

# GEORGIA UPDATE

WEEKLY EDITION • 31 May 2012

A Publication of the Government of Georgia

[www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge](http://www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge)

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Georgia's lawmakers met on May 26th in their ultramodern new home in Kutaisi, Georgia's second-largest city, for the first time since its construction; the event coincided with Georgia's Independence Day. President Saakashvili underscored Georgia's commitment to building its democracy, decentralizing power, and unifying the country in his speech before MPs and foreign diplomats in Parliament's new chamber. "This is a new building, like our country is; our new Georgia is still unfinished construction," he said, referring to the building, whose interior is still a work in progress. "I offer you to continue moving towards further democratization and de-centralization with bold steps," he said. Parliament will convene in Tbilisi until after the elections in October, after which lawmakers will hold their first official session in their new home.

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## QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"This year marks the 20th anniversary of US-Georgian bilateral relations. Since regaining its independence, Georgia has made impressive progress fighting corruption, developing modern state institutions, and enhancing global security. The United States is committed to helping Georgia deepen Euro-Atlantic ties and strengthen the institutions of your democracy, and we remain steadfast in support of Georgia's territorial integrity."

"We stood with the Georgian people 20 years ago at the dawn of your renewed independence, and we stand with you today. As you celebrate this special day, we look forward to working with the Georgian government and people to build a more peaceful and prosperous world."

♦ US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

"We know how precious freedom is and how fragile it is at the same time. We know what it means to be deprived of it and we know what it means to fight for it. Freedom is everything."

♦ President Saakashvili speaking at the Reagan Library and Museum in California last week

## UPCOMING MILESTONES

**May 29:** Europe Week begins in Tbilisi

**Jun. 5:** Secretary of State Clinton opens US-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission meeting in Batumi

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

**Jun. 11-16:** NATO Days in Georgia

**Aug. 7:** 4th anniversary of Russian invasion

**Oct.:** Parliamentary elections

## TOP STORIES

**Lawmakers Inaugurate Ultramodern New Parliament in Kutaisi, Highlighting Decentralization Drive**

Georgia last week celebrated its Independence Day with the debut of its ultramodern new parliament building in Kutaisi, the country's second-largest city. The building's striking façade, dominated by a 40-meter-high glass dome, has been completed, although much of the interior is still under construction. "This new building of our parliament is a symbol of the new Georgia," President Saakashvili said at the official opening. "The building of the new Georgia is far from completion. Georgia of course is an unfinished building in terms of democracy." The President used his address to underscore the importance of next autumn's parliamentary elections. "It is important to make the October parliamentary election the fairest, freest, and most exemplary, with the highest degree of democracy." He emphasized that parliament's move to Kutaisi is part of the government's effort to decentralize power and unify the country: "I offer you to continue moving towards further democratization and with bold steps. Local self-governance bodies should get closer to the people and their accountability before the people should grow.... The emergence of many centers is the firmest foundation for unity." The President also warned in his speech that Moscow still wanted to "accomplish its cherished dream—to topple Georgia's government," adding: "But I am confident the Georgian people will stand guard to save Georgia's independence." Lawmakers will hold their first official session in Kutaisi after October's elections.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Saakashvili's Independence Day Speech](#)  
[AFP: Georgia Transfers Parliament to Provincial City](#)

**US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to Visit Georgia Next Week**

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will visit Georgia next week as part of a week-long trip to the South Caucasus, Turkey and Scandinavia. In Batumi on June 5th, Clinton will open the plenary session of the US-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission. Ahead of the visit, Clinton pledged to reaffirm America's commitment to Georgia. "The US is committed to helping Georgia deepen Euro-Atlantic ties and strengthen the institutions of your democracy, and we remain steadfast in support of Georgia's territorial integrity," she said on Georgia's Independence Day. "Since regaining its independence, Georgia has made impressive progress fighting corruption, developing modern state institutions, and enhancing global security," she added. "We stood with the Georgian people 20 years ago at the dawn of your renewed independence, and we stand with you today." Clinton will also meet with President Saakashvili and other political actors and civil society representatives to discuss regional security, democracy, economic development, and counterterrorism issues. This visit comes less than two weeks after Clinton met with Georgia and other NATO "aspirant" countries at the Alliance's summit in Chicago.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Clinton to Visit Georgia on June 5](#)  
[US STATE DEPARTMENT: Secretary Clinton to Travel to Georgia](#)

**Amendment Clears Way for Ivanishvili Candidacy**

President Saakashvili has signed a constitutional amendment that now clears the way for Bidzina Ivanishvili, among others, to vote and to run in the October parliamentary elections, as well as in next year's presidential vote. The amendment went into effect on Tuesday, as soon as it was published in the Sakanonmdeblo Matsne, the state online registry of legal acts. 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" is allowed 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. Last week, he also said he would refuse to take advantage of the new amendment.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Ivanishvili-Related Amendment Goes into Force](#)



*President Saakashvili and First Lady Sandra Roelofs visited Latvia Tuesday to discuss Georgia's reforms, business opportunities, and regional issues. Latvian President Andres Berzins underscored his country's support for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. "I am convinced that Georgia's future development will be successful," he said. "Georgia will join NATO and succeed in integrating into the European Union." The presidents signed agreements to address double taxation and combat tax evasion, and also addressed a business forum that aimed to thicken trade between the two countries.*

**Government to Create Parliament for Georgians Abroad**

The government is aiming to create a new parliament for Georgians living abroad. "The initiative will help to increase our contacts with the Georgian Diaspora abroad and it will help to boost their involvement in Georgia's state affairs, political, economic, cultural developments," said Diaspora Minister Papuna Davitaia. The 45-member "Diaspora parliament" would serve as "an advisory body" to the State Ministry for Diaspora and would convene annually in the Georgian Parliament building. Georgian expat communities will elect 30 members; the diaspora ministry would designate the other 15. Earlier this year, Parliament approved a law that awards Georgian expats "special status" and access to state-funded services. Meanwhile, last month marked the largest volume of money transfers to Georgia from Georgia's diaspora—\$112 million, a 6 percent increase from last April. ,

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Georgia Plans "Diaspora Parliament"](#)

**Azerbaijan Joins Georgia's Euro 2020 Bid**

Azerbaijan is rejoining Georgia in its bid to host the 2020 European football championships. The news comes just days after Baku was eliminated from the running to host the Olympics in the same year. "We have agreed to make a joint bid for hosting 2020 Euro Championship," said the Azerbaijani Football Federation. Georgia welcomed the decision: "The joint bid will ease efforts to overcome challenges related with infrastructure, stadiums and hotels," said Georgian Football Federation President Zviad Sichinava.

[RADIO FREE EUROPE: Georgia, Azerbaijan to Bid for Euro 2020](#)

**European Union Launches Prize for Georgian Journalists**

The EU launched its inaugural "EU Prize for Journalism" in Georgia last week, aiming to recognize Georgian journalists who demonstrate journalistic integrity and professionalism; the prize is the first of its kind in Georgia. "We aim to support the freedom of speech and development of professional journalism standards in line with EU values in Georgia," said EU Ambassador Philip Dimitrov. "The Prize will be awarded in the spirit of respect for media pluralism, and in the context of the European Union's desire to improve communication between EU institutions and Georgian citizens." All professional Georgian journalists, editors, web publishers, and NGOs are encouraged to submit entries.

[EU NEIGHBORHOOD INFO CENTRE: The Power of Words](#)

## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

**FOREIGN POLICY: Obama must stand up to Putin**

President Bush failed to protest against Putin's 2008 provocation and even visited Putin at his summer residence in Sochi immediately afterward. Interpreting Bush's actions as clear approval, Putin followed up with a real war in August 2008. Obviously, he should not be welcomed to another NATO summit, and the NATO-Russia Council may rest in peace. Obama needs to stand up to the Putin presidency. To begin with, he must re-establish elementary respect.

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

**NEWSWEEK: The return of the Circassians**

The Circassians lost their country a century-and-a-half ago to a brutal campaign by the imperial Russian army, which seized the entire Caucasus region. Now they are finding allies among those with grievances against Moscow. A year ago the Georgian Parliament voted unanimously to recognize the conquest of Circassia as genocide, and Georgia became the first country in the world to do so. This May 21 the Georgians are taking their campaign a step further, unveiling a Circassian genocide memorial in the town of Anaklia.

[newsweekpakistan.com](http://newsweekpakistan.com)

**EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Ivanishvili starts selling assets**

Georgian billionaire and aspirant to power Bidzina Ivanishvili has started selling some of his assets in Russia for liquidity, aiming to funnel the money to support his political operations in Georgia. Russian revenue streams to Ivanishvili have continued unabated during the past 20 years, and have doubled his net worth from the Forbes-estimated \$2.6 billion by 2004-2005 to \$6.4-billion in 2012. Wealth accumulation on such a scale, and now the profitable sales for liquidity, would seem inconceivable without the consent of state authorities in Putin's Russia. Moreover he will be able to use the liquidated assets against the Georgian government, in line with Moscow's destabilization goals.

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

**RADIO FREE EUROPE: Clinton says NATO membership should grow at next summit**

US Secretary of State Clinton spoke with aspiring NATO members Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Macedonia, and Montenegro during last week's NATO summit in Chicago. "I believe this summit should be the last summit that is not an enlargement summit," she said. Georgia, she noted, has made progress toward membership in the alliance.

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

**EURASIANET: Abkhazia disputes Russian story on "terror" plot**

The plot is thickening in the alleged Georgian-Chechen Sochi Olympics terror plot: the Abkhazian security services are casting doubt on the Russian version of events. A source in the Abkhazian government is saying that the arms cache was not intended for Sochi, but for use in Abkhazia. Might the Abkhazian government have reason to inflate a threat against it? Possibly. But it's interesting that Abkhazia is pushing back against the Russian narrative. The plot really doesn't do anything other than thicken in the Caucasus, does it?

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

**PACIFIC ISLANDS NEWS: September 2012—Russians set to land**

Russia has been able to woo support at the UN for recognition of Georgia's Russian-occupied territories of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia—the scene of Russia's 2008 war with Georgia. While the region's biggest aid donor, Australia, accuses Russia of "exploiting" some of the world's smallest economies like Kiribati, Tuvalu, Nauru, Vanuatu, and Fiji, Russia is marching on and forging ties with whichever countries it can in the Pacific Islands Forum region. Russia is said to have poured tens of millions of development aid to these five countries in return for their acknowledgement of the Russian puppet states.

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

**THE INDEPENDENT: Gorgeous Georgian cuisine**

Georgia, blessed with a Mediterranean climate and outstanding organic produce, is home to some of the world's most inventive and original food traditions. Until recently, Georgia's legendary cuisine was a secret to almost everyone but the Russians, who treasure the Georgian restaurants that opened in Moscow during 200 years of Russian occupation. But now the Russians are coming in increasing numbers to London, new Georgian restaurants are opening and the older ones are coming out of the closet.

"I could not believe the quality of the produce in the markets—it was phenomenal," says Claude Bosi of Hibiscus, the two-Michelin-starred restaurateur who has been incubating a love affair with Georgia since his first visit last year. Georgian wines are also as unique as the dishes they accompany. Strips of delicately poached chicken submerged in a thin but rich sauce of ground walnuts, infused with garlic trout from a nearby river, pan-fried crisp and enrobed in a ruby-red pomegranate coulis is just one savory, authentic Georgian dish.

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

**DER TAGESSPIEGEL: Georgia overthrows Stalin**

Georgia is transforming the birth house of Soviet dictator and native Georgian Josef Stalin into a museum exhibiting the atrocities committed during his rule, commemorating the victims of the dictatorship. "We cannot build a democratic state and see ourselves as a part of the free world when we keep on glorifying the greatest tyrant of the 20th century," said Culture Minister Nika Rurua. Younger Georgians are particularly interested in emphasizing the crimes committed by Stalin and his repressions against Georgian intellectuals.

[www.tagesspiegel.de](http://www.tagesspiegel.de)

**TIMES OF TRENTON: Saakashvili speaks at Princeton on democracy**

"In the 1990s, there were two choices: to be messy, chaotic, crime-ridden, corruption-crippled, and have freedom of speech, or to be more regulated, more orderly, but more authoritarian," President Saakashvili said in a speech at Princeton. "Our democracy isn't perfect, but we have free speech, free elections, open civil society, yet still have a low crime rate and no corruption." Georgia receives delegations from other countries eager to learn from its reforms—even from Russia.

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

**VENTURA COUNTY STAR: Freedom is everything, Saakashvili says**

President Saakashvili spoke on Georgia's democracy to an audience of about 350 specially invited guests at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum. Our partnership with the US is most important because the country is "a pivotal force in a world of freedom and opportunity," he said. "We know how precious freedom is and how fragile it is at the same time. We know what it means to be deprived of it and we know what it means to fight for it," he said. "Freedom is everything."

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