

GEORGIA UPDATE

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- Georgia Stays Firm on Russia’s WTO Accession
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President Saakashvili—engaging above in a lighthearted exchange with his Azerbaijani President Aliyev (center) and Ukrainian President Yanukovich (right), respectively—told EU leaders at last week’s Eastern Partnership summit in Warsaw that Georgia’s commitment to reform and its EU membership aspirations were unwavering. “Many European leaders today agree that Georgia must become a member of the EU,” he said. “This was impossible to say even several months ago—this is a huge, huge change.” He added: “Foreign media and foreign leaders acknowledge that Georgia is the leader in implementing reforms aimed at EU membership. This means that the reforms we carried out in recent years and months were successful.” At the summit, European leaders signed a joint declaration acknowledging the “European aspirations and the European choice of some partners and their commitment to build deep and sustainable democracy.”

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“Georgia is developing so fast that the point will come when the EU will not be able to turn down our entry. It is crucial for us to start integration with European structures. Our starting point today is better than that of Bulgaria and Romania when they began their entry talks.”

“Membership in the EU is decisive for our development, for our security, because we cannot stay alone. We live in a very difficult region and face huge challenges.”

♦ President Saakashvili at the EU’s Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw

“It was clear throughout this time that PM Putin was in charge. Russian policy toward Georgia and its other neighbors has not changed and unfortunately there’s no sign it will change in the immediate future. It will be aggressive, as it was.... For some analysts who had some illusions that there was some internal struggle, that we always thought were unserious, this is an eye opener now. It’s an insult to Russian citizens the way this has been presented to them.”

♦ National Security Council Secretary Giga Bokeria

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

NEWSWEEK/DAILY BEAST: Saakashvili—US stopped Russia bombs

PROJECT SYNDICATE: Georgia on Europe’s mind

LA CROIX: Europe extends a closed hand Eastward

WASHINGTON POST: Editorial—Russia’s corruptionism

DPA: Georgia takes Russia to European court over 2008 war

REUTERS: US vote on Russia trade looms as WTO deal nears

FOX NEWS: Interview-President Saakashvili

BLOOMBERG: Georgia’s GDP expands 4.7%,

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: New LNG project via Georgia, Black Sea

NEW ZEALAND HERALD: Georgian World Cup warriors prepare for battle

NEW YORK TIMES: Definitions—Shalva Alkhanidze, Natela Grigalashvili, Guram Tsibakhashvili

UPCOMING MILESTONES

Sep. 28-Oct. 6: Georgian FM Vashadze visits New Zealand, Australia, and Fiji

Oct. 7: French President Sarkozy visits Georgia

Oct. 7: Next round of WTO negotiations

Nov. 9-10: NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and North Atlantic Council in Georgia

May 15-22: NATO summit in Chicago

TOP STORIES

European Union Confirms Launch of Georgia-EU Free Trade Negotiations

European leaders last week confirmed the launch of Georgia-EU free trade talks, adopting a joint declaration at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw. "Negotiations could start by the end of this year, provided sufficient progress has been made in fulfilling a number of remaining key recommendations," the declaration said, referring to opening dialogue on a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement (DCFTA) with Georgia.

EU leaders at the two-day summit applauded Georgia's "significant progress" in implementing the Union's recommended Association Agreement reforms and encouraged continued reforms to boost its integration efforts: "The pace of reforms will determine the intensity of the cooperation, and partners most engaged in reforms will benefit more from their relationship with the EU, including closer political association, deeper gradual economic integration in the EU Internal Market and increased EU support," the declaration said.

President Saakashvili hailed the EU's call for opening DCFTA talks with Georgia, saying it was a "huge change" in EU policy. Of the six nations in the EU Eastern Partnership, only Moldova and Georgia show signs of movement toward a European democratic model, said Nicu Popescu, a researcher at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Parliament Chairman Bakradze aims to become part of united Europe as soon as possible: "We still have much to do and our government is taking all steps for the rapid European Integration," he said.

[AP: Summit aims to renew push for democracy east of EU](#)

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Georgia and Warsaw Summit of Eastern Partnership](#)

"Georgia aims to join EU within 10 years," President Saakashvili Tells Warsaw Summit

President Saakashvili underscored Georgia's reforms in a speech at the Eastern Partnership summit in Warsaw last week, saying Georgia aims to join the Union in five to 10 years. "Georgia is developing so fast that the point will come when the EU will not be able to turn down our entry," he said during his address to European leaders, urging the bloc to launch trade talks—the first step to EU membership. "It is crucial for us to start integration with European structures," Saakashvili emphasized the impact of EU integration in advancing Georgia's democratic development: "Membership in the EU is decisive for our development, for our security, because we can not stay alone. We live in a very difficult region and face huge challenges," he said. Parliament Chairman Bakradze also echoed this sentiment: "EU membership remains an important incentive for change "in a part of the world where it is easy to fall into chaos," he said. "It gives us a sense of our final destiny."

[RUSTAVI: President Delivers Speech at EU EP Summit in Warsaw](#)

[AP: Summit Aims to Renew Push for Democracy East of EU](#)

Four Groups Register Under New Law Granting Legal Status of Religious Minorities

Four religious groups in Georgia have registered as legal entities since Parliament in July passed a legislative amendment granting greater freedoms and legal protections for religious minorities. The All-Georgia Muslim Administration, the Caucasus Administration of Latin Catholics, the Chaldo-Assyrian Catholic community, and the Spiritual Assembly of Yazidis have become the first four religious minority groups to attain legal status—a right previously limited to the Georgian Orthodox Church. Religious minority groups in the past could only register as "non-commercial entities under private law." President Saakashvili applauded the law, saying it told Georgians that "everyone is equal." While the legislation sparked small street rallies, Saakashvili said he would "have done it again," referring to his outspoken support of the religious freedom law. "I want Georgia to be strong; I want a Georgia that is based on unity, equality, and equal chances for all of its citizens regardless of their origins."

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Four Groups Registered For Now Under New Law of Legal Status of Religious Minorities](#)



The man nicknamed "Gorgodzilla," or Gulliver depending on the country you're in, finally made a mark at the Rugby World Cup last week. Mamuka Gorgodze starred in the one game Georgia wanted to win above all others in Pool B: He scored the only try in a 25-9 win over Romania before a capacity crowd at New Zealand's Manawatu Arena. Gorgodze has been tagged Gorgodzilla in the French Top 14, where he was voted the best foreign player last season. But in his homeland, he's called Gulliver, because he's so big. His nineteenth try for Georgia made him the team's outright leading try-scorer. The victory was only Georgia's second in three trips to the World Cup and a craved pick-me-up for a country where rugby is the national sport. www.nbcsports.msnbc.com

New Commission to Vet Voters Lists Ahead of 2012 Elections

Parliament passed the first reading of a draft law to establish an election commission that vets voters lists in advance of the 2012 elections. According to the draft law, the state will fund a 21-member commission—chaired by an opposition party representative—to verify the accuracy of registered voters lists. The commission, composed of representatives from Georgia's governing and opposition parties and civil society organizations, will employ various methods, including "door-to-door checking," to confirm the lists' accuracy. The proposal amends the electoral code and is part of the government's bi-partisan electoral system reform deal. Officials expect the entire verification process to end before July. Parliament must approve the draft in its second and third readings before it goes into force.

[CIVIL GEORGIA: Commission to Verify Voters Lists](#)

Georgia Stays Firm on Russia's WTO Accession

Georgia remains steadfast in its demand for border transparency as a precondition to Russia's WTO accession. Moscow has shown no signs of moving toward Tbilisi's basic demands, said Georgia's National Security Advisor Bokeria. "The Obama administration is urging all parties to compromise. We are doing that; the Russians are not," he said. "It's up to the Russians, either they want to compromise or they don't," he said, adding that the choice for membership was Russia's. "We just want to reach a meaningful compromise to achieve transparency through international monitoring." Georgia, a WTO member seeks to have international observers stationed at customs checkpoints along its northern borders to monitor the movement of people and goods. Georgian and Russian negotiators will meet in Geneva Friday for the next round of WTO talks.

[FOREIGN POLICY: Georgia to Clinton—We won't Budge on WTO Bid](#)

Seaside City of Poti to Host Georgia's Latest International Airport

The Black Sea port city of Poti will be home to Georgia's newest international airport, as the coastal region becomes a major hub for business, tourism, and development. "The Poti airport is a very serious breakthrough for us in terms of developing this region as well as all of Georgia," said President Saakashvili at the groundbreaking ceremony marking the start of construction. "This airport is going to be the most contemporary airport in Georgia and the Caucasus."

[RUSTAVI: Another international airport to be opened in Georgia](#)

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON GEORGIA

NEWSWEEK/DAILY BEAST: President Saakashvili—US stopped Russian bombings

Georgia credited the Obama administration for engaging in quiet diplomatic intervention with Russia and helping to end a string of bombings that had terrorized his country. "I know firsthand Hillary Clinton raised this several times with FM Lavrov," said President Saakashvili. "This was not just raised for the sake of formality; she was very insistent and very tough on that one. On a public level, it was much less visible, but what we know from diplomatic considerations is that the administration was pretty tough."

www.thedailybeast.com

FOX NEWS: Interview—President Saakashvili

"They don't recognize our government, they don't allow people to go back to their homes, and they don't recognize the ceasefire agreement that they themselves signed," President Saakashvili said, referring to Russia's non-compliance with the 2008 ceasefire. He also highlighted America's role in the world. "America will stay as the ultimate force for good, and the only power in the world that is absolutely unchallenged. That has the power to change the world, including countries like Georgia who believe in the very same ideals as America."

www.foxnews.com

WASHINGTON POST: Editorial—Russia's corruptionism

Putin's presidency bid is bad for Obama, who invested heavily in his relationship with Medvedev, hoping he would emerge as a true leader. It is bad news for Russia's neighboring countries, such as Georgia and Ukraine, whose independence Putin views as a temporary and irritating historical aberration. Most of all, it's bad news for the Russian people, who face corruption and stagnation persisting perhaps—if Putin now seeks, like Stalin, to rule for life—as long as their president.

www.washingtonpost.com

PROJECT SYNDICATE: Georgia on Europe's mind

Georgia will test the EU's new flexibility in the East. The country is ahead of its neighbors in many areas. But the political will, on both sides, for closer cooperation appears to have emerged at last.

www.project-syndicate.org

LA CROIX: Europe extends a closed hand eastward

Full adhesion to the EU remains the objective, a guarantee of stability and foreign investments for the majority of these countries that are trying to extract themselves from Russia's sphere of influence. "The partnership must bind our countries to Europe, without becoming an alternative to accession," said Raphaël Glucksmann, an advisor to President Saakashvili. Meanwhile, the Europeans are seeking to cater to their own publics, who are weary of the many prior enlargements.

www.la-croix.com

DPA: Georgia takes Russia to European court over 2008 war

Georgia lodged a case against Russia at the European Court of Human Rights, accusing Russian soldiers of numerous human rights abuses in its occupied regions of S. Ossetia and Abkhazia. Deputy Justice Minister Burjaliani accused Russia of standing by as the attacks were carried out and of covering up for the attacks. The court is not expected to issue a ruling before next year.

www.citiadr.idmanagedsolutions.com

REUTERS: US vote on Russia trade looms as WTO deal nears

The US Congress could face a tough vote on trade relations with Russia, igniting a potentially fierce debate over Moscow's record on human rights and democracy in the wake of Putin's decision to return as president. Russia's entry into the WTO would require the US Congress to vote to establish "permanent normal trade relations" with Russia by removing a Cold War-era human rights provision. The vote could dredge up an array of concerns in Congress over issues ranging from Putin's recent decision to Moscow's foreign policy.

www.reuters.com



NEW YORK TIMES: Definitions—Shalva Alkhanidze, Natela Grigalashvili, Guram Tsibakhashvili

This magical little sepia-toned show of work by three unknown photographers from the country of Georgia echoes in miniature the point made by the New Museum's excellent "Ostalgia" exhibition: Western art capitals have much to learn about the visual culture of the countries that once formed the Soviet Union. The strongest works are in some ways the most old-fashioned. Taken around 1990 by Natela Grigalashvili, they record the rural side of life in Georgia, sometimes zeroing in on shepherds or farmers, sometimes pulling back to show figures or animals in broader landscape views. Effortlessly composed, rendered in small, exquisite prints, the images both document and romanticize a harsh life lived close to nature with a memorably strange and lyric realism.

www.nytimes.com

EURASIA DAILY MONITOR: New LNG project via Georgia, Black Sea

To reduce its dependence on Russian natural gas, Ukraine proposes to import Azerbaijani liquefied natural gas via Georgia and across the Black Sea to Ukraine. The project would involve building a pipeline from Azerbaijan to Georgia's Black Sea coast; constructing a gas liquefaction plant on Georgia's coast; and shipping the LNG from Georgia to Ukraine in sea tankers.

www.jamestown.org

BLOOMBERG: Georgia's GDP expands 4.7%,

Georgia's economic growth was 4.7% in the April-June period, with output in mining, quarrying, and constructions lagging. Foreign direct investment reached \$203.4 million in the second quarter, 17 percent more than in the first. Investments in energy, communications, transportation, trade, and real estate led the way.

www.bloomberg.com

NEW ZEALAND HERALD: Georgian warriors prepare for battle

You don't have to be Charles Darwin to understand the evolution of rugby in Georgia. The sport has close affiliations with a traditional pastime called leloburti. That's where villages fought for possession of a leather ball filled with wine and sand. "Genetically, I think they are made for rugby. They are warrior-type players," said Richie Dixon, the coach of Georgia's national rugby team. "The people are fully behind this team. They realize rugby has become a window to the world for Georgia."

www.nzherald.co.nz

THINK TANKS/NGOS

HERITAGE: The folly of the Russia reset

The Obama Administration has been hailing its reset policy as one of its greatest diplomatic achievements. On closer examination, it is clear that the reset has been nothing but a list of concessions to an increasingly belligerent and aggressive state. It is time for the Obama Administration to launch a true reset based on the values of freedom and justice.

blog.heritage.org