

GEORGIA UPDATE

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TOP STORIES

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- Qatar Airways Launches Flights to Tbilisi, Eyes Growing Business, Tourism Market
- TEDx Brings "The Long View" to Inaugural Tbilisi Conference



President Saakashvili met US Secretary of State Clinton last week at the State Department and thanked her for helping lift the US-Georgia relationship to a new level. He said he was "totally elated" by President Obama's commitment to a Free Trade Agreement with Georgia—"nobody could have imagined that Georgia would ever start to qualify for this a few years ago," he noted—and to enhancing security cooperation. He ended his weeklong visit to Washington by meeting dozens of Congressional leaders, delivering a speech at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, visiting wounded Georgian and American soldiers at a military hospital in Bethesda, Maryland, and touring the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, where he had lunch with four Georgian midshipmen studying there.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"Georgia is a valued partner. They are actively participating in Afghanistan, where Georgian soldiers are showing great courage and professionalism. We are pursuing a system of consultations to determine the way forward on further trade and investment. There's a lot of work going on in our bilateral consultations on education, on health, on good governance, on rule of law, on defense and security cooperation. So, the president's had a very busy week here and there are more people for him to see. There's a great deal of interest in Georgia in our capital."

♦ US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton after meeting President Saakashvili last Wednesday in Washington

"I know the invaluable contribution Georgia has made to NATO's mission in Afghanistan... We owe Georgia the same support when it comes to its bid for NATO membership..."

♦ Congressman Mike Turner, Chairman of the US Delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

WSJ: World Bank recognizes Georgia's progress on corruption

FOREIGN POLICY: Saakashvili—The Arab Spring will topple the Russian government

AFP: US, Georgia to mull free trade deal

LE FIGARO: How Georgia sees Putin's future

BLOOMBERG: Saakashvili challenges Medvedev claims

COMMENTARY: Is NATO expansion more dangerous than status quo?

AAP: Russian aid to Pacific must be open

XINHUA: Georgia attracts 39% more foreign tourists in 2011

NCAA.COM: War refugee finds comfort at Tulane

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Feb 16: PM Gilauri visits Hungary

Feb 27-28: FM Vashadze visits Israel

Mar 5: FM Vashadze visits Czech Republic

Mar 8: FM Vashadze visits Egypt

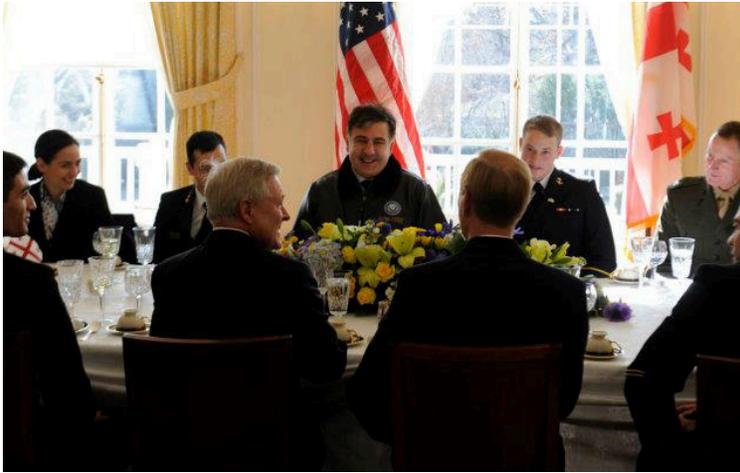
Mar 28-29: Next round of Geneva peace talks

May 15-22: NATO summit in Chicago

May 26: Parliament relocates to Kutaisi

Oct: Parliamentary elections

TOP STORIES



President Saakashvili Meets Secretary of State Clinton, Congressional Leaders, Visits Naval Academy as US Visit Ends

President Saakashvili headed home after a weeklong trip to the Washington that consolidated the strategic partnership between the US and Georgia, with President Obama committing to launch discussions on a Free Trade Agreement, bolster Georgia's defenses, and continue to work towards Georgian membership in NATO.

On Wednesday, President Saakashvili met with Secretary of State Clinton to discuss details of how move forward on these fronts; Secretary Clinton is expected to visit Georgia in the coming weeks. Said Clinton of President Saakashvili upon greeting him at the State Department: "He's had a number of excellent meetings and consultations here in Washington, starting with the very comprehensive meeting he had with President Obama in the Oval Office. Georgia is a valued partner. They are actively participating in Afghanistan, where Georgian soldiers are showing great courage and professionalism. We are pursuing a system of consultations to determine the way forward on further trade and investment. There's a lot of work going on in our bilateral consultations on education, on health, on good governance, on rule of law, on defense and security cooperation. So, the president's had a very busy week here and there are more people for him to see. There's a great deal of interest in Georgia in our capital."

President Saakashvili also held meetings with CIA Director General David Petraeus and dozens of Congressional leaders. He also visited wounded soldiers at a US military hospital in Bethesda, Maryland, where he awarded Vice Colonel Alexandre Tughushi with the I class Vakhtang Gorgasali Order for bravery; Tughushi was injured in Afghanistan's Helmand Province while serving with NATO forces. On Friday, he visited the US Naval Academy in Annapolis with US Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus, eating lunch (above) with four Georgian students enrolled at the Academy.

[US STATE DEPARTMENT: Remarks With President Saakashvili](#)
[AP: Georgian president visits Naval Academy](#)

President in Munich: Don't Overlook Universal Call for Freedom

"Despite economic problems and doubts about the future, 2011 has shown that the very values on which the trans-Atlantic Alliance is based are on the rise," President Saakashvili told the Munich Security Conference on Saturday, speaking of the global wave of pro-democracy revolutions and protests over the past year. "People all around the world are ready to risk their lives for freedom, accountability, and respect—this is a fantastic message of hope." He added: "Let's not give in to the prophets of the Great Decline, the clash of civilization, or any form of cultural relativism. Let's not overlook the universal call for freedom that we are witnessing in the most diverse parts of our world."

[RUSTAVI: President at Munich Security Conference](#)

US, Georgia Move Forward on Defense Cooperation After White House Visit

After President Obama pledged last Monday to strengthen US-Georgian defense cooperation, the two sides immediately began working on the details of an enhanced security relationship. On Thursday, Defense Minister Bacho Akhalaia met US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta in Brussels and noted an important shift in American defense support. "The US side expressed its readiness to extend assistance with regard to enhancing Georgia's defense capabilities which implies new levels of cooperation," the ministry said after the meeting. "From now on the American side will focus not only on preparation of Georgian military servicemen for peacekeeping operations, but on enhancing and improving Georgia's defense capabilities."

Following his Oval Office meeting with Saakashvili, President Obama underscored America's appreciation for Georgia's contributions to international security: "We have talked about how we will continue to strengthen our defense cooperation, and there are a wide range of areas where we are working together." President Obama also spoke about Georgia's NATO membership. "And I reaffirmed to the President and assured him that the United States will continue to support Georgia's aspirations to ultimately become a member of NATO."

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Defense Minister Meets U.S. Secretary of Defense](#)

Georgia's Economy Grows at Blistering 8.1% Pace in Q4; GDP for 2011 Clocks in at 6.8%

Georgia's economy grew at an exceptional 8.7% pace in December of last year, helping lift fourth-quarter growth to 8.1%, according to GeoStat, the National Statistics Office. Full-year economic growth reached 6.8%, far exceeding estimates of 4.5% made at the beginning of 2011. "GDP growth has exceeded the most optimistic forecasts," PM Gilauri said. "It demonstrates and reflects the healthy fundamentals of the Georgian economy, and fuels our positive expectations for this year as well."

[BLOOMBERG: Georgia's Economy Expanded 8.7% in December](#)

Qatar Airways Launches Flights to Tbilisi, Eyes Growing Business, Tourism Market

Qatar Airways CEO Akbar Al Baker flew on his airline's inaugural flight from Doha to Tbilisi last week with high-level guests. Speaking at a ceremony at Tbilisi airport, he underscored that Georgia was an underserved part of Europe, which prompted the airline to open the route. "Georgia is a country with tremendous potential, rich in culture and history with large infrastructure developments taking place offering great business opportunities and a landscape providing a good base for family and independent tourism," Al Baker said. "We look forward to bringing visitors from around the world to Tbilisi, and, similarly, to provide Georgians with the opportunity to fly to global destinations on Qatar Airways via our Doha hub."

[GULF TIMES: Georgia Tourism Eyes Qatar Airways Boost](#)

TEDx Brings "The Long View" to Inaugural Tbilisi Conference

The world-renowned TEDx conferences are coming to Georgia. Tbilisi State University will host the inaugural TEDxTbilisi this Saturday, aiming to foster discussion, ideas, and action on Georgian and global issues. "Georgia continues to undergo rapid transformation across cultural, social, economic, and political norms and remains a compelling and exciting space," said TEDx Tbilisi co-organizer Deborah Fairlamb. "A TEDx event is the perfect way to celebrate this, to be inspired, and to be reminded there are commitments beyond the immediacy of daily life." The theme for conference is "The Long View." The sold-out event aims to illuminate unique, innovative, and inspiring parts of Georgia's history and future. Thirteen Georgian and foreigner experts, including Swedish Ambassador to Georgia, Diana Janse, were chosen to speak on a variety of subjects, including "Civil Society: Rebooted," "The New Face of Diplomacy," "Tradition, a Springboard for Creativity or How Ancient Becomes Cutting Edge," and "Reputation Management: The Decline of Thieves-in-Law in Georgia."

[TEDxTBILISI WEBSITE](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

WALL STREET JOURNAL: World Bank recognizes Georgia's progress on corruption

A new book from the World Bank heaps praise on Georgia's progress on corruption. "Corruption is sometimes seen as endemic, a product of traditional local culture, and, as such, inevitable," said Philippe Le Houérou, the bank's vice president for Europe and Central Asia. "Georgia's experience shows that the vicious cycle of endemic corruption can be broken and, with appropriate and decisive reforms, can be turned into a virtuous cycle." The book concluded: "Although every country has a unique set of initial conditions and the nature of the corruption problem and the type of political economy differ, many elements of Georgia's story can be replicated in other countries."

blogs.wsj.com

FOREIGN POLICY: Saakashvili—the Arab Spring will topple the Russian government

"You need to listen to what Russian leaders themselves are saying. They say 'We are not Libya, we are not Egypt, Russia will not go down this road'," Saakashvili said. "I've heard that from other leaders before. I heard it from Soviet leaders. And once you start saying those things it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, and then you start to do certain things and to not allow certain things, and those are exactly the kind of actions that promote further sliding down this road [toward losing power]." He added: "Two radically different attitudes have emerged, offered by two specific regional powers. On one hand, the Russian Federation reacted with outrage and panic to the Arab Spring and tries to do anything they can to prevent any international support to the democracy movements anywhere. On the other hand, Turkey asserts itself as the model for the post revolutionary countries," he said.

foreignpolicy.com

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: US, Georgia to mull free trade deal

US President Barack Obama and his Georgian counterpart Mikheil Saakashvili on Monday discussed the possibility of sealing a bilateral free trade agreement during their talks at the White House. "What we've agreed to is a high-level dialogue between our two countries about how we can continue to strengthen trade relations between our two countries, including the possibility of a free trade agreement," Obama said. "Obviously there is a lot of work to be done and there are going to be a lot of options that are going to be explored. The key point, though, is we think it's a win-win for the United States and for Georgia." Saakashvili added that such a deal would "attract lots of additional activity to my country."

news.yahoo.com

LE FIGARO: How Georgia sees Putin's future

For Putin, "this is the beginning of the end," said Georgian FM Vashadze. Passing through Paris last weekend, he did not mince his words regarding the future of the Russian PM. "Certainly," he adds, "it will take time. Putin keeps a tight rein on the political and social life." In his opinion, the of events in Russia show that "the Russian leader cannot govern as he has done since 1999. From now on, the Russians demand respect and democracy."

BLOOMBERG: Saakashvili challenges Medvedev claims

"It's not clear what Russia means when they say they're ready to restore ties with Georgia," Saakashvili's spokeswoman Manana Manjgaladze told reporters. "Do they mean Georgia as a whole, as it's recognized by the international community? Or Georgia without the regions Russia occupied? We won't restore ties with Russia until the illegal embassies in the two occupied regions are closed." "The problem is not in Saakashvili," she said. "The problem concerns Georgia as a whole, including its population and those thousands who were expelled from their land."

www.bloomberg.com



NCAA.COM: War refugee finds comfort at Tulane

Mariam Kurdadze (front row, third from right) has seen tanks rolling down the streets of her hometown of Tbilisi. She's seen houses on fire, people dying, bombs flying through the air when she should have been practicing her serve and volley. When she flew to America, Kurdadze had to wade through a sea of evacuees trying to flee the country in advance of the Russians. Areas near the airport were being bombed and there were tight restrictions because of the crush of people trying to get away. "I don't like it when I play Russians," Kurdadze said. "Every time I play them I think about what's been going on [back home]. Even though it's not them, it's hard and a big motivation when you come from Georgia." Says Tulane's tennis coach: "I think if you picked a handful of athletes out of the entire Tulane athletic department, Mariam would be one of the most known."

www.ncaa.com

COMMENTARY: Is NATO expansion really more dangerous than the status quo?

NATO has never considered itself exclusively a club for countries with no natural predators, so I'm not convinced the Russia-Georgia dispute should disqualify Georgia. I'm not arguing it would absolutely prevent war, but our current position has instigated war already, and set a pattern of such conflict. It cannot be argued that keeping Georgia out of NATO contributes in any meaningful way to conflict prevention. So I remain convinced that of the three options—bringing Georgia into NATO, permanently excluding Georgia from NATO, or forcing a more concrete resolution of Georgia's breakaway provinces—Georgian inclusion in NATO is the best.

www.commentarymagazine.com

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATED PRESS: Russian aid must be open

Australia's Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd has stressed to his Russian counterpart the need to be transparent with the development assistance it gives to Pacific island nations, amid ongoing concerns Moscow is using aid to buy diplomatic support in the region. Russia has been accused of giving vast sums of money to Pacific island nations like Tuvalu and Nauru in exchange for those countries recognizing the sovereignty of the disputed territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which are officially part of Russia's enemy Georgia. There are also fears Russia's dealings with Fiji could set back the diplomatic campaign to coax the country's military regime to restore democracy.

aap.com.au

XINHUA: Georgia attracts 39% more foreign tourists in 2011

The influx of foreign tourists to Georgia increased by 39% to reach 2.82 million in 2011, the country's national tourism agency reported. Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia are the top contributors of foreign tourists, followed by Russia, according to the agency. "The majority of foreign tourists that visited Georgia were from Turkey," the tourism agency said in its annual report. In 2011, 738,136 Turkish tourists came to Georgia, a 38% increase in comparison to 2010 when 535,593 people visited Georgia from Turkey.

www.chinadaily.com.cn