

GEORGIA UPDATE

WEEKLY EDITION • 5 November 2009

A Publication of the Government of Georgia

www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge

TOP STORIES

- **United Nations Calls for Probe of Russian War Crimes During 2008 Invasion of Georgia**
- **Annual Report on Religious Freedom Shows Marked Improvement in Georgia**
- **Foreign Diplomats Visit Pankisi Gorge; Abducted Georgians Released by Occupying Forces**
- **Opposition Member Takes Seat in Parliament, Boosting Efforts for Political Pluralism**
- **US General Visits Georgia to Observe Training, As Georgian Troops Prepare for Afghanistan**
- **Anna Politkovskaya, Martyred Russian Journalist, Honored in Tbilisi Street-Naming Ceremony**



President Saakashvili traveled to Qatar this week to build on Georgia's fast-expanding economic ties with the Middle East. He met with Prime Minister and Foreign Minister H.E. Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al Thani (above), as well as with other senior officials. The President said he has won a pledge from the United Arab Emirates to invest as much as \$1 billion into Georgia within the next two to three years and has received serious interest from Qatar for investments in agriculture, hydropower, infrastructure, and tourism

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

THE GUARDIAN: A weak response to Russian aggression

EU OBSERVER: New pro-Russia, pro-Stalin campaign comes to EU capital

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Southern Corridor, White Stream—the strategic rationale

VARIETY: Georgia to bounce back with 25% rebate

RFE/RL: Georgia braces for provocations on border with Russia

RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY: Biden working to make it all quiet on the Eastern front

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Val Kilmer to play journalist in Georgia war film

WASHINGTON TIMES: Georgian wine sells widely after Russian snub

INSIGHT: Georgian trade deficit continues to narrow in Q3

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“Supporting democracy is in the interests of all democracies. The war on terrorism and the use of small states as bases for projecting global terror attacks demonstrates that there are no remote countries any more.”

—Parliament Chair David Bakradze

“There is risk of provocations. We believe that the entire border area with Russia represents a threat, as these areas will be used for various provocations; our maritime border section also is part of this zone of risk. We have information that there may be various types of provocations; we will work to prevent them.”

—Intelligence Chief Gela Bezhuashvili

“We do not recognize the new states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.”

—British FM Miliband, voicing support for Georgia's territorial integrity on Russia's Echo Moskvy radio station this week

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Nov. 11: Eighth-round of Geneva peace talks

Nov. 13: NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Scotland

Nov. 18: Euro-Atlantic Integration Minister Baramidze attends NATO ANP meeting in Brussels

Nov. 23: Sixth anniversary of Rose Revolution

Dec. 1-2: OSCE Ministerial in Athens

Dec. 3-4: NATO Ministerial in Brussels

TOP STORIES

United Nations Calls for Probe of Possible Russian War Crimes in 2008 Invasion

The UN's Human Rights Committee urged Russia to "conduct a thorough and independent investigation" into allegations of human rights abuses in Georgia during its 2008 invasion. The committee's 18 independent experts held Russia responsible for reported attacks on civilians by armed groups in the occupied territory of South Ossetia in the aftermath of the August 2008 war with Georgia, saying Russia should have moved to stop them, and called for Moscow to investigate those abuses. The report also found that Russia still fails to protect journalists, activists, prison inmates and others from a wide range of abuses, including torture and murder. The UN urged the Kremlin and parliament to make sweeping changes in the laws, including narrowing the current broad legal definitions of terrorism and extremism, decriminalizing defamation cases against journalists and granting people forced into psychiatric hospitals by the courts the right to appeal.

[ASSOCIATED PRESS: UN panel faults Russia's support for human rights](#)

Annual Report on Religious Freedom Shows Marked Improvement in Georgia

Respect for religious freedom by the Georgian government continued to improve during 2008, according to the US State Department's annual report on International Religious Freedom. "Abuse of religious minorities, including violence, verbal harassment, and disruption of services and meetings, continued to decrease," according to the report released last week. "Both government officials and religious leaders attributed this decline to more vigorous government prosecution of those who harass or attack religious minorities."

[CIVIL GEORGIA: US annual report on Georgia religious freedom](#)

Foreign Diplomats Visit Pankisi Gorge; Abducted Georgians Released by Occupying Forces

A group of MPs, foreign diplomats, journalists, and political analysts visited Pankisi Gorge last week to investigate allegations by Russia that Georgia was assisting terrorist organizations in the north Caucasus. The chief of Russia's Federal Security Service claimed last month that the Georgian secret services were assisting "Al Qaeda emissaries" in Chechnya and Dagestan. "For Georgians it is clear that the Russian allegations are groundless," said MP Giorgi Targamadze, leader of the parliamentary minority and of the Christian-Democratic Movement, whose party led the fact-finding trip. "But we should let foreigners see with their own eyes the situation on the ground. We should counter Russia's disinformation campaign with true information and the truth, which is on the ground," he said. Meanwhile, the European Union Monitoring Mission welcomed the release of 21 Georgians who had been abducted last week by Russian-backed forces in the occupied territories.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Calls for Fact-Finding Trip to Pankisi Gorge](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: EUMM welcomes release of 21 Georgians](#)

Opposition Member Takes Seat in Parliament, Boosting Efforts for Political Pluralism

Freedom Party leader Gamsakhurdia took his seat in Parliament this week, boosting efforts for political pluralism in the country. Gamsakhurdia's return became possible after the Parliament endorsed in September a constitutional amendment allowing 10 opposition politicians to regain the MP credentials they renounced after the May 2009 parliamentary elections. "It is a very positive and important decision," said Georgia's Chairman of the Parliament, Bakradze.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Bakradze welcomes opposition politician's return to parliament](#)

US General Visits Georgia to Observe Training, As Georgian Troops Prepare for Afghanistan

US General Carter Ham visited Georgia this week to observe joint training exercises, preparing Georgian troops for their participation in NATO's Afghanistan operation next spring. "The exercises are aimed at training Georgian servicemen to be deployed within the framework of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)," a Georgian defense ministry spokeswoman said. "They will last for two weeks and involve a total of 840 servicemen, 420 Georgians, and the same number of Americans," she added. Meanwhile, General Ham, Georgia's deputy defense minister Kharshiladze, and Joint Chief of Staff of the GAF Tchankotadze discussed bilateral defense cooperation issues, US European Command assistance programs, Georgia's participation in the ISAF, and Georgia's NATO integration efforts.

[AGENCE FRANCE PRESS: US military trains Georgian troops for Afghanistan mission](#)

Anna Politkovskaya, Martyred Russian Journalist, Honored in Tbilisi

Tbilisi's City Council voted last week to rename a street after slain Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, in honor of her bravery and for fighting against Russian imperialism. Politkovskaya, who was sharply critical of Russia's strongman Putin, was shot in an apparent contract-style killing in 2006. "Journalist Anna Politkovskaya is notable for her bravery," the council's chairman said. During a speech at the UN earlier this year, President Saakashvili called Politkovskaya "one of my personal heroes."

[AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Georgian capital names street after slain Russian journalist](#)



Tbilisi names Hasburg as Ambassador to Germany

Georgia has nominated Gabriela Von Habsburg, a Tbilisi art professor and granddaughter of the last emperor of Austria, as its ambassador to Germany. A 53-year-old member of the Habsburg-Lorraine dynasty also known as Archduchess Gabriela of Austria, she was born in Luxembourg and is the daughter of Otto von Habsburg, the former crown prince of Austria. Von Habsburg has been teaching at the Academy of Arts in Tbilisi since 2001 and has Georgian citizenship. She is well-known as a sculptor of abstract stainless steel structures.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA**THE GUARDIAN: A weak response to Russian aggression**

Irritation is a common reaction in western Europe when Georgians and their friends draw the obvious parallels between the August war and other instances of Russian aggression towards its neighbours. The usual response is that comparing modern Russia with the Soviet Union is irrelevant. Things have changed, they say. That is true. A lot has changed in Russia since the dark days of Stalinism. But one thing that has not changed is Russian foreign policy. Failing to recognise this recklessly assertive policy and the terrible consequences it entails is a gross disservice to the Europeans and the values Europe is designed to protect.

www.guardian.co.uk

EU OBSERVER: New pro-Russia, pro-Stalin campaign comes to EU capital

Russian news agency Ria Novosti is rolling out a new public relations campaign in Brussels aiming to justify Russia's great power ambitions and improve the image of Joseph Stalin. The contract involves organizing an Arctic conference, portraying Russia as a good egg on environmental and energy policy. The PR campaign seeks to cast the Soviet Union in a positive light in order to justify the idea that modern Russia should also impose its influence on neighboring countries for the good of the world.

euobserver.com

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: Southern corridor, White Stream—the strategic rationale

White Stream, the proposed gas pipeline from Georgia to Romania on the seabed of the Black Sea, is intended to maximize European gas imports from Central Asia through the EU-initiated Southern Corridor. With Ankara blocking gas transit from Azerbaijan and delaying the Nabucco project, de-monopolization of transit becomes urgent, in line with the EU's diversification goals for sources and routes. White Stream's maritime route provides an option for supplementing, if not replacing, the Turkish overland route for Azerbaijani and Central Asian gas to Europe.

www.jamestown.org

VARIETY: Georgia to bounce back with 25% rebate

Georgia is determined to bounce back after the shock of Russia's August 2008 invasion. The country's minister of culture, Nick Rurau, is prepping a tax incentive law that would provide for 25% rebates on films made in the country. The compact country of 4.5 million people boasts breathtaking scenery, history, and culture, where a director can film on a sun-drenched beach in the morning and have time to be high up a snowy mountain by late afternoon. David Vashadze, manager of the Georgian National Film Center, estimates that film production costs are 20 percent lower than in Eastern Europe.

www.variety.com

RFE/RL: Georgia Braces for Provocations on Border With Russia

Georgian officials heightened security measures as intelligence chief Bezhuashvili warned last week that Russia may be preparing "provocations" on its borders with Georgia. Parliament members and national security officials discussed recent Russian allegations that international Al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorists are transiting Georgia en route to join the ranks of the North Caucasus resistance. The minority Christian Democratic Movement parliament faction proposed creating a Confidence Group to monitor the Pankisi Gorge, a conflict hotspot.

www.rferl.org

RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY: Biden working to make it all quiet on the Eastern front

Biden's visit to Eastern Europe last week has gone a long way toward soothing many of the fears in the region, but it hasn't eradicated them entirely. "We are back on track, working together on one of the most important issues of common defense against some future threats," said Eugeniusz Smolar, an expert at a Warsaw international affairs think-tank. "I don't think that all anxieties have been eliminated. They have a lot to do with the situation in Central Europe, in the S. Caucasus, and with what will happen to Georgia and Ukraine," Smolar said.

www.rferl.org

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: Val Kilmer to play journalist in Georgia war film

American actor Val Kilmer arrived in Georgia last week to film a new Hollywood movie on Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia. "Kilmer will be filming in Gori, playing the role of a journalist who covered last year's war," said co-producer Davitaia. Georgian media last week noted Kilmer's resemblance to a Dutch cameraman, Stan Storimans, who was killed during a Russian bombing raid in Gori. US actor Andy Garcia was also in Tbilisi last week to portray President Saakashvili in the film. Finnish-American action movie director Renny Harlin is directing the movie.

www.google.com

WASHINGTON TIMES: Georgian wine sells widely after Russian snub

When Russia boycotted Georgian wine in 2006, Georgia lost 80 percent of its export market for wine overnight. "Sure, the ban hurt us because we lost our biggest customer. But, now we have an opportunity to sell to more profitable markets, and we have been pushed to create a much better product," said the director of Teliani Valley winery. Three years later, Teliani Valley wine is sold in 23 countries, and the company is Georgia's No. 1 wine exporter. As it has upgraded its winemaking equipment and techniques, the company has seen its revenue from exports grow by 13 percent to 17 percent annually,

www.washingtontimes.com

GLOBAL INSIGHT: Georgian trade deficit continues to narrow in Q3

The Georgian current-account deficit is now narrowing. Making up part of the fall in FDI inflows, Georgia's external balances have received substantial support from concessional credits. In addition, at least the base for comparison for exports from major trade partner Turkey will turn more favorable again in the fourth quarter, given that demand from there suffered a major blow due to the large toll taken by the international financial crisis in Turkey. Similarly, the recent improvement in the global growth outlook naturally is good news also for Georgia. The recently increased flexibility of the lari exchange rate should assist in managing external risks, while Georgia's access to concessional credits to cover its external financing needs remains good.

WEBSITES @ GEORGIA

Civil Georgia: Leading independent English-language news website on Georgia.

Georgia Update: Official government information service.

Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies: Leading NGO focuses on Georgian domestic and foreign policy.

Georgian Mission to NATO

Georgian Parliament

Government of Georgia

Local Ministry of Foreign Affairs

National Investment Agency

City of Tbilisi: Official website of Georgia's capital, Tbilisi

Office of the President of Georgia