

Georgia (Republic of) (Sakartvelo)

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Location and area

Georgia is a republic in the Transcaucasia region of western Asia, bordered by the Black Sea on the west, Russia on the north, and Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkey on the south. Georgia includes two autonomous republics - Abkhazia and Ajaria - and one autonomous region - South Ossetia. It has a total area of 69,700 km². (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

Georgia contains high mountain ranges as well as extensive coastal lowlands. The Greater Caucasus Mountains form most of the republic's northern boundary, with Mount Shkhara (5,068 m) as the highest elevation in the republic. The Lesser Caucasus Mountains in the south rarely exceed an elevation of 3,000 m. The area between these two mountain systems is generally much lower, especially along the river valleys and the coast of the Black Sea, where elevations are generally less than 100 m.

Climate

The climate ranges from humid, subtropical conditions in the Colchis Lowland to drier and more continental conditions in the eastern uplands. The Black Sea coast and the Rioni plains enjoy average temperatures of 5° C in January; 23° C in July and an average annual rainfall of 2,000 mm. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Water

The two largest rivers in the republic, the Kura and the Rioni, flow in opposite directions; the Kura, which originates in Turkey, runs generally eastward through Georgia and Azerbaijan into the Caspian Sea, while the Rioni drains into the Black Sea to the west. Numerous other rivers flow across the fertile Colchis Lowland at the coast of the Black Sea. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

Agriculture has for long been an important feature of the Georgian economy. Reclamation of swampy coastal lowlands around the mouth of the Rioni has added much fertile land; this region produces tea and citrus fruit.

There has been unprecedented intensive deforestation since independence, caused partly by the collapse of timber imports—85 per cent of the country's requirements were imported from Russia—and illegal cutting of forests in an attempt to supplement scarce fuel resources. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Wetlands

The Kolkheti Marshes and Lake Paliastomi in the west, form one of the largest wetland areas in the Black Sea region. Lakes and reservoirs occupy a total area of some 170 km², and number in excess of 850. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Peatlands

Neishtadt (1946) (in Kazakov 1953) gives a total area of “peat resources” of 250 km² with peat reserves of 120 Mt of air-dried peat.

Schneider (1976, 1980) and Schneider & Schneider (1990) mention a “peatland” area of 1,000 km².

Markov (1976) gives a total area of “peat deposits” for Georgia of 200 km² (0.2 % of the country area) with peat resources of 100 Mt.

Lappalainen & Zurek (1996b), following Tjuremnov (1976) mention a recent “peatland” area of 250 km² (0.4% of the land area) and total peat resources >100 Mt.

The total area of mires in Georgia („tchaobi“ in Georgian) is ca. 450 km² (Markov et al. 1988) with the majority in the 2000 km² large Colchian Lowlands (Kobulina 1974, table xxx, Joosten et al. 2003). Mountain mires can be found on all altitudes between 600 and 3400 m asl, but only occupy a very small part of the country (Botch & Masing 1983).

Table xxx: Large peatlands in the Colchis Lowlands (areal data after Dokturowski 1931, Potskhishvili et al. 1997, Matschutadze 1999).

Name	Area (km ²)	Main vegetation type
Imnati	80	Sphagnetum; Alnetum
Anaklia-Churia	25	Sphagnetum; Caricetum, Alnetum;
Nabada	33	Sphagnetum
Maltakva peat bog ^{*)}	9.8	originally Sphagnetum; now secondary vegetation types
Grigoleti ^{*)}	4.2	partly Sphagnetum; secondary vegetation types
Shavtskala ^{*)}	5.0	Caricetum; Juncetum; secondary vegetation types
Ispani 2	2.5	Sphagnetum
Ispani 1 ^{*)}	5.0	dispersed Sphagnetum; secondary vegetation types

^{*)} currently strongly degraded

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) 720 km² of histosols exist in Georgia and 2,135 km² of gley soils.