say Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia has turned out to be a boon for the country, and for President Saakashvili, for three main reasons. First, it catalyzed \$4.5 billion in international aid—that's \$1,000 for every Georgian citizen—a sum primarily responsible for keeping this tiny nation above water during the recent financial crisis. Second, the war drew pledges of political support for Georgia and, by extension, for Saakashvili's then-wobbly government. Finally, in losing the battle for Georgia's Russian-occupied territories of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia, Saakashvili was able to gracefully redirect his own blustery nationalist rhetoric and reassess his domestic goals.

www.aolnews.com

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE: The Black Sea need not be a black spot

At first glance, Russia seems to be as much a problem as solution in the Black Sea region. It is building up its ground and air forces in Abkhazia and S. Ossetia, Georgian territories it annexed after the 2008 clash with Georgia, and at the Gyumri base in Armenia. These forces create unease because they could easily interdict shipments of Caspian oil and gas. Russia also says it will deploy more warships in the Black Sea, and it is outfitting a naval base in Abkhazia. Despite some hints of change, Moscow still refuses to deal with the government of Georgia.

www.nytimes.com

THE TELEGRAPH: Russia to beef up military presence in former Soviet space

A new deal, unveiled last month, will allow Russia to keep and expand a military base in Armeria, in a strategically vital S. Caucasus region crisscrossed with oil and gas pipelines. "The contract was previously concluded for a period of 25 years, but will now be effective for 49 years starting from 1995," Armenian FM Nalbandian said last month. Russia earlier this year also brokered a surprise deal to keep its Black Sea Fleet based in Ukraine until at least 2042, and, only last week, the Kremlin admitted it had installed game-changing S-300 air-defense missiles in Abkhazia, Georgia's Russian-occupied region, as long ago as 2008.

www.telegraph.co.uk

JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION: Is Russia decoupling S. Ossetia and Abkhazia?

Why is there renewed talk in Russia of "decoupling" Abkhazia and S. Ossetia again? Is it because a new invasion of Georgia is no longer on the Kremlin's agenda and thus the significance of S. Ossetia decreases? Or have the Russians shelved their plan to overthrow Saakashvili's government and started to show willingness to bargain with "S. Ossetia" for greater legitimate acquisitions in Abkhazia or somewhere else, for instance, to gain Georgia's support for their WTO membership? Whatever the reason, Georgia should be careful to not be tricked once again.

jamestownfoundation.blogspot.com

RADIO FREE EUROPE: Georgia slams Russia over ceasefire breaches

Georgia's PM last week charged Russia with failing to live up to the EU-brokered ceasefire that ended Russia's 2008 invasion, noting that Moscow of beefing up its military forces. On a visit to Lithuania, he said Moscow had breached the six-point deal signed by Russian and Georgian leaders under the auspices of French President Sarkozy. Lithuanian PM Andrius Kubilius said the ceasefire issue should remain at the forefront of talks on boosting ties between the EU and Russia. Georgia last month also accused Russia of deploying sophisticated missile-defense systems in the country's Russian-occupied regions of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia.

www.rferl.org

WINDOW ON EURASIA: Medvedev seeking a new "USSR—a union of sovereign super-loyal states"

Taking advantage of a "marked" decline in US activity in the former Soviet space, Medvedev is moving to "minimize" what some in Moscow see as the negative "consequences of the most serious geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century" by setting "a certain Union of Sovereign Super-loyal Republics." The editors of the Moscow paper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* recently pointed to the failings of GUAM, the Georgian-Ukrainian-Azerbaijani-Moldovan grouping, over the same period as indicative of Moscow's regaining of dominance in the post-Soviet space. "Taking into account the marked reduction in the activity of Washington in this region and the corresponding weakening of its opposition to Moscow, there has appeared," the editors say, "the optimal chance if not for the liquidation of 'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century.'"

www.eurasiareview.com

GLOBAL POST: Mapping Georgia from scratch

As it is, Google Maps shows Georgia as an empty, light gray swath of territory squeezed between Turkey, Russia, and the Black Sea, devoid of highways or train tracks or rivers. Now, one US-funded NGO, Open Maps Caucasus, has taken the mapping of Georgia into its own hands. "Our other goal is to actually make an accurate, street-level map of the entire country that will be useful to the people who live here," Austin Cowley, one of five founders of the organization, said. The map from Open Maps, which will be completed by the end of this month, will be an open-source map—meaning anyone can contribute to it, edit it, and tweak it to their needs: It's Wikipedia-meets-cartography, developing-world style.

www.globalpost.com