

GEORGIA UPDATE

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TOP STORIES

- EU, US, NATO Condemn Elections in Abkhazia
- NATO European Commander Visits Tbilisi; 10th Georgia Soldier Killed in Afghanistan
- Russian Helicopters Violate Georgian Airspace, Menace Border Post
- Trade Turnover Reaches \$4.8 Billion, Tops Pre-Crisis Levels
- French Diplomat Philippe Lefort Named New EU Envoy for S. Caucasus, Geneva Talks



Georgia and Moldova are getting closer to becoming European Union members thanks to their political leadership, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said during an economic forum on Wednesday. “A few years ago, nobody would have thought that Georgia’s and Moldova’s road to Europe will be so quick thanks to the determination of its political leaders,” Tusk said at the opening of a three-day forum in Krynica-Zdroj, southern Poland. Tusk praised President Mikhail Saakashvili for his determination in “shortening the time” it would take Georgia to join the bloc. President Saakashvili, speaking at the same event, said that he was expecting “a very serious breakthrough” this autumn in terms of Georgia’s EU integration, adding that Poland was offering enormous support to Tbilisi.

[DPA: Georgia and Moldova closer to EU membership, says Poland's Tusk](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

OPEN DEMOCRACY: Abkhazian elections—Russia's pawn in Georgian game?

NEW YORK TIMES: Exiled Abkhaz residents must be part of solution

BLOOMBERG: Georgia demands international reaction to Abkhazian vote

L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO: Georgia grants Catholic Church legal status

WASHINGTON POST: Renny Harlin talks “5 Days of War”

MOSCOW TIMES: Why Georgia has friends and Russia doesn't

KURIER: Interview—Foreign Minister Vashadze

RADIO FREE EUROPE: Three years after war, Georgia looks to long term

NEW YORK TIMES: Out of a swelter come apocalyptic visions

NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY: 6-point ceasefire implementation review

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“The holding of such elections does not contribute to a peaceful and lasting settlement of the situation in Georgia. The Alliance reiterates its full support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders.”

— NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen on the putative Abkhaz elections

“These elections do not change the position which the European Parliament holds on the breakaway region of Abkhazia in Georgia. The lack of support by the international community to the idea of an independent sovereign Abkhazia state shows the feebleness of the claims underpinning the demands of secessionist politicians in Sukhumi. Russia should also cease issuing passports to the people of the occupied provinces.”

— European Parliament President Jerzy Buzek

“In view of the reports today from Sukhumi in the breakaway region of Abkhazia in Georgia, that Mr. Alexander Ankvab has been elected as new president, this statement is to recall that the European Union does not recognize the constitutional and legal framework within which these elections have taken place.”

— EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Sep. 2-8: Parliamentary Speaker Bakradze visits Australia and New Zealand

Sep. 13-23: Vice PM Giorgi Baramidze US tour to Washington DC, Chicago, Missouri and Florida

Sep. 22: President Saakashvili addresses the UN General Assembly

Oct. 4: Next round of Geneva peace talks

TOP STORIES

EU, US, NATO Condemn Elections in Abkhazia

The international community last week condemned the putative "elections" in Georgia's Russian-occupied region of Abkhazia. "The US does not recognize the legitimacy or the results of the August 26 so-called elections in the Abkhazia region of Georgia," said State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland. "We reiterate our support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders," she added, urging Russia to fulfill all of its obligations under the 2008 ceasefire agreement. EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton echoed America's denunciation of the Abkhaz vote, which was held in a region under illegal occupation and absent monitoring by international observers: "The EU does not recognize the constitutional and legal framework within which these elections have taken place," she said, while also reiterating Europe's support for Georgian sovereignty.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen expressed his concern that the elections would stir regional instability: "The holding of such election does not contribute to a peaceful and lasting settlement of the situation in Georgia," he said. "The Alliance reiterates its full support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders." The President of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek, said that the complete lack of international support for an independent Abkhazia "shows the feebleness of the claims underpinning the demands of secessionist politicians in Sukhumi." He added: "These elections do not change the position which the European Parliament holds on the breakaway region of Abkhazia in Georgia." Buzek also insisted that, "Russia should also cease issuing passports to the people of the occupied provinces."

Meanwhile, the Georgian Foreign Ministry denounced the legitimacy of the elections, saying they were held "under the condition of occupation" by Russian forces that have expelled "more than three-fourths of the region's population." "Said Georgia's Deputy FM Kalandadze: "This reality is well-known by the entire civilized part of the international community. The actions will never be considered as legitimate and can never define the future of Abkhazia."

[BLOOMBERG: US Won't Recognize Legitimacy of Abkhaz Elections](#)

[AFP: EU, NATO Refuse to Recognize Abkhazia](#)

NATO European Commander Visits Tbilisi; 10th Georgia Soldier Killed in Afghanistan

"NATO is grateful to Georgia for its participation in the ISAF mission," the Commander of NATO's European forces, Admiral James Stavridis, told President Saakashvili and Defense Minister Akhalaia in Tbilisi last week. The senior Alliance commander was particularly thankful for the "bravery" and "outstanding participation" that Georgian soldiers exhibited while fighting alongside US Marines and ISAF forces in some of Afghanistan's most volatile regions. Saakashvili and Stavridis also discussed the broader state of the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan. Georgia plans to deploy another rotational battalion to the province of Helmand in coming months, making the country the largest non-NATO-member contributor of troops to the mission.

Meanwhile, Georgians last week mourned the loss of another of its soldiers killed in Afghanistan. Thirty-five year old Junior Sergeant Rezo Beridze, from Georgia's 33rd battalion, died in an attack by Taliban forces while patrolling the Helmand province. His death brings to 10 the total number of Georgian soldiers killed since they joined the NATO-led operation in November 2009. Georgia has committed nearly 925 soldiers to serve alongside US marines in Afghanistan's most dangerous hot spots.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Tenth Georgian Soldier Killed in Afghanistan](#)

[TREND DAILY NEWS: Georgian President, NATO Commander Mull NATO Operation in Afghanistan](#)

Russian Helicopters Violate Georgian Airspace, Menace Border Post

Three Russian Mi-8 helicopters flew 3 kilometers into Georgia, violating the country's airspace, and circled over a Georgian border police post for 15 minutes on Wednesday. "This violation of Georgia's airspace represents a continuation of Russia's policy aimed at infringing on Georgia's statehood and independence," the Georgian foreign ministry said. "Such a blatant contravention of international law clearly aims at provoking the adequate response from the Georgian side, and intends to further escalate the security situation on the ground."

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Tbilisi Accuses Moscow of Violating its Airspace](#)

French Diplomat Philippe Lefort Named New EU Envoy for S. Caucasus, Geneva Talks

The European Union has named French diplomat Philippe Lefort as its new special envoy for the South Caucasus, replacing Swedish diplomat Peter Semneby. "Philippe Lefort has an in-depth knowledge of the region and years of experience working there at the very highest level," said EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton. "I am confident that he is an ideal choice as special representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, and that he will enhance the EU's role in this sensitive region." A former ambassador to Georgia, Lefort also will serve as a co-mediator in the Geneva-based peace talks between Russian and Georgia to resolve the crisis stemming from Moscow's 2008 invasion and illegal occupation. He replaces fellow Frenchman Pierre Morel in this latter capacity. The EU said Lefort's mandate includes developing effective relationships with key political, judicial, and civil society figures in the region; encouraging regional cooperation on common issues and security threats such as terrorism, illicit trafficking, and organized crime; and fostering a peaceful resolution to Russia's illegal occupation of Georgia's territories in accordance with the principles of international law.

[AFP: EU Names French Diplomat as New Crisis Envoy](#)

Trade Turnover Reaches \$4.8 Billion, Tops Pre-Crisis Levels

Foreign trade turnover in Georgia topped \$4.8 billion in the first half of 2011, climbing 36 percent year-on-year. According to state statistics office Geostat, exports soared 37 percent from last year to a total of \$1.1 billion. Turkey remains Georgia's top trading partner with \$671 million, followed by Azerbaijan (\$442 million), Ukraine (\$425 million), China (\$242 million), and Germany (\$212 million). Ferro-alloys, ferrous waste, fertilizer, gold and the re-export of vehicles continue to be the country's top exports. Georgia's demand for foreign goods jumped 36 percent, reaching \$3.6 billion, with petroleum, motorcars, natural gas, pharmaceuticals and wheat being the top imports.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Georgia's Foreign Trade in H1 2011](#)



Admiral James Stavridis, NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, touring the Presidential Palace with President Saakashvili last week.

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

OPEN DEMOCRACY: Abkhazian elections—Russia's pawn in Georgian game?

Writes MP Denis MacShane: "Russia has already organized one election in Abkhazia in 2009, which was 'won' by Moscow's man, Sergei Bagapsh. In reality, it is irrelevant who wins this election, as the winner will be a puppet of his Russian masters. The victor will not only lack legitimacy because he will lead a proxy state, but even on its own terms the election is a sham. Only certain residents of Abkhazia are allowed to take part in the vote. The ethnic Georgians who bravely remain *in situ* on their own land in their own country are forbidden to take part. The thousands of residents expelled from Upper Abkhazia during the August 2008 war are not allowed a say. Nor are the almost 400,000 removed in previous conflicts."

www.opendemocracy.net

NEW YORK TIMES: Exiled Abkhaz must be part of solution

Our government has eschewed political game-playing and instead is promoting human development by fostering engagement with the occupied regions at the community level, writes Temuri Yakobashvili, Georgia's ambassador to the United States. The brutal ethnic cleansing of the majority of the rightful residents of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia further undermines the legitimacy of the proxy regimes; a significant majority of their population is today in exile. They must be part of any solution.

www.nytimes.com

BLOOMBERG: Georgia demands international reaction to Abkhazian vote

The EU and NATO issued statements saying they do not recognize the result of the Abkhaz elections and support the sovereignty of Georgia. The Abkhaz elections are "a stage farce," said Georgia's foreign ministry. Catherine Ashton, the EU's High Representative, said the EU "does not recognize the constitutional and legal framework within which these elections have taken place."

www.bloomberg.com

L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO: Georgia grants Catholic Church legal status

Georgia granted last week juridical status to the Catholic Church and other ecclesial communities "that have close historical ties with Georgia or that have become lawfully recognized as religions in member states of the Council of Europe." The decision, so long awaited and now received with great satisfaction, allows religious institutions to be registered and to place themselves around the negotiating table as legally recognized partners.

www.catholicculture.org

WASHINGTON POST: Renny Harlin talks superpower nations and "5 Days of War"

Using information from Human Rights Watch, as well as their own research, American director Renny Harlin and screenwriter Mikko Alanne reshaped the script for the "Five Days of War." The process began less than a year after the war ended, and shooting commenced while emotions in Georgia were still raw. "We never had to show the script to the Georgian government," Harlin says. "I feel that I had complete freedom to make the film I wanted to make."

www.washingtonpost.com

MOSCOW TIMES: Why Georgia has friends and Russia doesn't

Some of the young Georgians I met held a contemptuous attitude toward Russia. Their position was: "We Georgians have created an honest police force and an effective government. We have largely eradicated crime and corruption. But you still can't get your house in order." Unfortunately, I couldn't object. Meanwhile, Tbilisi's pro-Western policy, as well as Georgians' traditional hospitality and creativity, will no doubt win new friends to their cause.

www.themoscowtimes.com

**ARTS DESK: The dilemma over Georgian architecture**

The last 18 months have seen a furious process of renovation in Old Town Tbilisi. Under the title "New Life for Old Tbilisi" squads of mini-bulldozers have been let loose on several key areas. Some artists are starting to use innovative techniques to bring local involvement back into the planning process. In the meantime Tbilisi, with the nation of Georgia in tandem, continues to launch itself purposefully into the future, with new restaurants, shops, film and theatre productions, a major renovation of the Opera building, and the always innovative visual arts festival Artisterium readying itself for its fourth incarnation in early November.

www.theartsdesk.com

KURIER: Interview—Foreign Minister Vashadze

FM Vashadze said Georgia's Russian-occupied territories of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia will return to Georgia sooner or later: "I know we will get back the territories," he said, adding that Georgia will "win the peace." "We offer benefits: better schools, a better health care system, greater prosperity and quality of life, democracy, and respect for human rights." Vashadze also underscored the importance of integrating with the West. "Euro-Atlantic integration with the EU and NATO are our priorities," he said. "We are also working to be a bridge between Asia and Europe."

kurier.at

RADIO FREE EUROPE: 3 years after war, Georgia looks to long term

Politicians and analysts in Georgia credit the conflict for sobering the political atmosphere, shattering dangerous illusions, and paving the way for a long-term approach that offers at least glimmers of hope. Georgia now is focused on the things it can do for itself, says Batu Kutelia, deputy secretary of the National Security Council. He adds that the key for Georgia is to continue its democratic transformation and other reforms without allowing itself to be distracted by "provocations from our enemies."

www.rferl.org

NEW YORK TIMES: Out of a swelter come apocalyptic visions

Every summer there is something to talk about in Georgia. This summer, TV news has reported on pestilence, starting with snakes, followed by a swarm of unusually large locusts migrating through the city. Guram Tsiklauri, a herpetologist, is exasperated by the topic, saying that in 30 years he has observed no variation in the prevalence of snakes, and that none of the local species are poisonous anyway.

www.nytimes.com

NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY: 6-point ceasefire implementation review

Despite a cease-fire agreement that ended the Russia-Georgia war three years ago, relations between Russia and Georgia are tense and getting worse, according a new report by Columbia University and the National Committee on American Foreign Policy. "Russia should withdraw its forces," writes David Philips. "Until that happens, the Obama administration should demand greater transparency in the conflict zones and expanded access by European monitors."

ncafp.org