

# GEORGIA UPDATE

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## TOP STORIES

- **Human Rights Watch Condemns Treatment of Georgians by Authorities in Abkhazia**
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- **European Union Earmarks €50 Million for Criminal Justice Reforms, IDPs**
- **Georgia, NATO Convene in Tbilisi on Emerging Security Challenges**
- **MTV Live & Enrique Iglesias to Rock Batumi Next Month**



“The rights of ethnic Georgian returnees to Abkhazia are hostage to nearly two decades of political conflict,” says a newly published report by Human Rights Watch. About 47,000 of those displaced by Russia’s 2008 invasion and earlier civil unrest in the 1990s have returned to Gali, the southernmost district of Abkhazia. But they face barriers to civil and political rights, driving some to leave again and creating serious obstacles for large-scale, sustainable returns. “The authorities in Abkhazia have duties when it comes to protecting rights,” HRW deputy director Rachel Denber said. “The Abkhaz authorities need to recognize and protect the rights of everyone in Abkhazia, including ethnic Georgians in Gali.”

## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

- AFP:** Georgia intensifies hunt for Russian spies
- LOS ANGELES TIMES:** Georgian photographers charged with spying for Russia
- EURASIA DAILY MONITOR:** Photographers’ case in Tbilisi—five misconceptions
- AFP:** Georgia rejects criticism of spy photographers case
- BLOOMBERG:** Georgia says detained photographer has links to Russia spies
- REUTERS:** Georgia imposes restrictions on public protests
- BBC (video):** Why Georgia’s national costume is back in vogue
- RADIO FREE EUROPE:** Armenian Church hails Georgian religious minorities’ law
- EURASIANET:** Rival groups seek to speak for Georgia’s Muslims
- LE PROGRES:** Magical caves of Georgia draw French speleologists
- CNN:** Georgia broadcasts into the Caucasus

## QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“The Abkhaz authorities need to recognize and protect the rights of everyone in Abkhazia, including ethnic Georgians in Gali.”

♦ Rachel Denber of Human Rights Watch

“Georgia has already made significant progress in reforming its criminal justice system and in assisting its internally displaced populations. Important results have already been achieved, but more still needs to be done. The Program will provide further assistance to help achieve these objectives.”

♦ Štefan Füle, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, referring to the EU’s Annual Action Program for Georgia

“Even one single case that is not backed by serious proof could seriously damage Georgia and the current administration’s standing.”

♦ Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili speaking to reporters about the evidence in the espionage arrests of three photographers

“The freedom of belief is indeed a fundamental human right and a core European value.”

♦ Philip Dimitrov, EU ambassador to Georgia, in a statement on Georgia’s newly passed law on religious freedom

## UPCOMING MILESTONES

**Aug. 12:** 3rd Anniversary of Sarkozy-Medvedev ceasefire agreement

**Aug. 18-20:** FM Vashadze visits Austria

**Aug. 25:** FM Vashadze visits Brazil

**Oct. 4:** Next round of Geneva peace talks

## TOP STORIES

**Human Rights Watch Condemns Treatment of Georgians by Authorities in Abkhazia**

In a new report on Russian-occupied Abkhazia, Human Rights Watch has condemned the gross violations of the human rights of ethnic Georgians living in Abkhazia. The report, "Living in Limbo," says the authorities in the occupied region of Georgia have serially violated and failed to protect the rights and civil liberties of ethnic Georgians living in the Gali region of Abkhazia, while creating "serious obstacle for a large scale, sustainable returns" of the hundreds of thousands of IDPs ethnically cleansed from the region. "There is little or no prospect for the dignified and secure return of the thousands of people who remain displaced from their homes in Abkhazia," the report says.

HRW notes a growing sense of insecurity among Georgian returnees caused by their Abkhaz oppressors: "Ethnic Georgians from Gali overwhelmingly conveyed to HRW a sense of acute vulnerability to theft, kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, extortion and other crimes," reads the report, adding that the failure by the authorities to recognize the rights of ethnic Georgians has perpetuated a "constant state of anxiety and limbo" among the population. "The authorities in Abkhazia have duties when it comes to protecting rights," said HRW Deputy Director Rachel Denber. "The Abkhaz authorities need to recognize and protect the rights of everyone in Abkhazia, including ethnic Georgians in Gali." The New York-based rights group interviewed over 100 Gali residents on both sides of the administrative boundary line in researching the report.

[HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH: Living in Limbo](#)

**Three Photographers in Espionage Case Confess, As Government Promises an Open Trial**

The apparent ringleader of three Georgian photographers accused of spying for Russia has confessed to involvement in espionage, both officials and his lawyer said on Tuesday. The other two men who have been charged with sending classified and top secret documents to Moscow—both of whom worked for the government—also have testified about their activities. Interior Minister Merabishvili made a detailed presentation of the evidence in the case to international journalists. "Even one single case that is not backed by serious proof could seriously damage Georgia and the current administration's standing," he said afterwards. Also on Monday, the Justice Ministry released a videotape of one of the accused, Giorgi Abdaladze, who worked for the Foreign Ministry. Abdaladze described being approached by Russian intelligence while detained in South Ossetia's main town of Tskhinvali in 2002 and told to cooperate under threat that his family would be killed. This involved working with a Georgian political party led by a onetime senior security official under former President Shevardnadze, taking pictures of the party rallies. Then in 2007, when working for the parliamentary press office, Abdaladze said he was approached by co-accused Zurab Kurtsikidze of the European Pressphoto Agency (EPA), who "told me he was also working for one of the Russian agencies," adding: "He asked me to send him some photos from official meetings. After a while he asked me to give him not just photos but also minutes of meetings, as he needed to send them to Moscow."

Georgia's ombudsman visited the detainees and reported that they were being treated normally and were not under any psychological pressure. "I'm pleased to see that the Ombudsman, Public Defender has had access to the photographers to assess their condition," said US Ambassador John Bass on Tuesday. "I think it's really important that he is able to provide objective information about their condition so that people are not dependent on many rumors that have been scrawling around." The Prosecutor's Office announced that despite the classified evidence involved in the case, court proceedings would in large part be open to the public. The prosecution has petitioned the court to exclude from public hearings only a small portion of the evidence, which includes information classified as top secret.

[AFP: Third Georgian photographer "confesses to spying"](#)

[EDM: Photographers' Case In Tbilisi—Five Misconceptions](#)

**MTV Live & Enrique Iglesias to Rock Batumi Next Month**

The government announced that MTV Live will come to Batumi on Aug. 2. The free concert will be headlined by global superstar Enrique Iglesias. "I can't wait to experience Georgia's beautiful coastline," the award-winning singer-songwriter said. "I hope everyone is ready for an exciting night with a great lineup!" Popular Georgian artists Sofia Nizharadze and Eldrine also will perform at MTV Live Georgia. "Batumi will form a stunning backdrop to this world class music event," said Alex Okosi, senior VP of MTV's parent company, Viacom. Over a billion spectators tuned in during last year's festival.

[BARRONS: Global Superstar Enrique Iglesias to Dazzle Georgian Music Fans with First Ever Black Sea Concert in Batumi](#)

**Four Policemen Fired for Violating Procedures During May Protests**

The Interior Ministry has fired four police officers for violating their disciplinary code during May's opposition protests. The officers were dismissed after an internal investigation into police efforts to disperse rowdy protestors after their demonstration permit expired. The ministry also demoted an MIA employee, and reprimanded 11 other officers. Georgia's Public Defender praised the ministry's disciplinary actions, calling the punishment of policemen "important" and a "step forward."

[AP: Georgia fires 4 police over protest dispersal](#)

**EU Earmarks €50 Million for Criminal Justice Reforms, IDPs**

The European Commission has adopted the Annual Action Program for Georgia, approving €50.7 million to support criminal justice reforms, conflict resolution efforts and social services for IDPs. "Georgia has already made significant progress in reforming its criminal justice system and in assisting its internally displaced populations," said EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, Štefan Füle. The program aims to improve Georgia's criminal justice system by bringing laws for juveniles closer in line with international standards, enhancing detention conditions, and strengthening legal aid services for minors. Georgia's IDPs will also benefit from the Program, which will finance housing and other services for IDPs.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: €50.7M in European Union Aid to Georgia](#)

**Georgia-NATO Conference on Emerging Security Challenges**

Tbilisi last week hosted a joint NATO-Georgia conference on "New Security Challenges" to address emerging security risks and foster enhanced regional cooperation. Supported by NATO's Science for Peace and Security program, the conference brought together over 100 industry experts, analysts, and policy makers from NATO and partner nations to discuss measures to prevent and enhance collective resilience to emerging security risks. "Georgian authorities attach great significance to the forum," said Deputy PM and State Minister for Euro-Atlantic Integration Baramidze. "Georgia has clear prospects for admission to NATO."

[TREND DAILY NEWS: Georgia NATO-Georgia Conference on Emerging Security Challenges to be Held July 7-8](#)

## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

### AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Georgia intensifies hunt for spies

Analysts suggest that the Kremlin has been targeting its pro-Western neighbor for years, both before and after Russia's 2008 invasion. "It's clear that Georgia is a prime target of Russian intelligence," said Russian military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer. "Many people here (in Russia) would be happy if Saakashvili was removed." Russia's espionage activities extend broadly "across various sectors of the Georgian state and society," said Svante Cornell, research director at the Stockholm-based Central Asia-Caucasus Institute.

[www.iol.co.za](http://www.iol.co.za)

### LOS ANGELES TIMES: Photographers charged with spying

Video footage released by the interior ministry show President Saakashvili's photographer, Irakli Gedenidze, confessing that he had been providing photos to European Pressphoto Agency photographer Zurab Kurtsikidze, and then was drawn into passing on other information. "Kurtsikidze demanded that I provide other information too, which went beyond my professional duties of taking pictures," said Gedenidze on camera. "At that point I realized it had something to do with special services."

[articles.latimes.com](http://articles.latimes.com)

### EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Photographers' case in Tbilisi—five misconceptions

Irrespective of the merits or demerits of the espionage charges, five misconceptions are common in much of the reporting by Georgian and international media. A first misconception suggests this investigation might serve to intimidate Georgian media, allegedly signaling dangers to their independence. Second, the photographers involved are often described inaccurately as accused journalists and local critics depict the investigation as interfering with the free operation of mass media. The third misconception holds that the pre-trial investigation must be fully open, and the trial public, in order to dispel concerns about restrictions on media freedom.

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

### AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Georgia rejects criticism of spy case

A Georgian official dismissed concerns about the case of three photojournalists charged with spying for Russia, saying they had real evidence of links to Moscow's espionage services. "Even one single case that is not backed by serious proof could seriously damage Georgia and the current administration's standing," Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili told reporters. "We have enough evidence that Kurtsikidze was in contact since 2004 with people we have established to be officers of the Russian military intelligence agency," he added.

[www.gulf-times.com](http://www.gulf-times.com)

### BLOOMBERG: Georgia says detained photographer has links to Russian spies

Georgia said a photographer detained on suspicion of espionage has links to two Russians expelled for spying five years ago. "Zurab Qurtsikidze has links to the spy scandal members from 2006," said Interior Minister Merabishvili. "He is suspected of having made phone and possibly other contact since 2004 and we have enough evidence." Police say the photographers passed confidential information about President Saakashvili through Qurtsikidze to Russia.

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

### REUTERS: Georgia imposes restrictions on public protests

Georgia's parliament earlier this month increased restrictions on public protests in response to opposition rallies in May in which two people died. Two people—a policeman and a demonstrator—were killed by protesters in May. The new law says rallies must not come within 20 meters of government buildings; prevents small rallies from blocking roads, railways and highways; and prohibits the possession of dangerous objects and the consumption of alcohol by participants.

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



### BBC: Why Georgia's national costume is back in vogue

Twenty years after declaring independence, Georgia is rediscovering many of its cultural traditions—including the national costume, the *chokha*. Worn by Georgian men for over a millennium, the high-necked wool coat was rarely seen during Soviet rule but is now making a comeback. For many it symbolizes the country's proud past and resistance to occupation. But the *chokha* is also quite a hit on the fashion scene. Although usually worn only by men, in Georgia it is used as an inspiration for contemporary women's fashion. Boutiques in Georgia are now selling updated, hand-made versions of traditional Georgian designs.

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

### RADIO FREE EUROPE: Armenian Church hails Georgia's religious minorities' law

The Armenian Apostolic has welcomed a new law allowing it to gain legal status in Georgia. Despite fierce opposition from the Georgian Orthodox Church, pro-government lawmakers in Tbilisi approved granted five minority religious groups, including the Armenian Church, status as "legal entities of public law." Other beneficiaries that have long sought such a status are the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Baptist Church, and the Muslim and Jewish communities in Georgia.

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

### EURASIANET: Rival groups seek to speak for Georgia's Muslims

In a sign of religion's influence in the South Caucasus, the founding of an organization to represent Georgia's Muslim population has sparked an emotional face-off with the Soviet-era body for the region's Muslims, the Baku-based Caucasus Muslim Board. At about 9.9 percent of the population (c. 2002), Muslims make up Georgia's second-largest religious group, after Georgian Orthodox Christians; most Georgian Muslims (about 300,000-400,000 people) are ethnic Azeris, but the community also includes ethnic Georgians from the Black Sea region of Adjara, as well as Meskhetian Turks.

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

### LE PROGRES: Magical caves of Georgia draw French speleologists

Ten cavers from Ain, Rhône, and Savoie flew to Tbilisi to "experience new canyons and discover new caves," said one. "Georgia has a great potential in caving and canyoning." For these adventurers, Georgia represents a new Eldorado. "Geologically, it looks like the Alps, in another dimension. This is where the caves are formed. It contains the deepest chasms of the world, with elevation changes of more than 2,000 meters, waterfalls, underground rivers, and fantastic mythical summits."

[www.leprogres.fr](http://www.leprogres.fr)

### CNN: Georgia broadcasts into the Caucasus

Kanal Pik aims to give Russians a balanced view of the Caucasus region. "It is important in Russia, in particular, because the perception of Georgia is so negative in Russia as a consequence of the fact that the sole source of information for most people living in Russia comes through the Russian media, which is consistently anti-Georgian," says Director Robert Parsons. "It is not the purpose of this channel to depict Russia in a negative way. What we want is the people in Russia to see what's really happening in this country, to get a balanced picture of this country."

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