

GEORGIA UPDATE

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TOP STORIES

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- US to Recognize Status-Neutral Documents for Residents of Occupied Territories
- Election Task Force Begins Work, Turns Focus on Politically Motivated Dismissals
- European Court of Human Rights to Hear Georgia's Deportation Case Against Russia
- Foreign Investment Rises 30% in First Quarter, on Target for \$1 Billion in 2012



US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton Tuesday underscored the importance of US-Georgia relations during her two-day visit to Batumi. "The United States is proud to have been Georgia's partner in this critical period," she said at a plenary session of the US-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission, a framework for advancing bilateral cooperation across democratic, economic, defense, and people-to-people fields. Clinton encouraged Georgia to continue its commitment to "free and fair" elections and reiterated support for Tbilisi's bid for NATO membership. We continue to strongly support Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and stand by the Bucharest decision and all subsequent decisions on Georgia," she said. Clinton pledged US support for the training of Georgia's military in coastal defense and underscored Washington's rejection of Russia's "occupation" of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia. US and Georgian officials discussed a series of agreements to deepen defense cooperation.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"Georgia already helps protect regional and global security and together we can do more. As we said at the NATO summit in Chicago two weeks ago, we are grateful for Georgia's contributions and sacrifices as the largest non-NATO contributor now to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. And we agreed that Georgia continues to make important progress toward meeting NATO's standards. We continue to strongly support Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and stand by the Bucharest decision and all subsequent decisions on Georgia."

"Georgia's reforms, including your economic reforms, have won international praise and rising standings in global business rankings. As Georgia continues to strengthen accountability, transparency, and the rule of law, you will see even greater interest and investment in your economy. The United States is proud to have been Georgia's partner in this critical period. Now we want to take our trade and investment relationship to the next level."

"We reject Russia's occupation and militarization of Georgian territory and we call on Russia to fulfill its obligations under the 2008 ceasefire agreement, including withdrawal of its forces to pre-conflict positions and free access for humanitarian assistance."

♦ US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Batumi

UPCOMING MILESTONES

- Jun. 7-8:** 20th round of Geneva peace talks
- Jun. 11-16:** "NATO Days" in Georgia
- Jun. 12-13:** OSCE Chairman-in-Office visits Georgia
- July:** US Congress delegation visits Georgia
- Jul. 12-13:** Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs Eamon Gilmore visits Georgia
- Aug. 7:** 4th anniversary of Russian invasion
- Oct.:** Parliamentary elections

TOP STORIES

Secretary of State Clinton, in Georgia, Underscores Strength of US-Georgia Ties; Warns Russia

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton used her second visit to Georgia since 2010 to hail the country's reforms as a model for other emerging democracies, underscore its contributions to global security, and highlight the importance of the upcoming elections. Clinton also sent a signal of steadfast US support for Georgian sovereignty and eventual membership in NATO. "America stands with you. We will not waver in our support for Georgia and your territorial integrity," she said, adding bluntly: "We reject Russia's occupation and militarization of Georgia's territory." Russian forces must withdraw to pre-conflict conditions, she insisted, and allow humanitarian monitors into the provinces.

Opening a meeting of the US-Georgia Strategic Partnership in Batumi, Clinton used the opportunity to focus on Georgia's progress. "Georgia's reforms, including your economic reforms, have won international praise and rising standings in global business rankings," she said. "As Georgia continues to strengthen accountability, transparency, and the rule of law, you will see even greater interest and investment in your economy. The United States is proud to have been Georgia's partner in this critical period. Now we want to take our trade and investment relationship to the next level." She said Georgia's reforms had made it a model for other emerging democracies. "Georgia is now asked by people all over the world to send experts to talk about how to reform economies and how to set up political systems and deliver services to people."

Clinton also commissioned a new Georgian coast guard vessel, taking the opportunity to announce a series of new bilateral defense agreements. "The United States will provide training and support for Georgian defense forces to better monitor your coasts and your skies. We will help upgrade Georgia's utility helicopter fleet so it can more easily transport supplies and people throughout your country. We are also going to help Georgia give its officers the 21st century training they need for today's changing missions." She underscored that modernizing Georgia's defense capabilities was a shared priority. "With these efforts, Georgia will be a stronger international partner with an improved capacity for self-defense," she said.

Clinton also focused on the upcoming elections as a "crucial indicator" of Georgia's democratic development. "The single best thing Georgia can do to advance your security, your prosperity, your democracy, your international reputation is to hold free and fair relations that result in a fully democratic transition," she said. Replied President Saakashvili: "These elections will express the free will of the Georgian people." He said he would invite as many observers as possible, to make the votes "as transparent, as fair, as trustworthy as possible."

While in Batumi, Clinton also visited a newly opened Public Service Hall, and also sampled a variety of wines at the Adjarian Wine House.

[US STATE DEPARTMENT: Hillary Clinton Remarks AP: Clinton in Georgia to Bolster US Ally's Defenses](#)

US to Recognize Status-Neutral Documents for Residents of the Occupied Territories

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Wednesday the US will recognize "status-neutral" documents issued by Georgia's government, which will allow residents of occupied Abkhazia and S. Ossetia to travel to the West. Clinton said she and President Saakashvili "discussed ways Georgia can reach out to the people of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia," including providing travel documents and ID cards. "Soon, US embassies and consulates around the world will accept the status-neutral travel document for any resident from these regions who chooses to use them for travel or study in the US," she said. "This would be a strong step toward reconciliation that supports a peaceful and just resolution of the conflict." Since the 2008 Russian invasion, residents of the two territories have had to use passports issued by either Russia or its proxy authorities. However, those passports are not recognized by most countries, which view Abkhazia and S. Ossetia as part of Georgia.

[RADIO FREE EUROPE: U.S. To Recognize "Status-Neutral" Passports From Georgia's Breakaway Regions](#)



Secretary of State Clinton and President Saakashvili at the Wine House in Keda.

Election Task Force Begins Work, Turns Focus on Politically Motivated Dismissals

Georgia's election task force has turned its attention to a string of recent layoffs in Georgia's public sector that were allegedly motivated by politics. "The firing of public servants due to their political views or those of their relatives is absolutely prohibited," the Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections (IATF) said in a statement. "It is unacceptable and illegal to fire public servants due to their political views or those of their family members."

The IATF reiterated that all public sector employees—with the exception of those employed in special defense, intelligence, or legal positions—enjoy full rights to "openly declare their political views" when not on official duty. The announcement follows a report by a Tbilisi-based election watchdog that identified 10 cases of alleged politically motivated dismissals within Georgia's state agencies and public schools. The layoffs, conducted under the "optimization" banner, were allegedly made in response to political party links ahead of October's parliamentary elections. While acknowledging the seriousness of the charges, the IATF cautioned against drawing swift conclusions until further investigation, as some state agencies were in the process of cutting staff to streamline operations. "Each and every such allegation must be investigated," the IATF said. The task force recommended that state agencies suspend all "optimization" dismissals of public sector employees. The newly formed task force is charged with a special mandate to monitor and prevent electoral violations, and to ensure the integrity of Georgia's electoral process.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Election Inter-Agency Group Tells State Agencies to Stop Layoffs](#)

European Court of Human Rights to Hear Georgia's Deportation Case Against Russia

The European Court of Human Rights next week will hear Georgia's case against Russia's mass deportation campaign. Tbilisi has accused Moscow of forcibly removing hundreds of ethnic Georgians from their homes in the Russian Federation following the Russian-Georgian spy row in late 2006. Georgian prosecutors seek compensation from the Kremlin on behalf of the deported Georgians. The case will be heard by the court's Grand Chamber, which consists of a panel of 17 senior judges and includes the ECHR's president and vice president. Georgia also has a separate inter-state case pending against Russia related to Moscow's mass human rights abuses during and after its 2008 invasion of Georgia.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: ECHR to Hear Georgia vs. Russia Case](#)

Foreign Investment Rises 30% in First Quarter, on Target for \$1 Billion in 2012

Foreign investment in Georgia soared by 30% year-on-year during the first quarter of 2012. PM Gilauri said the increase is a "good sign" that FDI flows will exceed \$1 billion by year's end. Georgia's debt relative to economic output is at 28% and falling, Gilauri added.

[BLOOMBERG: Georgian Investment on Target to Exceed \\$1 Billion](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

HERITAGE: Georgia & Russia—the forgotten occupation

Sadly, in the same way Russia is failing at getting international recognition of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia, the Georgians are having difficulties getting their European allies to formally recognize Russia's military presence there as an occupation. If 10,000 Russian troops permanently based on 20% of Georgia's territory is not an occupation, what is? Yet most European nations—including the UK—have remained mute. The UK and European partners should join France and the US in a statement unequivocally recognizing the Russian occupation.

blog.heritage.org

AFP: Georgia's Saakashvili moves parliament

Thousands of soldiers on Georgia's Independence Day marched past the ultramodern new parliament building in a display featuring tanks, fighter jets and, for the first time, Georgian-made military hardware including spy drones, rocket launchers, and combat vehicles. "I am confident that the Georgian people will stand guard to save Georgia's independence," said President Saakashvili in the industrial city of Kutaisi. Said one local housewife: "Our city was a forgotten place, now it regains new life. We simply could not be happier."

www.france24.com

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: NATO & Georgia—beyond open door

The postponement of the NATO-Georgia Commission meeting in Chicago last month and other obstructions look like mere rearguard attempts to slow down Georgia's advance toward NATO's open door. If NATO maintains the integrity of its Open Door policy, with membership prospects dependent on performance only, and with Georgia outperforming the other aspirants, Georgia cannot for long be kept waiting in front of that open door.

www.jamestown.org

EURASIANET: A Euro-style recognition of Abkhazia, S. Ossetia?

During his visit to Moscow last week, Serbia's new president, Tomislav Nikolić, promised to push for recognition of the independence of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia in the Serbian parliament, a pledge that sparked optimism in Abkhazia. And, by now comfortably settled into its role in the two regions, Russia has made plain that it's happy to sweeten the deal. Nikolić's promise was followed by President Putin promise to lend \$800 million to Serbia.

www.eurasianet.org

SLATE: Tunisia, Egypt, Kyrgyzstan—the Georgian model that everyone looks up to

Credit must be given where it is due. Saakashvili partisans have their shortcomings, but the success of reforms in Georgia cannot be contested. In less than 10 years, the republic has been transformed, different in many aspects to its ex-Soviet comrades. Having managed to break the spiral of corruption, Saakashvili and his team "cleansed" Georgia through and through. Breaking with the Soviet heritage, they have gambled on the West. Tunisia, Egypt, and Kyrgyzstan—which have gone through popular revolutions in recent years—are seeking to learn from the Georgian success story. In Russia, the fact that Georgia has eradicated corruption is discussed at length in alternative media sources, while it remains absent from the traditional televised media.

www.slate.fr

INSTITUTE FOR WAR & PEACE REPORTING: Georgian students snap up summer jobs

A government program that provides Georgian students with summer jobs reached capacity on its launch day, reflecting the huge demand among young people interested in paying work to fund their studies. Registration for the Summer Job program opened on March 20 and was supposed to be open for a month, but closed by day's end after all 25,000 places had been snapped up. The website for applications was so overloaded with requests that it crashed.

iwpr.net



THE ARTS DESK: A Georgian "As You Like It" in London

At the Shakespeare's Globe in London, the Caucasus is proving as fruitful a ground for new views on old texts. Georgia's Marjanishvili Company, under director Levan Tsuladze, proved the region has a special style with their version of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Georgia's theatre company was invited to perform the Shakespeare play in their native Georgian language as part of the Globe's World Shakespeare Festival to celebrate the renowned playwright. The cross-casting worked outstandingly, with the Jaques of actress Nata Murvanidze just right, and especially powerful in interchanges with Adam, also female, who brought out an almost erotic quality in his/her interaction with Orlando.

www.theartsdesk.com

DIE WELT: Top grade for Gori

Gori lies in the Shida Kartli region of Georgia and is well connected due to its prominent cotton industry and numerous universities. However, the most famous sight of Gori has so far withstood time. Until now, 133 years after the birth of Stalin in Gori, the Stalin-museum has decided to glorify the Soviet dictator no longer. The government is remodeling the museum to focus on Stalin's atrocities during the Soviet dictator's rule.

www.welt.de

NEW YORK TIMES: Kakha Bendukidze betting on a fish

If Americans ever eat genetically engineered fast-growing salmon, it might be because of a biologist turned oligarch turned Georgian government minister turned fish farming entrepreneur. That man, Kakha Bendukidze, holds the key to either extinction or survival for AquaBounty Technologies, the company that is hoping for federal approval of a type of salmon that would be the first genetically engineered animal in the human food supply.

www.nytimes.com

XINHUA: China adds Georgia as travel destination

Georgia has officially become a new travel destination for Chinese citizens, according to an agreement reached between tourism authorities of the two countries. The accord is likely to trigger a new wave of Chinese visitors. Tourists have flocked to Georgia in recent years to bath in hot springs in the capital Tbilisi and relax on the country's Black Sea beaches.

news.xinhuanet.com

SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS: My grandmother

Clarinetist Beth Custer is a composer known for her silent film scores. Her most fraught performance was when she presented "My Grandmother," by Georgian filmmaker Kote Mikaberidze, at the Tbilisi International Film Festival. The festival was held in the same city where Mikaberidze was born. She had good reason to be nervous about presenting Georgia's national treasure at home, as there was grumbling among Georgians galled by Russia selling her the rights to the silent feature. "It turned out they loved us," Custer says. "The experience was amazing."

www.mercurynews.com