

GEORGIA UPDATE

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NATO's Special Representative to the Caucasus, James Appathurai (left), visited Georgia last week to discuss the country's reform progress and Euro-Atlantic integration efforts. He said NATO-Georgia relations are "going in the right direction," that Georgia is working very hard to meet membership requirements, and that both sides should strive to "reinforce" Georgia's success. Appathurai also underscored Georgia's territorial integrity: "NATO will not compromise when it comes to the territorial integrity of this country; there will be no recognition of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia as independent by the NATO allies. These are very firm principles on which our relationship is based." Meanwhile, the Georgia-NATO Commission meets today on the sidelines of an Alliance ministerial in Berlin. "This is a sign of the development and maturity of the relationship between NATO and Georgia," Appathurai said. "It's about more than just us, it's about what we do together."

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

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THE ECONOMIST: The Russia-Georgia conflict—going nowhere fast

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"In the last decade Georgia has begun a reawakening—a march toward a new golden age. Georgia's economy is growing, and you have been taking important steps to strengthen your democratic government and attract private investment to your country. I am happy to say that the friendship between Georgia and the United States has also grown stronger."

♦ Patrick Fine, Vice President of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)

"Five years ago, many people could not believe that this project might be realized. It was a very difficult job, but very well done by the MCC and the Georgian Millennium Department as well. Thousands of new jobs were created, which is the main goal of our government."

♦ PM Gilauri on the successful completion of Georgia's first MCC Compact

"Georgia should be a model for other countries in the region by becoming fully clean of corruption, clean of crime, and ecologically clean."

♦ President Saakashvili on the Georgian government's push for a "three clean model"

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Apr. 14-15: Foreign Minister Vashadze attends NATO ministerial meeting in Berlin

Apr. 15-20: Parliament Speaker Bakradze attends IPU meeting in Panama

May 1-2: Foreign Minister Vashadze visits Kuwait

May 6-7: Latvian Foreign Minister visits Tbilisi

May 26: Georgian Independence Day

Jun. 7: Next round of Geneva peace talks

TOP STORIES

Parliament Passes Media Transparency Legislation

Parliament last week passed key legislation on media ownership, banning offshore companies from owning Georgian broadcasters and requiring the Georgian National Communications Commission and other broadcasters to publish their revenue sources and financial audits annually and online. Parliament also passed amendments requiring media broadcasters to publicly disclose revenue from ads, sponsors, and donors. Media companies must also present their financial backers when applying for a broadcasting license. Broadcasters must implement the new reporting and ownership requirements before January 2012.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Broadcast Media Ownership Transparency Bill](#)

US Marines to Extend Georgia Training Mission

US Marine officials are planning to extend a successful US-Georgia military training program that prepares Georgian troops for deployment to Afghanistan. "These guys are in the fight, they want to fight, and they want us to teach them how to fight, which is the beauty of it," said Maj. Andrew Del Gaudio, head of a Georgian Development Program team at the Krtsanisi National Training Center. Discussions are underway to extend the program in Georgia and to deploy eight more battalions to support NATO operations in southern Afghanistan. Georgia plans to deploy this spring its third rotation of infantry battalions to fight alongside Marines in the volatile Helmand province, a mission to which few countries within NATO's International Security Assistance Force have committed. Launched in 2009, the Georgian Deployment Program sent its first unit—the 31st battalion—to Afghanistan last spring. The program has been critical in improving the Georgian military and enhancing global security. "They're side by side with us over there, and the Marines who are over there with them say positive things about them," said Sgt. Maj. Carlton Kent, the Corps' top enlisted adviser, referring to Georgia's military contributions to NATO's Afghanistan mission.

[MARINE TIMES: Marines to Extend Georgia Training Mission](#)

Millennium Challenge Corporation Hails Completion of First Program, Prepares Second

Georgian officials and representatives of the US Millennium Challenge Corporation representatives gathered in Tbilisi to celebrate the "extraordinarily successful" completion of Georgia's five-year MCC aid Compact. "The Government of Georgia has undertaken far-reaching policy reforms; met ambitious timelines; promoted economic development; and proven your country has the capability to plan and carry out complex economic activities for the good of all Georgians," MCC Vice President Patrick Fine said at the closing ceremony of the Compact, a package worth \$395 million targeted to infrastructure and economic development projects. He also commended the government's reform progress: "In the last decade, Georgia has begun a reawakening—a march toward a new golden age. Georgia's economy is growing, and you have been taking important steps to strengthen your democratic government and attract private investment." The MCC recently selected Georgia to receive a second aid package, worth between \$100-150 million, citing the country's hard work, success, and focus on quality and transparency. Officials are drafting a proposal of projects to receive aid for this next round of development projects.

[MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP: Georgia Compact Closeout](#)

Sweden-Georgia Bilateral Relationship Grows Stronger

Swedish and Georgian leaders last week called for enhanced bilateral trade and development assistance agreements, as relations between the two countries deepen. "Sweden supports Georgia's EU aspirations, and wants to see a prosperous, democratic Georgia," said Amb. Diana Janse, Sweden's first resident diplomat in Georgia, at the opening ceremony of the Swedish embassy in Tbilisi. She said 2011 has been a "fantastic year for economic and social reforms," a fact that is attracting Swedish companies, together with Georgia's "perfect location." Sweden is one of Georgia's largest donors.

[GEORGIA TODAY: Deepening Cooperation Between Sweden, Georgia](#)



Columbia University's Harriman Institute is hosting this month a photo and film exhibit documenting the history of Georgians in the US. "Georgians in American History: A Photo Narrative" is the culmination of a decade of research by film director Irakli Makharaдзе intended to uncover the role played by Georgians in shaping American history. Images introduce viewers to both the famous and the little-known—from George Balanchine (above) to Alexander Kartvelishvili, a pioneer of American aviation—whose contributions to US history date as far back as the Civil War.

US State Department Report Underscores Improvement in Georgian Human Rights Records

The US State Department in a report released last week highlighted Georgia's progress in improving human rights in 2010. "Significant human rights achievements included the implementation of a new Criminal Procedure Code with increased evidentiary standards and rights of the accused; amendments strengthening the Public Defender's Office; the construction of new prisons that met international standards; and the first direct election of the Tbilisi mayor," read the Department's annual report on human rights in Georgia. The report also found that police and petty corruption remained low. "Georgia has made important strides," said US Ambassador John Bass, adding that the US has allocated \$60 million in new investments this year to support electoral reform, promote independent media, and strengthen the judiciary and civil society. The report also noted shortcomings related to the treatment of prisoners, detention procedures, and a weak judiciary. The report also very clearly and unequivocally describes the extensive violation of human rights in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia, now occupied by Russia.

[US STATE DEPARTMENT: 2010 Human Rights Report: Georgia](#)

Black Sea Bank to Lend €50 Million for Georgian Projects

The Black Sea Trade and Development Bank will allocate \$50 million for projects in Georgia in the next four years, with half the aid targeting energy investments. "One of the projects could be a pipeline," said Deputy Finance Minister Gvindadze. "We are glad that a bank like this is supporting the development of the private sector in our country, which is the main driver for any economy." The lender has already contributed \$70 million for other development projects in the country.

[BLOOMBERG: Black Sea Bank to Lend €50 Million for Georgia](#)

Four Georgians Die While on UN Mission in Congo

Four Georgians died last week in a fatal plane crash in the Democratic Republic of Congo while on a UN peacekeeping mission. Crew members Alexi Oganessian, Suliko Tsutskiridze, Albert Manukov, and Guram Kepuladze—together with 29 UN officials, peacekeepers, and humanitarian workers—were killed when their plane, operated by Georgian carrier AirZena, crashed while attempting to land in heavy rain in Kinshasa. The CRJ-100 jet had undergone thorough technical tests last December and no mechanical problems were reported. Only one person survived.

[NEW YORK TIMES: UN Plane Crashes in Congo, Killing 32](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

CNBC: President Saakashvili interview

"People were fascinated by the Georgian experience because it was the first televised revolution," President Saakashvili said, putting the Rose Revolution in the context of the uprisings in the Middle East. "It was televised for days and days, and it was a vivid expression of people power. The whole change happened without a single window broken. And I really think it captured the fantasies of people, especially in that region, in a way that was beyond my imagination."

video.cnbcc.com

CONSERVATIVE HOME: ICJ must investigate the ethnic cleansing of Georgians in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

The ICJ ruling is both disappointing and, given the overwhelming weight of evidence accumulated over the past two decades to support the Georgian government's position, nonsensical. The ruling did, however, reject Russia's central claim that no "dispute" exists between their country and Georgia, with court justices calling on both parties to conduct further negotiations before the Georgia's case can be examined in detail. Yet in the absence of clear and immediate efforts on the part of the Kremlin to engage in full, frank, and open discussions with Georgia in a timely manner, the ICJ must launch an investigation into the allegations of ethnic cleansing at the earliest opportunity. It could not possibly come a day too soon.

conservativehome.blogs.com

THE ECONOMIST: Russia-Georgia conflict—going nowhere fast

Georgia contends that its primary conflict is with Russia, which has supported rebel regimes in Georgia's occupied regions since the early 1990s. Russia, conversely, insists that the conflict is between Georgia on the one hand and S. Ossetia and Abkhazia on the other; its own role is simply that of a mediator. The ICJ judges disagreed. Few people outside Moscow take Russia's argument seriously: Hanjörg Haber, head of a EU monitoring mission set up in Georgia after Russia's invasion, said it is "clearly absurd."

www.economist.com

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Russia's WTO membership—on track or not?

The Kremlin calculates that Georgia's relationship with the US is of such importance that it will eventually back down to US demands. Moreover, it is expected that this will be the outcome even when Georgia's conditions are not fulfilled. Another argument buttressing Moscow's strategy is that Washington might sway Georgia by insisting that under WTO rules Russia will have to comply with international trade rules and the trade embargo on Georgia will be lifted.

www.jamestown.org

REUTERS: Pensioner devastated after "cutting Internet"

Seventy-five year old Hayastan Shakarian was arrested last week for single-handedly cutting off the Internet in Georgia and Armenia. But Shakarian said she was just a "poor old woman" who was not capable of committing such a crime. "I did not cut this cable," Physically, I could not do it," she said, repeatedly bursting into tears as she spoke. The Georgian interior ministry said that despite her claims to innocence, Shakarian had already confessed to cutting the fiber-optic cable.

www.technology-mag.com

OPEN DEMOCRACY: Wikileaks, S. Ossetia & the Russian "reset"

The consensus is that cooperation between the strong—in this case the US and Russia—is more dangerous to the weak than a "medium" level of conflict. Following the "reset," several former Soviet states that have built their security on US counterweight against Russia have been weakened, while Ukraine has switched to the Russian side. The US-Russia reset recognizes a new status quo in southern Caucasus. The between-the-lines message reads: "We don't like what happened during and after the war, but there is nothing we can do about it, and there are more important problems in the world than Georgia!"

www.opendemocracy.net



Georgia kicked off its 3rd Fashion Week under the theme: "Art is Fashion, Fashion is Art" at the State Academic Theatre in Tbilisi. Georgia's Bastien De Almeida captivated the audience with his colorful vintage look; 18 designers from Asia and Europe—including Nur of Armenia, Fahria Halapova of Azerbaijan, and Marco Corso of Italy—also were on show.

RADIO FREE EUROPE: Georgian opposition girds for "revolution," but is the time right?

One segment of Georgia's opposition categorically rejects the potentially violent revolutionary strategy of the radicals. They are focused on winning elections and are negotiating with the authorities on how to reform the electoral system. What is the likelihood of a new, and this time successful, revolutionary wave in Georgia? We'll have to wait and see. But the revolutionary opposition's starting position seems weaker than in 2009.

www.rferl.org

HEALTH CARE MAGAZINE: Remaking healthcare in Georgia

While many of the world's first ladies travel their countries to spotlight pressing issues, the first lady of Georgia, Sandra Roelofs, went abroad last month to raise awareness about her favorite cause: transforming Georgia's healthcare system. The international healthcare forum she hosted in Washington sparked a dynamic debate of ideas about how to harness the energy, resources, and commitment of Georgian doctors in the diaspora, government officials in Tbilisi, and stakeholders in the US to improve healthcare in Georgia. It is time once again to take the energy and courage that resurrected a downtrodden nation and focus it on reenergizing the reform of Georgia's healthcare system. We have no doubt that through this process, other countries moving towards greater democracy will continue to find inspiration in the example Georgia sets.

www.healthcarereformmagazine.com

EURASIANET: Using friendship, not prison, to fight juvenile crime

With its prisons packed, Georgia is trying to keep troubled youngsters out of jail with a program that makes mentoring a key part of the country's juvenile-justice system. Other attempts to liberalize the juvenile-justice system are also underway. One umbrella program includes initiatives for community service and reconciliation between victims of violence. A rethink of the country's juvenile justice strategy is also in the works.

www.eurasianet.org

REUTERS: RAKIA, APM Terminals in talks over Georgian port

RAKIA of the UAW is in talks with APM Terminals to sell its control of the Georgian Black Sea port of Poti. Talks may be concluded within the coming day. APM Terminals, the port arm of Danish shipping and oil group A.P. Moller-Maersk, does not currently have a Black Sea port. Its terminal nearest to Georgia is in Italy.

www.reuters.com

CONCERTONET: Giya Kancheli—Themes from the Songbook

Georgia composer Giya Kancheli, compiles in 20 small bites excerpts from his previous film and stage scores. Kancheli's "Themes from a Songbook" is a spellbinding collection, colored by the haunting, halting voice of the bandoneon, Kremer's violin, sometimes played close to the bridge, and the glistening tones of the vibraphone. "The vast majority of more than a hundred of the films and plays for which I wrote music have now passed into history," Kancheli writes on the disc. "Time will tell if they can survive outside their original context." This album should help.

www.concertonet.com