

GEORGIA UPDATE

WEEKLY EDITION • 29 July 2010

A Publication of the Government of Georgia

www.georgiaupdate.gov.ge

TOP STORIES

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- By 70-21 Percent Margin, Georgians Judge Municipal Elections as “Mostly Free and Fair”
- World Court Opinion Underscores Uniqueness of Kosovo, Inapplicability of Ruling to Georgian Regions
- Georgia, Azerbaijan Seek to Boost Trade Via New Caspian Corridor
- Geneva Talks Fail Again to Reach Beyond Impasse



PM in Baku

After President Saakashvili hosted President Aliyev of Azerbaijan (right) in Batumi last week, it was the turn of PM Gilauri (left) to meet Aliyev in Baku. The back-to-back, high-level visits marked the ever-closer relationship between the neighboring countries, which on Tuesday announced a new Caspian transit corridor that aims to significantly boost trade in the region (see page 2). Georgia and Azerbaijan also are pursuing several other initiatives aimed at enhancing political and economic cooperation, including a new pipeline project. “We will never forget that Azerbaijan has always stood beside Georgia without any hesitation when it concerned issues of vital importance for Georgia,” President Saakashvili said. “This is real brotherhood.”

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“I would also underscore that the court’s opinion was closely tailored to the unique circumstances of Kosovo. This was about Kosovo. It was not about other regions or states. It doesn’t set any precedent for other regions or states.”

—Phil Gordon, US Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, commenting on the ICJ’s ruling last week on Kosovo

“Reading Russian press accounts, you’d think Saakashvili was a nutcase detested by his own people. But on a stroll down the Batumi esplanade, shouts of “Misha!” went up as he was thronged and greeted by adoring young people, many of them pleading for the chance to have their picture taken in his company. The people of Batumi have also given him a new nickname—“Misha the Builder.”

—Scott Horton writing in *Harper’s Magazine*

“Georgia’s opponents have been fond of saying that the country is isolated and the West no longer supports us. Either Georgia must throw itself on the mercy of the victor or Saakashvili must leave immediately. After the diplomatic parade this month, it is much harder to make this argument.”

—Ghia Nodia commenting for Radio Free Europe

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

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NEW YORK TIMES: Flirtatious Bunch, Instigating Playful Adventures

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Aug. 7: Ministry of Defense commemorates fallen soldiers in Tbilisi ceremony

Aug. 8: 2nd anniversary of the Russian invasion

Aug. 20 FM Vashadze visits Salzburg

Aug. 29: FM Vashadze visits Slovenia

Oct. 14: Next round of Geneva talks

TOP STORIES

Final Draft of Constitution Advances in Parliament, Set for Debate in September

Parliament last week launched the formal procedures required to amend the constitution, making significant progress towards adopting a more European model of government. Lawmakers voted in favor of establishing a 36-member group to lead a month-long discussion on the proposed final draft of constitutional amendments, approved last week after 14 months of work by the State Commission on Constitutional Reform. "This draft provides a real balanced system of governance," said Pavle Kublashvili, a senior lawmaker from the ruling party. If adopted after Parliament debates the changes in the autumn, the new constitution would institute greater checks and balances within the government and grant more power to Parliament. The legislative body would select the prime minister and approve cabinet members; it also would have an easier path to overturning a presidential veto, among other changes. While the president would remain head of state and a commander-in-chief, the prime minister and cabinet would hold sway over domestic and foreign policy. The proposed amendments would take effect in December 2013.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Constitutional Amendments Initiated](#)
[CIVIL GEORGIA: Final Draft of Constitutional Amendments Approved](#)

By 70-21 Percent Margin, Georgian Public Judges Municipal Elections as "Mostly Free and Fair"

A new poll of the Georgian public shows an overwhelming sentiment that the country's May 30 local elections were conducted in an open and legitimate manner. By a 70-21 percent margin, Georgians say the May 30 elections were "mostly free and fair," as opposed to "mostly not free and fair." Similarly, by a very strong 64-6 percent margin, the public says the May elections were more rather than less free and fair than the country's 2008 elections. The survey was based on 1,200 face-to-face interviews with Georgian adults nationwide, conducted July 7-15; the survey was commissioned by the US firm Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, on behalf of the United National Movement.

World Court Opinion Underscores Uniqueness of Kosovo, Inapplicability of Ruling to Georgian Regions

The international community last week underscored the uniqueness of the International Court of Justice's ruling on Kosovo's declaration of independence, rejecting its applicability to Georgia's Russian-occupied regions of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia. Legal experts stressed that the Court's studious refusal to rule on the legal status of Kosovo's statehood had been calculated to avoid encouraging nationalist movements; the Court left the issue of a territory's independence at the discretion of the countries that chose to recognize it. The US and most countries insisted that Kosovo's statehood is a special case because it is the result of a brutal Serbian ethnic cleansing campaign against Albanian separatists that led to an international administration in 1999, when NATO ejected Serb forces after a brief aerial war. Said Phil Gordon, US Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs: "I would also underscore that the court's opinion was closely tailored to the unique circumstances of Kosovo. This was about Kosovo. It was not about other regions or states. It doesn't set any precedent for other regions or states."

International commentators also saw the court decision as doing little to change the status of Georgia's occupied regions. "While in Kosovo the very purpose of the international mission was to help the Kosovar Albanians to return safely, hundreds of thousands of Georgians have not been allowed to go back to Abkhazia and Tskhinvali," wrote David Iberi. "Thus, unlike Kosovo, the de-facto authorities in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali do not represent the majority of the lawful residents in those territories but are merely puppet regimes whose declarations have no legitimacy. Recognizing the independence of the occupied territories would just legitimize the use of ethnic cleansing as a device to change international borders."

[NEW YORK TIMES: Court Rules Kosovo's Declaration was Legal](#)
[JAMESTOWN: ICJ's Kosovo Verdict Weakens Russian Position](#)

Georgia, Azerbaijan Seek to Boost Trade Via New Caspian Corridor

Georgia and Azerbaijan signed an agreement on creating a transit corridor linking the Caspian and Black seas to increase flows of oil and natural gas to European customers. The two former Soviet republics will create a commission to form policy on ports, transit and railway companies, Georgian Prime Minister Nika Gilauri said during a government meeting in the capital Tbilisi today. The agreement will lead to increased transit volumes of energy and other cargoes, as well as jobs for Georgians, he said. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili held talks on transit cooperation earlier this month with his Azeri counterpart, Ilham Aliyev, Gilauri said. Georgia's Black Sea ports will be the focus of increased transit. Georgia and Azerbaijan, together with Romania, have agreed to build a liquefied natural-gas terminal for exports of the fuel to Europe.

[BLOOMBERG: Georgia, Azerbaijan Sign Transit Corridor Pact](#)

Geneva Talks Again Fail to Reach Beyond Impasse

Georgian and Russian officials and representatives from Georgia's Russian-controlled regions of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia met in Geneva this week for a 12th round of talks. The OSCE-EU-UN mediated negotiations produced little progress in resolving pressing security concerns. "The Kremlin was refusing to assure the freedom of travel of the people in the region," said Giga Bokeria, Georgia's first deputy foreign minister, adding that troops had repeatedly arrested Georgian citizens without reason. "Moscow is trying to undermine the negotiating process," Bokeria said, noting that Moscow's "cynical, alarming" position on the talks was underscored by the failure of his Russian counterpart, Grigori Karassin, to attend the latest negotiations. Meanwhile, though Abkhaz representatives participated in the negotiations—despite Sokhumi's statement last month that it was "temporarily withdrawing"—they proved intransigent. "We've heard yet another series of threats from the Abkhaz side that they would not come to Geneva," Bokeria said. "It's good that they are participating—we are in favor of continuation of talks." Shota Utiazhvili of the interior ministry said that Sokhumi's statement about its intention to temporarily pull out from talks was "an attempt to blackmail" the co-chairs of the negotiations. The next round of negotiations is planned for October.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Twelfth Round of Geneva Talks](#)
[DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR: Russian-Georgian Diplomacy Talks End in Geneva Without Progress](#)



The Georgian Parliament last week declared February 25 as the National Day of Soviet Occupation, marking Red Army's occupation of Tbilisi 89 years ago. The resolution, endorsed unanimously by the Parliament, instructs the government to organize memorial events, and to fly the flag at half-mast to commemorate the hundreds of thousands of victims of political repression during the Communist occupation. The Parliament also declared August 23 as the Day of Memory of Victims of Totalitarian Regimes.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA**BBC NEWS: Key Kosovo ruling grips Europe's press**

Kosovo's independence has no links whatsoever to the case of Georgia's Russian-occupied regions of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia, writes Kakha Gogolashvili in the Georgian daily *Rezonansi* on the ICJ's decision on Kosovo. The Kosovo precedent—if this can be called a precedent at all—cannot apply to these regions. We know that Serbs committed genocide there, and the international community led Kosovo to independence because the co-existence of the Serbs and Kosovars was impossible. It is the other way round in Georgia, as the majority of the ethnic Georgian population of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali was evicted; therefore, it is impossible to justify their independence.

www.bbc.co.uk

RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY: Georgia coming back in from the cold

The uptick in diplomatic activity is particularly significant for Georgia, but what is really important is the new dynamic. Lately the US has begun consistently describing the Russian military presence in Abkhazia and S. Ossetia as “occupation”—that is, Washington is using the harshest word there is in the diplomatic lexicon. The increased diplomatic activity can all be summed up like this: Georgia's opponents have been fond of saying that the country is isolated and the West no longer supports us. Either Georgia must throw itself on the mercy of the victor or Saakashvili must leave immediately. After the diplomatic parade this month, it is much harder to make this argument.

www.rferl.org

JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION: West beefs up support for Georgia

The Georgian capital has seen several high-profile visits over the past weeks, signs that the West is beefing up its support for the country. Apart from meeting with the Georgian president and senior cabinet members, the American and European guests have also found time to talk with representatives of Georgian civil society and the opposition. However, unlike in the past, they have now met almost exclusively with a “constructive” or “systemic” part of the Georgian opposition who are either represented in Parliament or have scored good results in the crucial May 30 local elections. Visiting Tbilisi last week, French FM Kouchner also acknowledged Russia's illegal occupation: “We should convince the Russians to pull their troops back to their pre-war positions as it is stipulated in the ceasefire agreement.”

jamestownfoundation.blogspot.com

FOREIGN AFFAIRS: Russia's invisible civil war

As the violence has spread in Russia's N. Caucasus, Moscow has responded by relying on the playbook of imperial Russia, buying off provincial officials and deploying the state's substantial repressive apparatus to sweep up suspected subversives. But the success of such a strategy depends on the good faith of local elites and the weakness of their rivals. It merely buys Moscow time without fixing the underlying problems of economic development and governance. If Moscow continues to focus its energies on insulating the rest of Russia from the ills of the N. Caucasus, then an increasing number of the region's inhabitants will wonder whether Russians can be anything other than distant, irrelevant overlords.

www.foreignaffairs.com

EURASIANET: A Caucasus ménage à trois

Georgia last week suggested building near-confederative relations with neighboring Azerbaijan to create a one-stop layover point for Asia-Europe energy and cargo transits. Earlier on, Tbilisi made a similar proposal to Armenia. President Saakashvili believes that the future of the S. Caucasus lies in the creation of a single space to cope together with economic and political challenges. The ongoing push for integration is reminiscent of the late 1910s when the S. Caucasus, an area better known for its penchant for separatism than for integration, had its first fleeting exercise in federalism.

www.eurasianet.org

**HARPER'S MAGAZINE: Letter from Batumi**

Jumping forward twenty years, writes Scott Horton, I find the city marvelously transformed. The oil refinery has disappeared. In its place is a splendid emerging resort. Long beaches are packed with tourists, the sea is filled with swimmers and boaters, and the sky overhead with hang-gliders. Their revels are interrupted only by the steady sound of jackhammers, because Batumi is also in the midst of a construction boom. Batumi is emerging as the Black Sea's newest and poshest resort. Reading Russian press accounts, you'd think Saakashvili was a nutcase detested by his own people. But on a stroll down the Batumi esplanade, shouts of “Misha!” went up as he was thronged and greeted by adoring young people, many of them pleading for the chance to have their picture taken in his company. The people of Batumi have also given him a new nickname—“Misha the Builder.” In a conversation at a bar that evening, a fifty-something Georgian businessman told me that he resented the way his generation had been brushed from power by the Rose Revolution, but he couldn't deny feeling admiration for the way the “kids” had transformed country. “They have a different vision of what was possible. And they are turning it into reality. I never imagined this could happen in my lifetime.” (*Panorama of Batumi* © 2010 by Irakli Gedenidze)

www.harpers.org

EURACTIV: EU displays commitment to Georgia

President Saakashvili last week hailed the launch of the EU's Association Agreements as a key step forward for the county's orientation towards the West: “Georgia is Europe, Georgia is coming back to Europe,” Saakashvili said. “The goal of our reforms is to create the first European state in the Caucasus.” Meanwhile, French FM Kouchner affirmed France's support for Georgia's western integration aspirations: “We will always help Georgia in its talks with the EU to become an associate member,” he said. “Russia does not decide who should become an EU member.”

www.euractiv.com

NEW YORK TIMES: Flirtatious bunch, instigating playful adventures

Georgian prima ballerina Nina Ananiashvili warmly acknowledged her public on opening night at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in Massachusetts. Ananiashvili, who is from Tbilisi and has long been an intercontinental darling, took control of the State Ballet of Georgia at the request of Georgian President Saakashvili; one minute she was an American Ballet Theater principal, the next a returning national hero. The Georgian ballet's program, which Jacob's Pillow's executive director, Ella Baff, described in preshow remarks as a “snapshot of ballet in the 20th century and now,” stretched from Frederick Ashton to Jiri Kylian. It proves Ananiashvili to be as adventuresome an artistic director as performer.

www.nytimes.com