

# GEORGIA UPDATE

WEEKLY EDITION • 21 June 2012

A Publication of the Government of Georgia

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

## TOP STORIES

- Established Election Monitors Start Arriving in Georgia; ODIHR Meets With Voter List Commission
- Parliament Acts to Ensure Impartiality & Integrity of Election Observation Groups
- Georgia to Provide Residents of Occupied Territories With Free University Education
- As Court Hears Case Against Russia for 2006 Deportations, Moscow Unleashes New Wave
- Georgian Economy Grows 6.8% in 1st Quarter, as Foreign Direct Investment Rises 55%



The European Court of Human Rights last week heard arguments in the case Georgia launched in 2007 against Russia for its harassment of the Georgian immigrant population in the Russian Federation. The case deals with administrative practice involving the arrest, detention, and collective expulsion of Georgian nationals from Russia. It raises a host of legal issues, including of inhuman and degrading treatment and the prohibition of collective expulsion of aliens. In a macabre echo of the case that coincided with the ECHR hearing, Russia last week announced that it was seeking to question 9,000 Georgian immigrants. See ECHR website for details: [www.echr.coe.int](http://www.echr.coe.int)

## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

**NEW YORK TIMES:** US accused of stirring up Georgia to move against Moscow

**AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE:** Russia-Georgia mediators condemn Gali killings

**DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR:** EU brings Georgia closer to visa-free travel

**EURASIA DAILY MONITOR:** Hillary Clinton in Georgia—a visit with deliverables

**WASHINGTON TIMES:** A journalist's descent into the Russian mafia state

**HENRY JACKSON SOCIETY:** A peaceful solution to Georgia's conflicts

**BMI VOYAGER:** Beka Gochiashvili

**FINANCIAL TIMES:** Chinese group buys Georgian bank

**RHEIN NECKAR ZEITUNG:** Nino Haratishvili's new novel, "My Gentle Twin"

**THE GUARDIAN:** Women's chess enjoying popularity surge in Georgia

## QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"I walked into a public building in Batumi, which is one of President Saakashvili's very creative and impressive advancements, where truly it's one-stop shopping. You go into one public building; you can get a marriage license, a work license, a passport. It's quite remarkable."

♦ US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton speaking last week in Washington at a joint event with Israeli President Shimon Peres

"Russia's continuing occupation of internationally recognized Georgian territory in Abkhazia and S. Ossetia creates an unsustainable tinderbox, which could at any moment destabilize the region and disrupt European security. There is ample evidence that Russia is not just annexing these territories, but is using them as bases to violently destabilize Georgia from within. Meanwhile in contravention of ceasefire agreements, and in contrast to Georgia, Russia has blocked all access to international observers in the occupied territories."

♦ From a report released last week by the Henry Jackson Society on "A peaceful solution to Georgia's conflicts"

"I would characterize Georgia still as a work in progress with lots of positive developments and achievements of which it can and should be rightfully proud and to which it is offering the power of example to a number of other countries that are wrestling with some of the same challenges as they make the transitions from authoritarian governance."

♦ Outgoing US Ambassador to Georgia John Bass speaking last week in Washington

## UPCOMING MILESTONES

**July:** US Congress delegation visits Georgia

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

**Oct.:** Parliamentary elections

## TOP STORIES

**Established Election Monitors Start Arriving in Georgia; ODIHR Meets With Voter List Commission**

International election monitors started arriving in Georgia last week to conduct an initial assessment of Georgia's electoral environment. The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) launched its Needs Assessment Mission to determine the structure and length of the mission ahead of October's parliamentary elections. OSCE Chairman and Irish FM Eamon Gilmore said during his two-day visit to Georgia last week that the OSCE is ready to assist Georgia, and he applauded the government's proactive invitation to established election monitors. "I welcome the timely invitation to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to observe the elections from the Georgian authorities," he said. "This will allow the experts adequate time to assess the situation." Among other meetings with stakeholders, ODIHR engaged with Georgia's opposition-led voter list commission to discuss its efforts to verify voter rosters. Other established observer missions from the European Parliament and the US Congress are also expected to deploy to Georgia to monitor the upcoming elections.

[TREND DAILY NEWS: OSCE Ready to Assist Georgia With Elections](#)  
[CIVIL GEORGIA: OSCE Chairman Visits Georgia](#)

**Parliament Acts to Ensure Impartiality & Integrity of Election Observation Groups**

Parliament on Thursday acted to ensure that election observer missions are transparent and follow the UN Code of Conduct for International Election Observers. With legions of established observers expected to monitor Georgia's elections at the invitation of the government—including the OSCE's elections division (ODIHR), the European Parliament, members of the US Congress, and numerous others—Parliament is aiming to prevent groups with little or no experience and with undisclosed financing from trying to subvert Georgia's elections. Fake observer missions that file floods of spurious allegations have tried to subvert elections in other post-Soviet states. Groups that have questionable backgrounds and refuse to disclose their financing sources already have started appearing in Georgia. MP Pavle Kublashvili, who chairs Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee, said minimum criteria that any legitimate observer mission can satisfy were established. He added that perhaps Russia would have a desire to send observers to Georgia to "stir up" trouble. "If a state does not recognize the sovereignty and laws of Georgia, especially since the territories of Georgia are occupied, the motivation of its participation in the electoral process is obvious," Kublashvili said.

Parliament also extended the mandate of the state-funded, opposition-led Voters' List Verification Commission (VLVC) so that it can act on election day as well. "Our representatives will check the voters list at polling stations on election day to verify whether they match with those compiled by the commission," VLVC chairman Mamuka Katsitadze of the New Rights Party said. The Commission is expected to finalize the accurate voters list next month.

[TREND DAILY NEWS: Georgia Toughens Requirements for Observers](#)  
[CIVIL GEORGIA: Amendments to Election Code Endorsed](#)

**Georgia to Provide Residents of Occupied Territories With Free University Education**

The Ministry of Education announced Tuesday that it will provide free university education to all residents of Georgia's two Russian-occupied territories who have obtained status-neutral documents. Georgia launched the status-neutral internal and travel documents for the residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia earlier this year, in accordance with the state strategy on the occupied territories. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said during her visit to Georgia on June 5 that the US would start accepting Georgia's neutral travel documents to allow residents of the occupied territories to travel to the United States.

[RADIO FREE EUROPE: Georgia to Provide Residents of Abkhazia, S. Ossetia With Free Education](#)



*Outgoing US Ambassador to Georgia John Bass offered his reflections last week on Georgia's accomplishments and challenges at the Atlantic Council in Washington, sharing his insights drawn from three years of service. Bass attributed America's special relationship with Georgia to the country's democratic achievements, calling Georgia an "example" for the region. "It is precisely that democratic component I think that has made Georgia stand out in the region, among the post-Soviet successor states, as a relative success story, and certainly on a relative basis with the other successor states," he said. Bass added that Georgia has notched many "positive developments and achievements." He underscored that the government has made strong progress in reforming and modernizing the country in recent years, but that challenges lie ahead. "I think that the challenge for the next period in Georgia's development is whether this country can continue to modernize, develop its economy and strengthen its democratic culture simultaneously, because all three [of these issues] are important to its long-term success."*

**As Court Hears Case Against Russia for 2006 Deportations, Moscow Unleashes New Wave**

The European Court of Human Rights held a hearing in Strasbourg last week on Georgia's case against Russia's 2006 deportation campaign. The court's Grand Chamber, which consists of a panel of 17 senior judges and includes the ECHR's president and vice president, heard arguments from both the Georgian and Russian delegations. Georgia has said Russia forcibly removed thousands of Georgians living in Russia in 2006. Meanwhile, Russia's Federal Migration Service boldly announced—on the same day as the hearing—plans to investigate 9,000 Georgian allegedly residing in Russia illegally. "We will be finding these people and either the migration service or court will be taking decisions about them," the Federal Migration Service said. The Georgian Foreign Ministry criticized the remarks as marking the launch of "yet another campaign of persecution" against the Georgian immigrant population in Russia. Georgia first filed the case against Russia with the ECHR in March 2007.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Russian Official—"Thousands of Georgians are in Russia Illegally"](#)

**Georgian Economy Grows 6.8% in First Quarter, as Foreign Direct Investment Rises 55% to \$269 Million**

GDP growth hit 6.8% in the first quarter, Geostat announced yesterday. Among the sectors contributing most to growth were construction, which rose 26%, processing (20%), the financial sector (16.7%), restaurants and hotels (9.4%), and transport (8.6%). Foreign direct investment, meanwhile, soared to \$269 million during the first quarter, rising 55%. Preliminary figures from Geostat showed Germany invested the most with \$131 million, followed by Turkey (\$32 million), the UK (\$27 million), Japan (\$22 million), and Luxembourg (\$20 million). Georgia's processing industry and financial sector attracted the most investment during the first quarter, totaling \$65 and \$63 million respectively.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Q1 GDP Growth 6.8%](#)

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

## INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

**NEW YORK TIMES: US accused of stirring up Georgia to move against Moscow**

Russia accused the US of encouraging Georgia to seek revenge against Moscow for its 2008 invasion, a day after Secretary of State Clinton promised new military support to Georgia. A Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman said US support of Georgia's bid to join NATO had encouraged President Saakashvili's "criminal adventures" that led to the five-day war between Georgia and Russia. Clinton had pledged America's support for the training of Georgia's military in coastal defense and underscored Washington's rejection of Russia's occupation of Georgia's regions, S. Ossetia and Abkhazia.

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

**AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Mediators condemn Gali killings**

Mediators of talks between Russia and Georgia on Friday condemned a gun attack in the Russian-occupied region of Abkhazia last week, which left two police officers dead. "Since the end of December we have had 10 killings—serious cases where 10 people have been killed, three of them police officers, in the Gali district," said Antti Turunen, the UN's representative to the Geneva talks. "I hope that this is not a sign of further escalation of tension on the ground."

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

**DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR: EU brings Georgia closer**

Georgians came one step closer to visa-free travel to the EU last week, with the two sides launching a visa liberalization dialogue. "The start of the dialogue marks an important political milestone in our relations and it demonstrates the long-term commitment to strengthen ties between our countries and our people," said EU Home Affairs Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom. Added FM Vashadze: "It's a huge achievement for my country. It's an absolutely wonderful, happy day."

[en.europeonline-magazine.eu](http://en.europeonline-magazine.eu)

**EDM: Hillary Clinton in Georgia—a visit with deliverables**

Clinton announced that the Obama administration has agreed to team up with Congress to send the maximum possible number of observers, long-term and short-term, to Georgia's parliamentary elections. The balloting is scheduled for early October, and the Georgian government wants a flood of American and European observers to witness the campaign and the voting. As a special present to Georgia, Clinton announced the US government's decision to start talks toward a bilateral free-trade agreement.

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

**WASHINGTON TIMES: Decent into the Russian mafia state**

It's 2008 and tens of thousands of Georgian villagers between S. Ossetia and Gori are trying desperately to outrun the Russian militias murdering defenseless Georgian civilians before setting their villages alight. British journalist Luke Harding asks one militia commander about the ethnic cleansing being carried out by the Russian side. "We did perform some cleaning operations, yes," he casually responds. Harding's descriptions of the atrocities in his new book are chilling.

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

**HENRY JACKSON SOCIETY: Report on "A peaceful solution to Georgia's conflicts"**

Russia's continuing occupation of internationally recognized Georgian territory in Abkhazia and S. Ossetia creates an unsustainable tinderbox, which could at any moment destabilize the region and disrupt European security. There is ample evidence that Russia is not just using these territories, but is using them as bases to violently destabilize Georgia from within. Meanwhile in contravention of ceasefire agreements, and in contrast to Georgia, Russia has blocked all access to international observers in the occupied territories. The international community should make concerted efforts to ensure that the EU Monitoring Mission is able to fulfill its mandate, with which Russia agreed, to monitor both sides of the occupation lines.

[henryjacksonsociety.org](http://henryjacksonsociety.org)

**BMI VOYAGER: Beka Gochiashvili**

Teenage jazz pianist Beka Gochiashvili is wowing New York, regularly headlining with his self-named trio at New York's famed jazz clubs. At just 16 years old, the Georgian sensation has been refining his talent for over a decade. Gochiashvili was playing complex compositions at the tender age of four, and was winning awards at international music festivals by the age of eight. Gochiashvili's talent caught the eye of then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice while performing during the Secretary's state visit to Tbilisi in 2008. Soon afterwards, Gochiashvili was on a plane New York-bound to attend The Julliard School, arguably the best music conservatory in the world. This year he's recording songs with his hero, Chick Corea, who played alongside Miles Davis in the 60s. Does he ever pinch himself? "All the time," he says. "To live in New York. This was my dream. I just never expected it to happen so fast."

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

**FINANCIAL TIMES: Chinese group buys Georgian bank**

A pioneering Chinese company is planning to buy Basisbank, Georgia's 11<sup>th</sup> largest bank, and become, it says, the first privately owned Chinese group to buy a foreign bank. At around \$100 million, it's a small deal for China but a pretty big one for investment-hungry Georgia—and for Xinjiang Hualing Industry and Trade Group. Xinjiang Hualing is no stranger to Georgia. With \$100 million already invested in the country, it is planning to expand the total to \$500 million, including \$300 million for a free trade zone/industrial park near Tbilisi, plus money for the bank purchase and other investments.

[blogs.ft.com/](http://blogs.ft.com/)

**RHEIN NECKAR ZEITUNG: Nino Haratishvili's "My Gentle Twin"**

Georgian playwright and author Nino Haratishvili is a remarkable, yet down-to-earth woman. At just 29 years old, the Tbilisi native has achieved a lot, earning awards for her plays "Liv Stein" as well as for her novels "Juja" and "My Gentle Twin," her most recent literary masterpiece. Haratishvili rejects any political or socio-critical symbolism in her novels. "The topic of guilt is interesting because of the conflict between Russia and Georgia, but the focus lies in the fates of the characters in the novels," she says.

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

**THE GUARDIAN: Women's chess enjoys popularity surge in Georgia**

Last week's World Rapid and Blitz chess championships in Batumi had a huge \$100,000 prize fund. The tournament attracted the cream of the female elite, a dozen of whom have ratings above the 2500 male grandmaster level. That Georgia should host the eight-day event was no accident. The country's long tradition dates back centuries to when a chess set was part of a Georgian bride's dowry, and reached its zenith in 1962-1991 when, for three decades, only Georgian women held the world crown. Since then China and Russia have become the top nations, but Georgia remains in the top three.

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