

GEORGIA UPDATE

WEEKLY EDITION • 2 June 2011

A Publication of the Government of Georgia

www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge

TOP STORIES

- In Aftermath of Protests, Evidence Emerges of Orchestrated Plan to Destabilize Government
- Death of Bagapsh Brings Further Instability to Georgia's Russian-Occupied Region of Abkhazia
- Eighth Georgian Soldier Killed in Afghanistan
- Parliament's Move to Kutaisi Takes a Step Forward
- Georgia Expects 5 Million Tourists Annually by 2015
- Direct Flights Between China and Georgia Set to Launch This Month



President Saakashvili met with US Vice President Joseph Biden on Wednesday in Rome, where they were attending the 150th anniversary of Italy's unification. In an extensive bilateral meeting, Saakashvili and Biden assessed a range of issues, including the status of Georgia's Russian-occupied territories and the spate of recent terrorist attacks against Georgia that have originated in the occupied territories. "The Vice President expressed his appreciation to President Saakashvili for Georgia's significant new contribution of forces to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, which will make Georgia the largest non-NATO contributor to ISAF," the White House said in a statement. Biden also expressed his backing of the Swiss-mediated talks between Georgia and Russia on WTO issues, emphasizing that Russia must address Georgia's concerns.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Georgia opposition planned to destabilize state

WEEKLY STANDARD: Democracy a victim of hit and run in Georgia

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Moscow encourages turmoil in Georgia

RADIO FREE EUROPE: One demonstration, with many interpretations

MOSCOW TIMES: Kremlin's shadow hangs over absurd protests

FOREIGN POLICY: Obama "personally engaged" in WTO dispute

FINANCIAL TIMES: Russia to buy warships from France

THE ECONOMIST: Georgians in Abkhazia—the plight of the Mingrelians

REUTERS: Georgia lawmakers call Circassian killings genocide

NEW YORK TIMES: In Georgia, two families and the art of hospitality

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"The United States and Georgia have built a vibrant partnership based on shared values and mutual interests. We are committed to Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty and we are helping Georgia strengthen democratic institutions. Together, our two countries are promoting freedom around the world. We are especially grateful for Georgia's commitment to the future of Afghanistan as our troops stand side by side on behalf of peace and security."

♦ US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

"Any country has the right to defend itself, including Georgia. Moreover, it has an aggressive neighbor on its borders which occupies its territory... [President Sarkozy] must persuade Russia to fulfill the cease-fire agreement of Aug. 12, 2008. It provides for the withdrawal of Russian troops to the pre-war positions. Russia violates all international norms by not fulfilling the agreement. I am disappointed by some European politicians who have not called to resolve this issue."

♦ Senator John McCain

"Our steadfast engagement and generous assistance have aided in transforming Georgia into an aspiring democracy and important partner to NATO in Afghanistan. Together with our European partners, we will maintain our support for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders and will continue to support international efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the dispute over Abkhazia and South Ossetia."

♦ US Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Jun. 1-4: FM Vashadze visits Cuba

Jun. 6: FM Vashadze visits Austria

Jun. 7: Next round of Geneva peace talks

TOP STORIES

In Aftermath of Protests, Evidence Emerges of Orchestrated Plan to Destabilize Government

Georgia on Monday charged the husband of radical opposition leader Nino Burjanadze with organizing attacks against the police during violent protests in Tbilisi aimed at ousting President Mikheil Saakashvili. Badri Bitsadze was “charged with creating paramilitary groups and organizing attacks on police officers during the protests,” the prosecutor’s office said in a statement.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs released a new batch of court-approved taped conversations between opposition leaders that apparently show Burjanadze’s supporters organizing a small paramilitary force to spark violence during demonstrations and thereby sweep the government from power. One of the transcripts released by the Georgian authorities shows Burjanadze’s husband saying “this is a really big force,” referring to about 3,000 men. Bitsadze is currently not under arrest and prosecutors have requested he remain at liberty on bail pending a trial.

The Ministry also announced that on the night of the violence, it had detained 24 “armed people” loyal to a former Georgian minister of internal affairs—Temur Khachishvili, convicted of terrorism in the 1990s and now hiding in Russia—who coordinated actions with Burjanadze and Bitsadze. “The aim of the this group was to stage armed provocations on the territory of Georgia,” the interior ministry said.

Early last Thursday, a police officer and a protester were killed when a motorcade belonging to the radical opposition sped away from the protests. Efforts by the police to disperse the rowdy protesters were conducted in an “organized and legal manner,” said Filip Dimitrov, chief of the EU’s mission in Georgia. US Ambassador to Georgia John Bass said of the protests: “Some individuals were not interested in peacefully protesting, but were looking to spark a violent confrontation.”

[AFP: Georgia Charges Husband of Opposition Leader](#)
[CIVIL GEORGIA: Police Do ‘Not Consider Anyone Missing’](#)

Death of Bagapsh Brings Further Instability to Georgia’s Russian-Occupied Region of Abkhazia

Sergei Bagapsh, proxy leader of Georgia’s Russian-occupied territory of Abkhazia, died suddenly of complications from cancer on Sunday in a Moscow hospital, creating greater instability in the territory. “After the August war, Abkhaz society—and this was also the tragedy of Bagapsh—is, if anything, more divided than it was before,” said Peter Semneby, the former EU special representative to the S. Caucasus. While leading Moscow’s puppet regime, Bagapsh allowed ever closer ties with Russia, a strategy that led to further militarization of the occupied territory, the exploitation of local natural resources for the Sochi Olympics, environmental degradation, and the seizure of property in Abkhazia by Russia’s elites. “You have those who are very uncomfortable with the dominating role of Russia, and what they see as selling out, many of whom were behind the independence movement in the first place,” Semneby said. The battle to succeed Bagapsh is already playing out. Alex Rondeli, director of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, believes that while Moscow will stay in the shadows, the government will remain clearly under Russian control. “Moscow will choose the most obedient guy, but this time they will be delicate,” he said. “If they openly show a preference, the people will be against them.”

[NEW YORK TIMES: Sergei Bagapsh, Abkhazia’s Leader, Dies at 62](#)

Eighth Georgian Soldier Killed in Afghanistan

Georgia’s military last week suffered another casualty while supporting the NATO-led operation in Afghanistan. Junior Sergeant Lavrosi Ivaniadze from the 33rd battalion died in a mine explosion while patrolling strategic locations in the Helmand province, one of the most volatile regions in Afghanistan, said Georgia’s Ministry of Defense. Ivaniadze’s death brings to eight the total number of Georgian soldiers killed in Afghanistan since joining NATO and American forces in the global fight against terrorism in November, 2009.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Georgian Soldier Killed in Afghanistan](#)



President Saakashvili and his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on Wednesday marked the official opening of the new Sarp border crossing between the two countries. “Turkey is not only a close neighbor for Georgia, but it is also a reliable friend,” Erdogan said. “Today, Turkey and Georgia are the most important partners for each other in the Caucasus region.” The presidents also took their visa-free travel policy a step further, initiating a passport-free travel regime under which Georgians and Turks require only their respective national identity cards to cross the border.

Parliament’s Move to Kutaisi Takes a Step Forward

Parliament last week launched formal procedures on a draft law to fully relocate its headquarters from Tbilisi to Kutaisi, the country’s second-largest city. Lawmakers voted to establish a commission that will lead month-long, public discussions on the newly proposed constitutional amendments. “It’s a decision that has been known for a long time, and it is not merely a technical measure, but part of an economic project aimed at regional development,” said Parliamentary secretary Giorgi Khuroshvili. Parliament in 2009 approved an amendment to the constitution that envisioned splitting Parliament’s official committee hearings and sittings between the capital and Kutaisi, located in the Imereti region. The draft law, however, envisions Kutaisi as the permanent home of the new legislative body, which will be elected in 2012. Meanwhile, construction on Parliament’s new headquarters is underway. Designed by CMD Ingenieros, the new building will be a 40-meter high glass dome supported by a centered, 200 meter concrete stripe, symbolizing both transparency and strength.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Parliament to be Fully Relocated to Kutaisi](#)

Georgia Expects 5 Million Tourists Annually by 2015

Georgian officials expect as many as 5 million tourists annually by 2015. Georgia attracted 675,000 visitors from Jan. to Apr. of this year, up 43 percent from 2010, said Economy Minister Kobalia. Whether they were drawn by Georgia’s famed Black Sea beaches, rich culinary traditions and history, or favorable business climate, over 2 million visitors—the highest since 2003, when President Saakashvili swept to power in the Rose Revolution—flocked to Georgia last year. “More tourists will mean more long-term jobs in Georgia,” Kobalia said. Meanwhile, President Saakashvili announced yesterday plans to spend \$700 million this year on roads and infrastructure to boost tourism.

[BLOOMBERG: Georgia Expects 5 Million Tourists a Year by 2015](#)

Direct Flights Between China, Georgia To Launch This Month

China Southern Airlines will start regular service to Tbilisi next week, creating new business, tourism, and investment opportunities between the two countries. China’s main airline will offer three direct flights per week from the capital of Xinjiang, one of China’s largest cities and a key regional transportation and commercial hub. Economy Minister Kobalia said the deal will help Georgia advance business relations with one of the world’s most stable and fastest growing economies.

[GEORGIA TODAY: Direct flights to connect China and Georgia](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

AFP: Georgia opposition planned to destabilize state

Georgia last week released covert footage alleging the opposition had planned to deploy thousands of paramilitaries to destabilize President Saakashvili's regime during recent protests. In the video, people identified as opposition supporters say they have recruited a force of 3, to destabilize the ruling regime: A force of "3,000 experienced and organized warriors who are backed by the mass crowd would be impossible to overcome," said one opposition leader identified as Irakli Batiashvili. A man believed to be Badri Bitsadze, Nino Burjanadze's husband, then adds that the "guys have made Molotovs (cocktails)."

georgiandaily.com

WEEKLY STANDARD: Democracy a victim of hit & run in Georgia

It's hard to see the protesters in Georgia as an unconnected element from the Russian hand. And it's hard to make the argument that the Russians have been not successful. The results? Undermining Saakashvili through worldwide propaganda. But, Georgia isn't a tyranny. In a democracy, unlike Putin's Russia, that's how things work—warts and all. Some will surely try to place Georgian opposition and protesters in with the Arab Spring—probably under the assumption that all protests that draw blood look alike. But Georgia isn't a tyranny.

www.weeklystandard.com

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Russia encourages turmoil in Georgia

Moscow has stimulated the radical opposition's actions in Tbilisi, and stands ready to exploit the unrest. Meanwhile, highly unpopular opposition party leaders have not announced any programs or alternative ideas for governing. This situation helps explain the now-or-never syndrome of People's Assembly's and Georgian Party's leaders' behavior in seeking immediate regime change. They realize that their political role will inevitably end with next parliamentary and presidential elections, if these are held on the regular timetable and on rules agreed between the governing party and the constitutional opposition.

www.jamestown.org

RADIO FREE EUROPE: One demonstration, many interpretations

The specter of Russia looms large in Georgia, with many in both the opposition and the ruling party convinced rhw Kremlin is determined to steer the course of Georgian politics. While MP Davit Darchiashvili said he did not expect a major outbreak of violence, he said it was reasonable to assume any unrest could be traced to Russia: "We can't rule out that several hundred people have coordinated with Russia in different ways and are ready to take various kinds of steps. It will be unpleasant, but any state and its law enforcement bodies should be ready for something like that," he said.

www.rferl.org

MOSCOW TIMES: Kremlin's shadow hangs over absurd protests

In contrast to the earlier unrest, last week's protests in Tbilisi really were a joke. Specially recruited people carrying specially made clubs attacked a police car. Then Russia's Foreign Ministry announced that Saakashvili had violated "the law of freedom of assembly." In 2009, any link between protesters and the Kremlin was covert. Not anymore. Now, opposition leaders Nino Burjanadze and Zurab Noghaidei have appeared publicly in Moscow. But it would be a mistake to conclude that the Georgian opposition went to Moscow and then lost its credibility. It first lost its credibility and then went to Moscow.

www.themoscowtimes.com

FOREIGN POLICY: Obama "personally engaged" WTO dispute

Senior Obama administration officials have been saying for months that the US would not get involved in the Russian-Georgian dispute over Russia's desire to join the WTO. Yet last week, it was revealed that the administration, including President Barack Obama, has been deeply involved in the dispute for a long time. There are also signs that administration officials have placed pressure on Georgia.

thecable.foreignpolicy.com

**NEW YORK TIMES: In Georgia, two families and the art of hospitality**

In recent years, grape local growers like the Nikolaishvili's have begun to throw open their doors to tourists, showing off Georgia's robust traditions of hospitality, which endured even during the Soviet era. Back then, Georgia was a popular vacation spot for the Communist elite, with its soaring mountains and Black Sea coast. Even now, Georgian cuisine has a cherished niche throughout the former Soviet Union—a jazzy cousin to more staid Slavic food. "Why are we alive?" Vazha, the patriarch of the family asked rhetorically. "Isn't it to meet people, to offer them a good meal, to share a meal with them? Georgians love having guests, and we want the entire world to know that." We marveled at the repast at the Nikolaishvili's farmstead in Georgia, as well as the location: Kakheti, a lush region of eastern Georgia known for its winemaking, where booming agritourism ventures offer a chance to see how private farming has revived since the end of the dismal collective agriculture of Communism.

travel.nytimes.com

FINANCIAL TIMES: Russia to buy warships from France

Russia began negotiating to buy Mistral war ships from France after launching sweeping military reforms in the wake of Moscow's invasion of Georgia in 2008. The conflict exposed the weakness of the Russian navy and raised concern in the Kremlin about security in the Black Sea. Meanwhile some US Republican senators have raised questions about the deal, saying it signaled French approval for Russian action in the Georgian conflict.

www.ft.com

REUTERS: Georgia lawmakers call Circassian killings genocide

Georgia's parliament branded the 19th-century killings of a Muslim minority by Russia's tsarist forces genocide in a resolution last week likely to strain Tbilisi's already troubled ties with Moscow. Originally from the northwest Caucasus, Circassians say 1.5 million of their ancestors systematically were killed in a Russian military campaign in 1860-64 to conquer the Caucasus mountain area on the southern border of today's Russia. Members of the Circassian diaspora meanwhile are demanding the Sochi Olympic Games be cancelled or moved unless Russia apologizes for what they say was genocide against their ancestors. Some Circassian leaders are demanding autonomous territory within Russia.

www.chicagotribune.com

THE ECONOMIST: Georgians in Abkhazia—the plight of the Mingrelians

In poverty-stricken Gali, an ethnically Georgian village in Georgia's Russian-occupied territory of Abkhazia, there are signs of change, of a sort. Russia had troops in Abkhazia under a 1994 agreement. Following Russia's 2008 invasion, their numbers doubled, but the legal basis for their presence dissolved. While Moscow now claims they are guarding the borders of independent Abkhazia, Tbilisi says they are illegally occupying sovereign Georgian territory. Either way, they are settling in. Russian contractors are building new bases and blocks of flats for the troops around Gali, and repairing the road to Sukhumi.

www.economist.com