

GEORGIA UPDATE

WEEKLY EDITION • 24 May 2012

A Publication of the Government of Georgia

www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge

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Georgia has made “remarkable progress” on reform and has a special partnership with the Alliance, said NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Alliance’s summit in Chicago on Monday. “The fact that Georgia has been the only partner country to participate in all three partner events in this summit is a testimony of a very special relationship between Georgia and NATO,” he added. The Alliance reaffirmed support for its 2008 Bucharest Summit communiqué, which declared that Georgia “will become [a] member” of NATO, and, for the first time, included Georgia among four NATO “aspirant” countries; the others are from the Balkans. US Secretary of State Clinton, meanwhile, underscored that the Chicago summit should be the last one that is not about enlargement.

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“One country that deserves to see progress on its membership aspirations is Georgia, which was first promised NATO membership in Bucharest in 2008. Despite the lack of movement since, Georgia continues to act as a contributing NATO partner country. It currently provides a full battalion to NATO forces in Afghanistan and has committed to adding a second. This would make Georgia the largest troop-contributing nation on a per capita basis in Afghanistan.”

♦ US Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s European Affairs

“Georgia has repeatedly proven itself to be a reliable friend and strategic partner of the United States, and it is time for the U.S. to further demonstrate our commitment to Georgia’s defense and sovereignty by supporting its membership in NATO.”

“Georgia’s security and sovereignty is critical to U.S. interests in the region.”

♦ US Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee

“We stand firm in our support for Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. We welcome Georgia’s non-use of force pledge, and we call on Russia to reciprocate with its own pledge. We stand by the Bucharest decision and all subsequent decisions on Georgia.”

♦ US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

UPCOMING MILESTONES

May 26: Parliament relocates to Kutaisi

May 26: Georgian Independence Day

May 29: Europe Week begins in Tbilisi

Jun. 7-8: 20th round of Geneva peace talks

Aug. 7: 4th anniversary of Russian invasion

Oct.: Parliamentary elections

TOP STORIES



NATO Affirms Commitment to Membership for Georgia; Grouped Among Four “Aspirant” Countries

NATO reaffirmed its commitment to Georgia’s membership at its summit in Chicago on Monday, formally naming it among four “aspirant” countries that could lead the next wave of NATO enlargement. “At the 2008 Bucharest Summit we agreed that Georgia will become a member of NATO and we reaffirm all elements of that decision, as well as subsequent decisions,” declared the Alliance in its official summit communiqué. “We welcome Georgia’s progress since the Bucharest Summit to meet its Euro-Atlantic aspirations through its reforms, implementation of its Annual National Program, and active political engagement with the Alliance in the NATO-Georgia Commission. NATO said it would “enhance Georgia’s connectivity with the Alliance” by strengthening political dialogue, practical cooperation, and interoperability with Georgia.

US Secretary of State Clinton was even clearer on American commitment to NATO enlargement. “I believe this summit should be the last summit that is not an enlargement summit,” she said during a meeting between NATO foreign ministers and their counterparts in the four aspirant countries, which also include Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. “We know it can be a lengthy and challenging process, but we need to stick with it,” Clinton said, adding that the “ultimate goal” was for a “stronger, more durable [and] more effective NATO.” Of Georgia, Clinton said: “Georgia has made democratic reforms, and the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections are additional opportunities for Georgia to show the world that it is committed to NATO’s democratic values. We stand firm in our support for Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. We welcome Georgia’s non-use of force pledge, and we call on Russia to reciprocate with its own pledge. We stand by the Bucharest decision and all subsequent decisions on Georgia.”

President Saakashvili welcomed NATO’s declaration, saying that Georgia will “have very good chances” to become a member at the next NATO summit. “If our progress continues—and it will definitely continue—we will be in the best shape for the next summit and it will be extremely difficult to explain by that time why Georgia should not be able to join NATO,” he said. “I’ve never been so sure about it as I am now.” The President expressed confidence in Georgia’s future membership based on its grouping with the three “aspirant” nations: “Those three Balkan states will definitely join NATO; so in this respect, this is a very serious step forward.” Georgia assumed a large role at the summit. It was the only country to participate in three high-level events including a session on the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, a 13-member partnership discussion, and an aspirant countries meeting with NATO foreign ministers. “The fact that Georgia has been the only partner country to participate in all three partner events in this summit is a testimony of a very special relationship between Georgia and NATO,” NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: ‘Our Chances Good for Next NATO Summit’](#)
[US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES: Georgia’s NATO Membership Strongly Supported by Ros-Lehtinen](#)
[FOREIGN AFFAIRS: What NATO should and shouldn’t do in Chicago](#)

Parliament Passes Amendment to Allow Ivanishvili to Run in Parliamentary, Presidential Elections

Parliament on Tuesday passed with its third and final reading a constitutional amendment, that will allow Bidzina Ivanishvili, among others, to vote and to run in the October parliamentary elections, as well as in next year’s presidential vote. According to the amendment, any citizen of an EU-member state, who was born in Georgia and “has permanently lived in Georgia for last 5 years” will be able to run. The Georgian government has urged Ivanishvili to apply for Georgian citizenship through the appropriate dual citizenship legal process, but he has refused to do so. This week, he also said he would refuse to take advantage of the new amendment. Parliament Chair David Bakradze said he was surprised by Ivanishvili’s rejection of the amendment. “For months we’ve been hearing from him and his team that he was going to run in the parliamentary elections...but the absence of citizenship was undermining his plans,” Bakradze said. “There is no restriction whatsoever; if he wants to run in the elections he has full right to do so; there is no restriction on his political activities; so it is totally up to him to decide whether to run or not is...wrong.”

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Ivanishvili-Related Amendment Passed](#)

Georgia Establishes Inter-Agency Task Force to Ensure Free & Fair Elections

Georgia’s government last week created a new inter-agency task force to ensure a “transparent and fair electoral environment,” ahead of October’s parliamentary elections. Headed by National Security Advisor Giga Bokeria, the new Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections (IATF) will include representatives from Georgia’s interior, justice, regional development, finance, and foreign affairs ministries. “The IATF will foster coordination among various government agencies and promote dialogue between the government and all stakeholders in the electoral process,” the National Security Council said in statement. “The IATF will cooperate with political parties, domestic non-governmental organizations, international organizations, and election observers.” The group is mandated to prevent and respond to electoral violations. By creating the group, Georgia follows through on its promise to launch a new election task force, a provision included in last December’s legislation on electoral code reform.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Election Inter-Agency Task Force Established](#)
[XINHUA: Georgia Sets up Panel to Monitor Parliamentary Elections](#)

Georgian Know-How in Public Sector Receives UN Award

The United Nations awarded Georgia last week with its most prestigious award for excellence in public service, recognizing the country’s public-sector reform accomplishments. Georgia won second place in the “Preventing and Combating Corruption in the Public Service” category for its electronic state procurement system, an initiative that contributed to its improved ranking on Transparency International’s annual corruption index. Georgia’s Public Service Halls also shared second place for improving the delivery of public services. The Halls, run by the Ministry of Justice, provide Georgian citizens with access to multiple state services under a single roof, making the administration of public services more efficient. “This is a prestigious annual award from the UN that determines its winners from countries throughout the world,” said President Saakashvili in New York.

[TREND: Georgian Know-How in Public Sector Receives Award](#)

Largest Greek Carrier, Aegean Airlines, Enters Georgian market

Greece’s largest airline, Aegean Airlines, announced plans to launch direct flights to Tbilisi, with twice-weekly service starting June 11. Discussions also are underway to coordinate direct onward flight routes to European capitals. “We are doing everything possible to ensure a high international reputation and to provide an influx of new tourists,” said Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava. Greece’s ambassador to Georgia, Eleftherios Proisos, said the initiative will boost bilateral relations and make communication between the two countries more “intense.”

[TREND DAILY NEWS: Largest Greek Airline Aegean Airlines Enters Georgian Market](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

FOREIGN AFFAIRS: NATO must reward countries like Georgia

One country that deserves to see progress on its membership aspirations is Georgia, which was first promised NATO membership in Bucharest in 2008, writes US Senator Jeanne Shaheen. Despite the lack of movement since, Georgia continues to act as a contributing NATO partner country. It currently provides a full battalion to NATO forces in Afghanistan and has committed to adding a second. This would make Georgia the largest troop-contributing nation on a per capita basis in Afghanistan. If NATO's open door policy is to remain credible, it must acknowledge and reward countries like Georgia that are meeting the Alliance's high expectations.

www.foreignaffairs.com

XINHUA: Georgia sets up panel to monitor elections

Georgia last week announced the formation of a special task force to monitor the October parliamentary elections. The Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections (IATF) is headed by National Security Advisor Giga Bokeria. The task force also consists of representatives from the ministries of the interior, justice, regional development, finance and the foreign ministry.

www.chinadaily.com

EDM: Normal or special standards for Georgia's elections?

Some officials in Washington and Brussels are cautioning Georgia preventively that it faces a "litmus test"—unusual language in those two capitals vis-à-vis a partner ahead of its elections. To single out Georgia for such special rigor seems paradoxical. This is the only thoroughly de-Sovietized country anywhere to the east of the Baltic States; its government is top-ranked on liberal economic reforms, as well as unconditionally Western-oriented—and shapes Georgian public opinion in the same direction. Meanwhile, Georgia has willingly accepted the US as de facto referee of Georgian domestic politics, including electoral processes.

www.jamestown.org

MOSCOW TIMES: FSB tells new tale about a terrorist plot

Abkhazia's leader, Alexander Ankvab, can't be pleased with the FSB's recent claim of a huge arms cache in Georgia's Russian occupied region. The cache was discovered during the investigation of the latest attempt on his life in February, and he had ruled out Georgia's role in the attack. Announcing that there are Muslim terrorists in Abkhazia who are associated with Georgia's plans to attack Sochi makes Ankvab look weak, Abkhazia look unstable, and confirms what Tbilisi has been saying all along: "Russia is its own phantom menace."

www.themoscowtimes.com

DIE PRESSE: Interview with Deputy FM Nino Kalandadze

"[Georgia] is the most democratic country in the region and has taken a determined route towards Europe," says Georgia's Deputy FM Nino Kalandadze. "Other countries have not received an offer to discuss a free trade agreement, and we have been negotiating an association agreement since 2010." She also highlighted the country's reform progress and its standing as a regional model of successful reform.

diepresse.com

ATLANTICO (FRANCE): Ivanishvili—Georgian oligarch challenging Saakashvili & Obama

As a new face in the Georgian political landscape, energy tycoon and billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili has launched a strong lobbying campaign in the US to make himself known. This intense campaign seeks to promote the launch of his "Georgian Dream" coalition while erasing his obscure past and his links with Moscow, which until now strongly affected his reputation among Georgians—who do not appreciate the political and economic connections of the oligarch with the Russian neighbor. Having capitalized on the move towards liberalization following the demise of the USSR, his quest for power in Georgia does not at all erase his links with Russia.

www.atlantico.fr



Georgia is making a solo bid to host the European football championships in 2020 after previously planning a joint application with neighbor Azerbaijan. "Azerbaijan has already submitted a statement about hosting the Olympic Games (in 2020) so we will work independently to be granted the authority to host the 2020 European football championships," Sports Minister Vladimer Vardzelashvili said. Construction of an "ultra-modern stadium" in Batumi (above), to be part of the bid, begins later this year, and new stadiums are also planned for Gori and Zugdidi. UEFA will choose the host in late 2013 or early 2014. www.afp.org

BLOOMBERG: Russia sent aid to Nauru, Nicaragua after S. Ossetia's recognition

Russia extended financial aid to Nicaragua and Nauru, two of the nations that recognized Georgia's Russian-occupied region of S. Ossetia. Nicaragua and Nauru, a Pacific island nation, joined Kyrgyzstan in sharing \$50 million in funds Russia allocated in 2010 for improvements in health care, infrastructure, and education, the ministry said in a presentation distributed to reporters in Moscow today. Recognition of S. Ossetia's independence was one of "numerous factors" that influenced the decision to disburse aid, said Deputy Finance Minister Sergei Storchak. "We weren't pursuing any political goals in providing assistance."

www.bloomberg.com

STRATFOR: Next stage of Russia's resurgence—Caucasus states

Russia has not been able to create or support a viable opposition movement capable of truly challenging Mikheil Saakashvili. In the coming months and years, Russia wants to increase the likelihood of the formation of a viable opposition movement. It also wants to prevent the West, particularly the US, from re-engaging in the country. This does not mean Georgia has no alternatives to Russia; it has partnered with Azerbaijan and Turkey to form a southern corridor for energy and trade that goes around Russia. But these alternatives are limited to economics and politics and leave Georgia militarily isolated and vulnerable. Lacking NATO membership, Georgia has sought to purchase weapons and build up its own military with help.

www.stratfor.com

AFP: Georgia gay activists rally after religious attacks

Dozens of gay rights supporters rallied for in the Georgian capital after being attacked by Orthodox Christians during their initial march in the deeply religious Caucasus state. Around 60 young activists assembled on the steps of the parliament building in the overtly Christian ex-Soviet nation holding banners with slogans such as "Stop hate crimes" and "No to religious extremists." A day earlier, gay rights demonstrators held a rare march and were attacked by a group of Orthodox priests and their supporters, who shouted abuse and threw punches at some participants.

www.google.com

FINANCIAL TIMES: Eurobond boost for Georgia

Georgia's state-owned oil and gas company has successfully placed a \$250 million Eurobond in London, in a move that PM Gilauri described as a "big success for the Georgian economy." Gilauri said the project was part of Georgia's efforts to become the second country in the world after Norway to derive virtually all its electricity from hydropower—a goal he said could be achieved within five to seven years. Surplus electricity from the project could also be exported to Turkey, Russia, and Eastern Europe.

www.ft.com