

GEORGIA UPDATE

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TOP STORIES

- Russian Forces Shoot Two Georgians on Occupation Line, Drawing International Condemnation
- Amnesty International Cites Progress on IDPs, Prison Reform; Condemns Attacks in Occupied Territories
- European Union Approves \$61 Million Aid Package for Georgia
- “Portrait of Georgia” Independence Day Gala in Washington Slated for May 24
- European Week in Tbilisi Set to Launch
- Georgia Completes Construction of Major Gas Pipeline



Prime Minister Gilauri met last week with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in Istanbul on the sidelines of the Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries; Georgia was held up as a model of reform for these states. The two leaders discussed the progress in Georgia's reforms, the status of the occupied territories, and their efforts to make the Geneva peace talks more productive. While in Istanbul, PM Gilauri also met with Turkish President Abdullah Gül, PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and a group of Turkish businessmen. They discussed, among other issues, energy sector cooperation between the two countries and Turkish investments in Georgia. Said Gilauri: “Turkey is one of our main strategic partners.”

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

ROLL CALL: Kyl, Johnson, Sessions and Crapo—“Belt of Freedom” Seeks Valuable U.S. Support

EURACTIV: Georgia calls for EU help over occupied territories

DIE PRESSE: Georgian Ambassador to Germany Gabriela von Habsburg

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MINNESOTA STAR TRIBUNE: Viva Virzaladze!

THE TELEGRAPH: Georgia—blessed in a big-hearted country

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“We got a report today that Georgian civilians have been wounded by the gunfire along the South Ossetian administrative boundary line.... Last week Senator Lindsey Graham and I introduced the Resolution supporting the territorial integrity of Georgia and calling on the government of Russia to fulfill the ceasefire agreement and return its military forces to the pre-war positions. Can you tell us what you know about this incident and what more we can do to emphasize the need for monitoring missions on the ground and how we can continue to work to address the territorial integrity of Georgia?”

♦ US Senator Jeanne Shaheen, questioning US Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon over yesterday's incident

“It is precisely this sort of incident that happened today that underscores why we are so concerned about the unresolved situation in Georgia. You are right to underscore in your resolution and just now Russia's lack of full compliance with the 2008 cease fire, as you know our strong view like that of pretty much every country in the world with a very tiny number of exception is to recognize Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. And the Russian military presence there about which the Russians are not fully transparent is a problem and it can lead to just this sort of incident that you mentioned.”

♦ US Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon

UPCOMING MILESTONES

May 16-18: FM Vashadze visits Sweden, Denmark

May 19: EP President Jerzy Buzek visits Tbilisi

May 24: “Portrait of Georgia” reception at the Smithsonian Portrait Gallery in Washington

May 25-30: European Week in Tbilisi

May 26: Georgia's Independence Day

June: Third round of Georgia-Russia WTO talks

Jun. 7: Next round of Geneva peace talks

TOP STORIES

Russian Forces Shoot Two Georgians on Occupation Line, Drawing International Condemnation

Two Georgian citizens were shot and injured yesterday, one gravely, when occupation forces from Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia opened fire on them. The incident occurred at about 8 a.m. as five young men from the Chalvani village were collecting edible plants in the Chonto valley, near the occupation line. Occupation forces attempted to detain them, but the men (ages 17, 21, 22, 26 and 27) managed to escape. As they did, occupants opened fire, wounding two citizens, including a 17-year-old pupil from a local school who is in grave condition. Four other Georgian citizens who were also collecting plants were apprehended and are being illegally detained. The Government called the incident "a criminal and brutal act that escalates tensions in the areas adjacent to Georgia's occupied regions," adding: "The Government of Georgia calls on the Russian Federation to take concrete steps to put an end to terrorist acts and similar aggressive actions, to reciprocate Georgian commitment of non-use of force, allow EUMM to access the occupied territories, comply with the August 12th 2008 ceasefire agreement ,and withdraw its troops from Georgia."

The incident drew immediate attention and a sharp rebuke from the US. During hearings in the Senate on policy towards Europe, Democratic Senator Jeanne Shaheen asked Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon about the shootings. "It is precisely this sort of incident that happened today that underscores why we are so concerned about the unresolved situation in Georgia," he said. "You are right to underscore in your resolution and just now Russia's lack of full compliance with the 2008 ceasefire. Our strong view, like that of pretty much every country in the world, is to recognize Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. And the Russian military presence there, about which the Russians are not fully transparent, is a problem and can lead to just the sort of incident you mentioned, as can the lack of international observation, which is something we have pushed for a long time."

[FOREIGN POLICY: Violence Breaks Out on the Georgian-South Ossetian Boundary](#)

Amnesty International Cites Progress on IDPs, Penitentiary Reform; Condemns Attacks in Occupied Territories

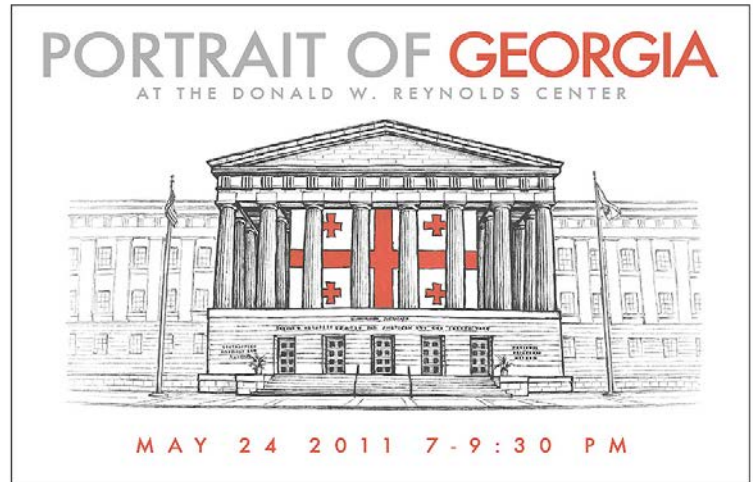
Georgia made progress in improving the rights of IDPs and detainees last year, said Amnesty International in its annual report. "The government took steps to improve the living conditions of displaced people," the report said, highlighting the government's effort to renovate and provide housing for hundreds of persons. The human rights watchdog also noted the government's progress on penitentiary reform, saying that incidents of prolonged detention were less frequent than the prior year. Meanwhile, Amnesty also denounced the perpetual violence against civilians living under Russian control in Georgia's occupied territory of Abkhazia: "Civilians continue to suffer from harassment and insecurity in Gali, where shoot-outs, killings, and acts of arson were reported in June." The organization encouraged higher living standards for IDPs and further investigation into missing person cases and police practices.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Georgia in Amnesty's Report](#)

European Union Approves \$61 Million Aid Package for Georgia

The EU last week approved a \$61 million aid package for Georgia. Proposed last January by the European Commission, the European Parliament awarded Georgia its second macro-financial assistance (MFA) package due to the country's success in implementing a similar aid package two years ago. The aid is part of comprehensive package from the EU totaling \$666.85 million to support Georgia's recovery from Russia's 2008 invasion and the global financial crisis. Resources from MFA package will help finance the government's adjustment program, a development program designed in coordination with the IMF. A second reading will be held in coming weeks a second reading to discuss implementation and oversight of the package.

[BNO NEWS: European Union Approves \\$61 Million Aid Package to Georgia](#)

**"Portrait of Georgia" Independence Day Gala in Washington**

US Ambassador to Georgia Temuri Yakobashvili will host on Tuesday the "Portrait of Georgia" gala, celebrating Georgian independence. Held at the Smithsonian Portrait Gallery, invitees will gain a glimpse of Georgia's rich cultural heritage and beauty through dance, art, song, history, and cuisine. The festivities start with a concert by Georgian musical group, The Shin, followed by special performances by renowned Georgian opera singer, 24-year-old Sophia Nizharadze, the Georgia's National Ballet, and a folklore group. A traditional Georgian feast, or "supra," will feature national culinary delights such as "khachapuri" (cheese pie), "khinkali" (Georgian dumplings), and Georgia's award-winning wines. A screening of the "Wild West Georgians" documentary by Irakli Makharadze will showcase the extraordinary fate of Georgian trick riders who, at the close of the 19th century, participated in popular Wild West shows. Meanwhile, the Portrait Gallery will play host to an exhibition of photographs from the 19th Century Ermakov Collection and from the "Georgia New Generation" exhibit of contemporary Georgian photographers.

[Portrait of Georgia Website](#)

European Week in Tbilisi

European Week will kick off in Tbilisi on Monday to celebrate and enhance cultural, civic, educational, and political ties between Georgia and Europe. Organized by Europe House Georgia, the week includes exhibitions, screenings, debates, and lectures. The second annual Tbilisi Photo Festival will feature a "Night of Photography." Ten screens set in the streets and squares of Tbilisi's Old Town will showcase the work of renowned photographers. Among the exhibitions are "Kavkaz," by Magnum photographer Thomas Dworzak; "Changes," on the colored revolutions; "Georgia at the Crossroads of Modernity"; and "Georgia-New Generation.. Meanwhile French FM Bernard Kouchner, Edward Lucas of *The Economist*, former European Commissioner Guenter Verheugen, and other public figures will participate in public debates on topics including corruption, women's issues, peace and nation-building, and education.

[EUROPE HOUSE GEORGIA: European Week in Tbilisi 2011](#)

Georgia Completes Construction of Major Gas Pipeline

Georgia last week completed construction of the East-West gas pipeline, marking a significant step in the country's progress toward energy independence. The USAID-funded pipeline links Georgia's Senaki district with the free industrial zone in the Black Sea port town of Poti, supplying over 25,000 families with natural gas. President Saakashvili, at the project's completion ceremony, thanked USAID Deputy Administrator Donald Steinberg for funding the critical high-pressure pipeline. USAID allocated \$115 million towards the pipeline's construction shortly after Russia's 2008 invasion. The project was implemented in collaboration with the Georgian Petroleum Corporation.

[TREND NEWS AGENCY: Georgian President Thanks US for Funding East-West Gas Pipeline](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

ROLL CALL: Kyl, Johnson, Sessions and Crapo—“Belt of Freedom” Seeks Valuable U.S. Support

Despite the 2008 Russian invasion into South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Georgian prospects are more hopeful. The dynamic leadership of Mikheil Saakashvili is modeled on the economic principles of Ronald Reagan and Milton Friedman. With Russian troops still occupying one-fifth of this country and nearly 1,000 Georgian troops fighting alongside U.S. forces in Afghanistan, Georgia has requested and should be allowed to buy defensive weapons from the United States. Likewise, Georgia, as a future NATO member, is an excellent site to support missile defense of the U.S. and Europe. Economic cooperation in the form of a free-trade agreement with the U.S. and admission into the European Union would also help ensure Georgia's long-term success. Perhaps nowhere on Earth can people be found who are more committed to freedom than in Georgia.

ROLL CALL: Kyl, Johnson, Sessions and Crapo—“Belt of Freedom” Seeks Valuable U.S. Support

EURACTIV: Georgia calls for EU help over occupied territories

"We always had a conflict with Russia. We don't have a conflict with our own regions," said Georgia's deputy PM Giorgi Baramidze. "Even before the August invasion and war, this conflict with Russia was never frozen," he added. Baramidze said he hoped the EU mission would in future be able to enter the Georgia's two Russian-occupied regions and perform its duties. "We are telling our friends: don't consider this conflict as frozen, and this situation as frozen. I'm reluctant to call those situations frozen conflicts, but Russia thinks that maintaining conflicts in different areas and with different countries, it can prevent both NATO and the EU to be enlarged, to have those countries included in these organizations. It's quite clear for everybody."

www.euractiv.com

DIE PRESSE: Interview with the Georgian Ambassador to Germany Gabriela von Habsburg

Georgia's main objective is to attain EU and NATO membership, said Georgia's Ambassador to Georgia, Gabriela von Habsburg, highlighting the country's success in implementing democratic reforms. Georgia enjoys high ratings for its fight against corruption and for "ease of doing business," she added, referring to its ranking as the 12th best country for doing business, according to the World Bank.

diepresse.com

RADIO FREE EUROPE: Russia's 17-year bid to join the WTO faces one last hurdle

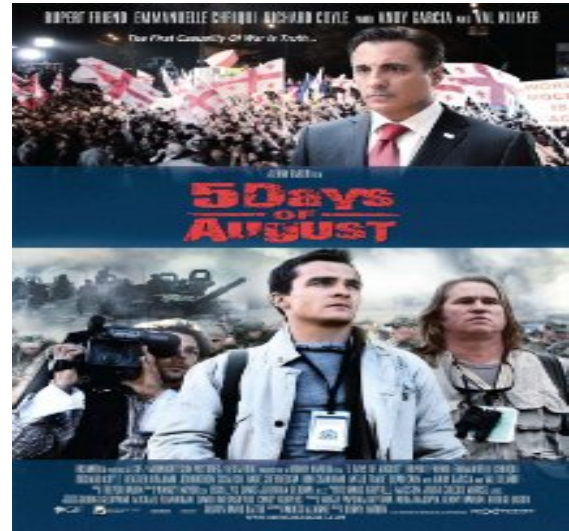
Moscow will give the current WTO negotiation process with Georgia until late summer or early autumn and then will begin pressing for a vote of the entire WTO membership, one political scientist said. Medvedev seems determined to force the issue before the end of the year. "I don't think the Russians are concerned about Georgia so much. They leave it to the US to put pressure on Georgia and if that doesn't pan out, they would seek a majority vote," said Hans-Georg Heinrich of Austria's Institute for Advanced Studies Heinrich. "It is no major preoccupation for the Russians."

www.rferl.org

REUTERS: Interview—Georgia sees Trump deal as catalyst

Georgia expects foreign investment in the country to double to \$1 billion this year, with energy and tourism sectors leading the way, said Georgia's Economy Minister Kobalia. "When we were celebrating the [Trump] deal in New York, there was a lot of interest from the business community in the US and also, generally, in foreign direct investments in Georgia," said Kobalia. "We can definitely reach around the \$1 billion mark."

www.forexyard.com



“Five Days of War” (aka “5 Days of August”)—starring Andy Garcia, Rupert Friend, and Val Kilmer—was screened this week at the Cannes Film Festival. Directed by Renny Harlin, the film gives an intimate account of Russia’s 2008 invasion of Georgia, focusing on an American journalist and Georgian native who get caught up in the conflict.

SUN HERALD: American winemaker highlights growing entrepreneurial interest in Georgia

American entrepreneur John Wurdeman saw the potential for an artisanal winery in the rich soil of Tibaani, a small village outside Tbilisi. In 2007, he founded Pheasant's Tears, continuing one of the oldest winemaking traditions in the world, dating back 6,000 years to the early Neolithic. "Georgia was attractive because it has the greatest biodiversity of any country on the planet," says Wurdeman, 35, noting the country produces more than 500 varietals of wine-quality grapes.

www.sunherald.com

DIE WELT: Portrait of Georgian violinist Lisa Batiashvili

Georgian violinist Lisa Batiashvili is one of the world's most talented violinists. She emigrated to Germany in 1977 to study music in Hamburg, then Munich. In 1995, the rising star won 2nd place as the youngest participant in the famous Helsinki Sibelius competition. Now, the 32-year-old is planning to renovate the Soviet-era Zakaraia Paliashvili music school in Tbilisi to encourage musical education among Georgia's youth. "Roots are important," she says. "Tbilisi is still a special place for me."

www.welt.de

MINNESOTA STAR TRIBUNE: Viva Virzaladze!

Elisso Virzaladze's recital of Chopin should have gained her honorary Polish citizenship on the spot. Prokofiev's Second Sonata was rhythmically explosive, and Schumann's glorious, Beethoven-haunted C-major Fantasie justified her reputation as the consummate Schumann player. At the close of the final movement, her hands hovered over the keys a few extra seconds, as if the end had come too quickly. It had.

www.startribune.com

THE TELEGRAPH: Georgia—blessed in a big-hearted country

When you witness the Caucasus Mountains soaring into blue skies like some mythical snowy set from Lord of the Rings, when you step into ancient sacred hilltop churches aglow with gold mosaics, and when you sit and feast with big-hearted, cultured people, suddenly Georgia doesn't seem so poor after all. The most interesting bits of Old Tbilisi are walkable and were built in the last century, when Russia was looking to Europe for inspiration. Climb one of the many hilly streets and you will feel as though you are passing ramshackle parts of Paris. Stroll along others and you will spot wooden houses that look like set pieces from a Tolstoy novel: charmingly painted in pastels, ornate verandas hung with grapevines

www.telegraph.co.uk