

GEORGIA UPDATE

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TOP STORIES

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OUR SUMMER HOLIDAY SCHEDULE: Georgia Update Will Be Published Biweekly Until September



Georgia's Lasha Shvdatuashvili, the youngest competitor in the event, grabbed Olympic gold in the men's 66-kg judo category on Sunday in a tournament spiced with shock results. The unheralded 20-year-old, the world number 32, beat Hungary's Miklos Ungvari, 31, in the final to send a small but incredibly noisy group of fans from his homeland wild as he secured Georgia's third-ever judo gold. "I'm happy to continue the Olympic gold medal list from Georgia and of course this medal belongs not only to the athlete but to the country," said the delighted winner, grinning broadly throughout a later press conference. www.reuters.com

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"To hold large-scale military exercises on occupied Georgian territory is a crude intimidation stunt. The Russian Government should cancel these exercises.... In any case, the fact that the Russian Government can even contemplate holding such exercises shows that the US should strengthen its engagement and support of Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity."

♦ US Representative Chris Smith, who chairs the US Helsinki Commission

"A US-Georgia free trade agreement would be a win-win for the US and Georgia. It would benefit Georgia, which gained independence in 1991, by making the country a more attractive destination for international investment.... Georgia needs and deserves America's continuing strong support."

♦ Ariel Cohen & Brian Riley of the Heritage Foundation

"These principles should be acceptable to all parties interested in having an electoral process free of violence, vote-buying, and misuse of administrative resources, as well as for all parties interested in holding really democratic elections instead of using the elections as a pretext for triggering other processes."

♦ Parliament Chair Bakradze on the electoral code of conduct supported by the ruling UNM

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Aug. 7: 4th anniversary of Russian invasion

Sep.: NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen visits Georgia

Oct. 1: Parliamentary elections

TOP STORIES

President Sets Parliamentary Elections for October 1st

President Saakashvili yesterday announced that parliamentary elections will be held on Monday, October 1, signaling the immediate start of the 60-day campaign period. "The President of Georgia has stressed many times the government's commitment to holding free and fair parliamentary elections this fall and that the election campaign must be open and transparent," the President's spokesperson said in making the announcement. "Today, we once again want to express our belief that this campaign and the elections will be exemplary." Among other measures that Parliament and the Government have implemented to ensure a fair and transparent vote, all Georgian cable broadcasters will be required during the campaign to carry all news-based TV channels, and all news-based TV channels are obliged to provide their signals to all broadcasters. Parliament passed the relevant legislation, which is among the most progressive in the world, in June.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Parliamentary Election Date Set for October 1](#)

Voter List Commission Submits Verified Voter Rolls to Central Election Commission

Georgia's opposition-led commission tasked with verifying the accuracy of voter rolls yesterday handed the Central Election Commission a list of the 3,385,844 citizens it found are eligible to vote. Mamuka Katsitadze of the opposition New Rights Party, who chairs the Voters' List Verification Commission (VLVC), said however that the list is still subject to change as the Commission has until two weeks prior to the October 1 election to finalize the rolls. The verified list includes 310,113 voters who are currently abroad; 52,648 voters who are not registered at any specific address; 55,277 military servicemen, policemen, and law enforcement workers who will cast ballots at special polling stations; 207,055 voters registered as internally displaced persons; and 1,295 convicts eligible to vote—for the first time in Georgia, convicts serving a prison term for "less grave offenses" will be able to cast a ballot, according to the election code amended last year.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Commission Releases Voters List Figures](#)

Electoral Code of Conduct Generates Near-Unanimous Support

Georgia's political parties have come tantalizingly close to reaching a consensus on an electoral code of conduct, but the Georgian Dream coalition continues to hold out. Tabled in July by the ruling UNM, the original four-point declaration was expanded to include commitments advocated by This Affects You Too, an umbrella group of leading NGOs. The proposed code call on parties to reject violence and the obstruction of other campaigns; to follow the recommendations of civil society organizations and the Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections on administrative resources; to recognize election results as "summarized by the Central Election Commission, and which have been deemed legitimate by credible observer organizations;" and to reject vote-buying. Thus far, the New Rightists, the Christian Democratic Movement, and the National Democratic Party have pledged to sign the code. Georgian Dream has yet to agree, it representative saying they refuse to uphold the pledge "unconditionally," challenging the declaration's primary principle of recognizing the official election results.

[IRISH TIMES: Saakashvili wants rivals to accept poll conduct code](#)

Latest IRI Poll Offers Snapshot of Party Support for October Vote

An independent public opinion poll commissioned by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and leaked to the media shows the ruling United National Movement (UNM) ahead with 43%, followed by Bidzina Ivanishvili-led Georgian Dream opposition coalition with 24% and the Christian-Democratic Movement (CDM) with 7%, Georgian media reported. The poll was designed, coordinated, and analyzed by Baltic Surveys/The Gallup Organization. A poll for the National Democratic Institute in June showed the ruling party with 36% support among likely voters and Georgian Dream with 18%; CDM had 3%.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Ruling Party Leads in Leaked IRI-Commissioned Poll](#)



Tbilisi has debuted a new cable car line, linking Rike Park with the 4th-century Narikala Fortress that overlooks the city. Designed as a tourist attraction, the new ropeway transports visitors from the city streets of Tbilisi to the hills overlooking the city in eight-passenger cars. On the hilltop, visitors can take in panoramic views of Old Town. The city plans to restore old cable cars and add several new commuter routes to make the aerial tramway part of the capital city's transport infrastructure.

US Congressman Calls on Russia to Cancel Military Exercises

Responding to Russia's planned "Caucasus 12" military exercises, Rep. Chris Smith, Chairman of the US Helsinki Commission, urged the Russian government to cancel the exercises. The Russian Government has publicly announced plans for large-scale military exercises, to be held not only in Russia but also in Abkhazia and South Ossetia—regions that are internationally recognized as Georgian territory but which the Russian government has illegally occupied and militarized since its August 2008 invasion of Georgia. The dates of the exercises are September 17-23, little more than one week before parliamentary elections in Georgia. "To hold large-scale military exercises on occupied Georgian territory is a crude intimidation stunt," said Chairman Smith. "The Russian Government should cancel these exercises—which are contrary to the principles of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states enshrined in the OSCE's Helsinki Accords. In any case, the fact that the Russian Government can even contemplate holding such exercises shows that the U.S. should strengthen its engagement and support of Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity."

[US HELSINKI COMMISSION: Chairman Smith Urges Russia to Cancel Plans for Military Exercises on Georgian Territory](#)

Georgian Soldier Succumbs to Injuries Suffered in Afghanistan

Georgia's military suffered another loss last week when Corporal Givi Pantsuala succumbed to injuries from in a January mortar explosion in Afghanistan. He had undergone treatment in a US military hospital in Germany before he was transferred to a Georgian military hospital in Gori, where he died. His death brings to 17 the total of Georgian soldiers killed in Afghanistan since they joined the NATO-led operation in November 2009. Meanwhile, First Lady Sandra Roelofs visited six wounded Georgian soldiers in at the Walter Reed military hospital in Washington last week, commending their bravery and dedication.

[AFP: Georgian Soldier Injured in Afghanistan Dies](#)

Georgia's Foreign Trade Turnover Rises 17%

Georgia's trade turnover reached \$4.86 billion in the first half of the year, soaring 17% since 2011. Imports climbed 19% to \$3.72 billion, and exports rose 10% to \$1.14 billion. Trade with the EU increased by a remarkable 32%, to \$1.37 billion. Turkey remains Georgia's largest trade partner with \$741 million, followed by Azerbaijan (\$606 million), Ukraine (\$341 million), Germany (\$325 million), China (\$295 million), the US (\$223 million), and Russia (\$215 million). The re-export of cars topped exports, followed by ferroalloys, fertilizer, nuts, spirits, copper, gold, scrap metal, mineral water and wine.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Georgia's Foreign Trade in H1 2012](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

AFP: Opposition tycoon pays fine, Georgia returns assets

Opposition coalition leader and billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili has paid the fine for illegally distributing free satellite TV dishes to potential voters. A spokesperson from the National Bureau of Enforcement said that "Ivanishvili has paid the fine in full, and we asked Tbilisi City Court to restore his property rights for his 100% of shares in Cartu Group and Cartu Bank, and a 21.7% stake in Progress Bank." Meanwhile, opinion polls suggest his coalition is trailing the ruling party.

www.afp.org

JAMESTOWN: Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream—proprietary electoral coalition takes shape

Reflecting his control, based on financial power, over the entire coalition, billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili himself announced at recent rallies all the nominations of candidates for the upcoming elections, including those on behalf of the dependent parties. Leaders of satellite parties did not make appearances to announce their candidates; Ivanishvili did this for them. Three common features define almost all of these candidates' political profiles. First, they hark back for the most part to the 1990s in terms of social status acquisition, mentalities, and interests. Second, most of them lack exposure to the West or fluency in English. And third, their track records show no contribution to, interest in, or comprehension of Georgia's post-2003 reform policies and Euro-Atlantic integration efforts thus far.

www.jamestown.org

HERITAGE: US, Georgia free trade agreement—time to get moving

A US-Georgia free trade agreement would be a win-win for the US and Georgia. It would benefit Georgia by making the country a more attractive destination for international investment. It would also send a signal to Russia that Georgia is viewed by Washington as an important friend. Georgia needs and deserves America's continuing strong support. Moving in a timely manner to implement a Georgia-US FTA would promote economic freedom and prosperity in both countries and would serve US economic and security goals in Eurasia. The Obama Administration and Congress should expedite its negotiation and approval.

www.heritage.org

JAMESTOWN: Georgian Dream's parliamentary candidates—personal loyalties unite eclectic lot

Bidzina Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream party holds novelty value at this stage. His coalition partners, however, are neither new as political figures nor self-sustaining as parties. They form small groups led by veteran politicians whose future depends on Ivanishvili's funding; and he seems to treat them accordingly. He has not yet learned to accord them at least pro forma honors in public, never yet sharing a speaking platform or spotlight with them. Thus far, Alasania or the Republican leaders receive less speaking time from Ivanishvili than they get from government-friendly or neutral television channels under legal requirements.

www.jamestown.org

WALL STREET JOURNAL: Georgia accuses Russia of hijacking athletes' glory

Some of Russia's neighbors feel Moscow never really has gotten over losing control of them when the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991. Now, it seems Russia is claiming them back. Ukraine and Georgia have protested that descriptions of some Russian athletes' birthplaces on the official London 2012 website make the countries seem like part of Russia. Wrestler Besik Kudukhov, meanwhile, is described as from "Yuzhnaya Ossetia (RUS)," Russian for South Ossetia, Georgia's Russian-occupied region.

blogs.wsj.com



Georgian children in traditional national costumes prepare for a performance during a folk festival at the open air National Ethnographic Museum in Tbilisi in July (copyright Zurab Kurtsikidze/epa/Corbis).

NEW YORK TIMES: From abortion to contraception

A 2005 survey on reproductive health in Georgia found that women had on average 3.1 abortions in their lifetimes. The situation since then has improved considerably. According to a 2010 survey, Georgian women were having on average only 1.6 abortions in their lifetimes—a 48% decline over five years earlier. Why the remarkable drop? The simple answer is that women in Georgia finally got the pill. That's largely thanks to a campaign funded by U.S.A.I.D. and the United Nations Population Fund that educates doctors and nurses here, markets birth control on television and subsidizes the cost of condoms, pills and I.U.D.s.

latitude.blogs.nytimes.com

RADIO FREE EUROPE: Victims of Georgia storm receive flood of attention in campaign season

Aid groups have called last week's hailstorms in Kakheti "the largest disaster in Georgia since the August 2008 conflict" with Russia. The government has been quick to respond. "When there's a disaster, the government always tries to react immediately, because it's a small country and rumors and information that there's no support and no help can spread very quickly," said Alexander Rondeli, the head of a local think-tank. "And this time the government is especially active, maybe because of elections," he said.

www.rferl.org

MIAMI HERALD: Georgia, Olympics archery & the Hunger Games

When actress Jennifer Lawrence, who played heroine Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games*, launched arrows at her prey, she had been trained by one of the best—US archer Khatuna Lorig, a five-time Olympian who advanced to the Round of 8 in the London Olympics. One of the sport's rising stars in the US is Lorig's 19-year-old son, Levan, a 2016 Olympic hopeful. Lorig will be 42 by then, but she dreams of being on a team with her son. Khatuna's story reads like a script. She was born in Tbilisi, won bronze with the Unified Team at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, and competed for Georgia at the 1996 and 2000 Olympics.

www.miamiherald.com

INTL. HERALD TRIBUNE: Related, by devotion, to Balanchine

Who remembered the birthday of famed Georgian choreographer George Balanchine? Who made this little YouTube video treasure? The credit rolled: "With Love and Respect From Tamara G. Pkhakadze 22.01.2012." Tamara is now 13, an only child who lives with her parents in Tbilisi, a curious fact of place given that Balanchine's father was also from Tbilisi, and that Balanchine was fond of saying that he was not Russian but Georgian. Perhaps Balanchine's claim about being Georgian and living forever was true; through young Tamara of Tbilisi—with her American nationality like his; Georgian heritage like his—it is so somehow. Why else would a teenager a world away, not even a dancer, "love and respect" him not only so greatly, but, more surprising, with such clarity?

www.nyt.com