

GEORGIA UPDATE

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TOP STORIES

- **President Sarkozy: “When I am in Tbilisi, I am in Europe”; Insists on Russian Withdrawal**
- **President Saakashvili Hails “Historic Visit” by French Counterpart**
- **Medvedev Ratifies Abkhazia, S. Ossetia Military Base Deployment**
- **Georgia Says Russia’s WTO Accession Talks Have Failed**
- **Georgia’s One-Stop Shop for Civil Services Comes to Kutaisi**
- **Vaclav Havel Awarded Georgia’s Highest Honor**



President Saakashvili and tens of thousands of Georgians welcomed French President Sarkozy to Georgia last week in a rally held in Tbilisi’s Freedom Square. “When I am in Tbilisi, I am in Europe,” Sarkozy said. “Georgia is European in its culture, in its choices of development, and above all in its values.” The French President hailed Georgia’s commitment to Europe. “Georgia must be free to express its aspiration to move towards the European Union, and to one day join it,” he said. “This aspiration is, first and foremost, a chance for Georgia, as it is a catalyst for the reforms undertaken in the past eight years to consolidate its young democracy and to transform its economy in depth.” Sarkozy also insisted that Russia must fulfill all of the terms of the six-point ceasefire agreement.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

- AL JAZEERA:** Interview—President Saakashvili
- WASHINGTON POST:** Romney under no illusions about Russia
- AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE:** Georgia aims to join EU within 10 years—president
- FOREIGN POLICY:** Georgia to Clinton—We won’t budge on Russia’s WTO bid
- FINANCIAL TIMES:** Russia and Georgia pursue WTO talks
- WALL STREET JOURNAL:** Russian reality-check
- ASSOCIATED PRESS:** Putin proposes setting up 'Eurasian Union'
- EURASIA DAILY MONITOR:** Putin prioritizes rebuilding the lost empire
- NEW ZEALAND HERALD:** Russia accused of Pacific bribery
- AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE:** Georgia oligarch challenges president
- THE TELEGRAPH:** Georgian splendour

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

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◆ French President Sarkozy in Tbilisi

“Georgia's and Russia's ways have parted. We choose Europe and we choose European democracy.”

◆ President Saakashvili during Sarkozy’s visit

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Nov. 9-10: NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and North Atlantic Council in Georgia .

Nov. 23: 8th Anniversary of the Rose Revolution

May 15-22: NATO summit in Chicago

TOP STORIES

President Sarkozy: "When I am in Tbilisi, I am in Europe"; Insists on Russian Withdrawal, IDP Return

French President Sarkozy unequivocally demanded that Russia adhere to the terms of the ceasefire agreement that he negotiated in 2008 between Moscow and Tbilisi. "Against all strategic logic and contrary to undertaken commitments, significant military forces are still stationed and were reinforced," Sarkozy said. "France will not resign itself to a 'fait accompli.' I would like to reiterate here my commitment to watch over the enforcement of the accord." He also reaffirmed Paris' support of Georgia's independence and western integration during his visit to Tbilisi last week, calling Georgia a "friend and strategic partner."

Speaking at an outdoor rally on Freedom Square, Sarkozy addressed a jubilant crowd numbering in the tens of thousands: "Everyone must admit that the Soviet Union does not exist anymore and that a policy of spheres of influence is not intended to succeed it," he said. "Everyone must admit that Georgia, like any other country, has the right to define its path and to freely choose its friends and its alliances. It must be free to express its aspiration to join NATO, if its people wish."

He added: "I want here to confirm the support of France and Europe for Georgia's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. I have come here to assure you that France, like yesterday, will always be with you, stand beside you, and be your loyal friend in order that you approach even closer to Europe," he said. "When I am in Tbilisi, I am in Europe," he added. Sarkozy also called on Russia to allow Georgia's IDPs to return to their homes. "I once again urge for the European monitors' access to Abkhazia and S. Ossetia in order to be sure that rights of the local population are protected there," adding that Moscow must also reciprocate Georgia's unilateral pledge not to use military force in its occupied territories.

[REUTERS: France's Sarkozy to promote peace in Caucasus](#)

[BLOOMBERG: Sarkozy Hits Campaign Trail in Georgia](#)

[AFP: Sarkozy Defends Georgia's Borders During Visit](#)

President Saakashvili Hails "Historic Visit" by French Counterpart

President Saakashvili hailed President Sarkozy's visit to Georgia as an "undoubtedly historic" event for the country as Tbilisi's relationship with Western European allies grows stronger. "Because of your relentless efforts, sacrifice, and actions Georgia is so firmly engaged on the path of European and Trans-Atlantic integration," he said, introducing his counterpart before over ten thousand people in Georgia's Freedom Square. "No foreign leader—as strong as he may seem—no puppet of a foreign power and no army of a foreign country—as frightening as it seems—will be able to throw us off this path," he said. Saakashvili also underscored the symbolic importance of Sarkozy's visit to the capital. "In Europe, major issues are decided by leading European states: Germany and France," he said. "If you want to join NATO and EU, you need the support one of those two countries," Saakashvili said, adding that France's position towards Georgia has shifted under the Sarkozy administration. After their outdoor speeches, Saakashvili awarded Sarkozy with the Saint Georgia's Victory Order, Georgia's highest honor, for "protecting Georgia's sovereignty and firmly supporting Georgia's national interests." Saakashvili was also awarded with France's Legion of Honor by Sarkozy.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Saakashvili: Sarkozy's Speech Historic for Georgia](#)

Medvedev ratifies Abkhazia, S. Ossetia military base deployment

President Medvedev last week ratified defense agreements with Georgia's Russian-occupied territories of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia. The agreements permit Moscow to operate military bases in Georgia's regions for 49 years and include an option to extend the term for another 15 years. The agreements were ratified last month by the Russian Parliament. Georgia's Foreign Ministry condemned the move as an illegal and irresponsible attempt to legitimate the Russian military presence in its occupied regions.

[RIA NOVOSTI: Medvedev ratifies Abkhazia, S. Ossetia military base deployment](#)



President Saakashvili has awarded former Czech president Vaclav Havel with Georgia's highest honor, the Order of Saint George, in honor of his work in advancing democracy in Eastern Europe. "The end of Soviet Union was not the end of history; it was the beginning of history for all of us," Saakashvili said in a speech at the Forum 2000 conference in Prague. "Thanks to you and many others, Vaclav, we were allowed to leave the cold museum." For those who grew up on the other side of the iron curtain, dreaming about democracy, Havel's name resonates "more than anything" in our region, Saakashvili added. Havel, a former political dissident who helped author Charter 77 to demand civil liberties in communist Czechoslovakia, expressed his support for Georgia's territorial integrity and Western integration efforts. "I hope that Georgia will restore its historic borders without bloodshed, and Georgia, as part of Europe, will become a member of the EU," he said, calling for Georgia to be given access to all EU institutions and defense alliances.

Georgia Says Russia's WTO Accession Talks Have Failed

Talks between Georgia and Russia on the Russian bid to join the World Trade Organization hit an impasse at the latest meeting in Geneva. "The negotiations are over and we can say that they collapsed, ended with no result at all," concluded Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergi Kapanadze. "We traveled there ready to talk about what kind of monitoring there should be on the borders," he added. "Sadly, Russia did not wish to talk about this. If Russia continues this attitude then there is no point to continue talks this year." Kapanadze said the sticking point was Russia's refusal to let Georgia have access to information about trade in the breakaway Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which Moscow occupies. Only by stationing international monitors along its borders with Russia can trade transparency be ensured. The 18th round of negotiations is planned for next week. Accession into the WTO requires approval from all 153 current members.

[BLOOMBERG: Talks Over WTO Entry Fail to Make Any Progress](#)

Georgia's One-Stop Shop for Civil Services Comes to Kutaisi

A new Palace of Justice opened last week in Georgia's second-largest city of Kutaisi, providing Georgians with "one stop shop" access to 250 different government services, from birth certificates to divorce papers, under one roof. As with other such centers elsewhere in Georgia, uniformed greeters known as "consultants" welcome arrivals and direct traffic: simple requests, to self-serve computers; more complex cases, such as a visa for a family member, to staffed desks. The emphasis is on speed and convenience. From family land deeds to licenses for hydropower plants, the government is pressing to streamline services in the belief that one-stop service not only makes citizens happy but also entices investors. The center, which also will house Georgia's Parliament and Kutaisi's Chamber of Commerce, is the fourth of its kind in the country. Operations are enabled by a technology platform built over a unified database, so citizens need not fill out multiple government forms. The centers aggressively monitor performance, collecting statistics on error rates and wait times. Customer surveys and mystery shopper programs reinforce the performance goals.

[MCKINSEY CONSULTANTS: Innovation in Government-Georgia](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

AL JAZEERA: Interview—President Saakashvili

“The Russian government does not recognize our borders and our government,” President Saakashvili said. “Russia doesn’t recognize the ceasefire agreement that they themselves brokered.” Saakashvili also discussed regional security issues arising from Russia’s illegal occupation: “We have 20 percent of our territory occupied and almost half a million people are unable to go back to their homes because Russia’s leadership decided these are no longer their houses.”

english.aljazeera.net

WASHINGTON POST: Romney under no illusions about Russia

Presidential candidate Mitt Romney is under no illusions about Putin. He is convinced that Putin dreams of “rebuilding the Russian empire.” Says Romney: “That includes annexing populations as they did in Georgia and using gas and oil resources” to throw their weight around in Europe. About Russian WTO membership, he was clear: “Letting people into the WTO who intend to cheat is obviously a mistake.”

www.washingtonpost.com

AFP: Georgia aims to join EU within 10 years—president

Georgia aims to join the EU within 10 years, said President Saakashvili last week at the EU’s Eastern Partnership summit in Warsaw. “It’s crucial for us to start our integration with Europe’s structures,” he said, adding that complete integration could take a few years. “Georgia is developing so fast that the point will come when the EU will not be able to turn down our entry.”

www.eubusiness.com

FOREIGN POLICY: Georgia to Clinton—We won’t budge on Russia’s WTO bid

“The Obama administration is urging all parties to compromise. We are doing that; the Russians are not,” said Georgia’s National Security Advisor Bokeria last week, referring to the Georgia-Russia WTO talks. “It’s up to the Russians, either they want to compromise or they don’t. The process exists, but as it stands there will be no Georgian consent. The ball is in Russia’s court.”

thecable.foreignpolicy.com

FINANCIAL TIMES: Russia and Georgia pursue WTO talks

Tbilisi wants international monitors to act as customs officers on its borders with Russia and also on the borders of its occupied territories of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia. “If Russia really wants to join the WTO, they have to make a rational compromise,” said Georgia’s National Security Advisor Bokeria. Any third-party monitors must be governmental rather than private, he added.

www.ft.com

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Russian reality-check

Putin’s return to the presidency removes the fiction of Russian reform and modernization that the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev represented. This in turn should allow US and EU policy makers to see the country as it is, rather than as they would prefer to imagine it. Western democracies should end their self-censorship on the systematic abuses of civil rights in Russia. Their messages to Russia should include stronger backing for the democracies of central and Eastern Europe—natural allies that have watched apprehensively as their interests are overshadowed by Russia’s relations with the US, Germany, and other powers.

online.wsj.com

AP: Putin proposes setting up “Eurasian Union”

Some observers said Putin’s proposal to launch a “Eurasian Union” heralds what could become a top policy goal after his return to the wpresidency. “From the geopolitical viewpoint it represents an attempt to revive the USSR,” said Alexander Dugin, a political scholar and a longtime proponent of Russia expansionism.

www.washingtonpost.com



BBC: Abkhazia artist Andro Wekua captures pre-war childhood

Georgian artist Andro Wekua captures pre-war childhood living in Abkhazia during the Soviet era, before the civil war and Russian invasion changed everything. The Abkhazian-born artist uses flashbacks from his childhood to create the narrative of his artwork, and in one of his latest pieces he has re-imagined the Sukhumi of his youth in ghostly sculptures of the town. When the 1990’s civil conflict began, Wekua’s family took refuge in Tbilisi. It was meant to be a temporary move but after Abkhazia declared independence and Russia’s subsequent invasion in 2008, their hopes of returning faded away. “After leaving Sukhumi my life has never been the same. I’ve moved from country to country and lived in different places but I’ve never been able to have the same freedom, the same carefree and relaxed life,” he says. “I was free and I was happy, that’s it.”

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Putin prioritizes rebuilding lost empire

A massive rearmament effort is underway in Russia; it is aimed at building modern conventional forces using Western technologies to defend the union of Eurasian dictators from popular uprisings and a new generation of long-range nuclear weapons to deter the West to keep its values out. Putin is pragmatic: such protection may indeed induce the Eurasian Union dictators to integrate. His Eurasian Union dream is a serious long-term strategy, which trumps almost anything else.

www.jamestown.org

NEW ZEALAND HERALD: Russia accused of Pacific bribery

Georgia has accused Russia of paying Pacific countries to recognize the independence of its two Russian-occupied territories. “It looks ridiculous that a permanent member of the Security Council is running around the world and buying support off tiny Pacific nation states,” said Georgia’s FM Vashadze, referring to Nauru and Tuvalu’s recent recognition of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia. “The biggest concern is that the whole system of international relations is corrupted by Russia and recognition and votes are becoming merchandise to sell.”

www.nzherald.co.nz

AFP: Georgia oligarch challenges president

Reclusive tycoon and philanthropist Bidzina Ivanishvili, whose fortune was estimated at \$5.5 billion by Forbes magazine, said his new party aimed to score an “absolute victory” at parliamentary polls in 2012. The publicity-shy billionaire, who has funded various charity projects in Georgia and is also a renowned art collector, has rarely given interviews and was previously thought to have rejected the idea of entering politics.

wires.univision.com

THE TELEGRAPH: Georgian splendour

In the pleasingly hilly capital of Tbilisi, the blend of old and new is at times extraordinary. Ultramodern bridges and a glass-fronted presidential palace rub shoulders with a handsome Old Town, while twisting alleyways lead past sulfur baths, coffee shops, and Stalinist academies. The 8th-century fortress high above the town, meanwhile, is close to both a synagogue and a mosque, and looks down on countless city spires.

www.telegraph.co.uk