

WEEKLY NEWS REPORT ON GEORGIA

Date: February 26-March 4, 2018

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

1. EU gravely concerned with tragic death of Georgian citizen and detention of two others in occupied Tskhinvali

Expressing their condolences to the late Tatumashvili's family, the statement said the EU is ready through its Monitoring Mission to support ongoing investigations and to facilitate discussions through the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism and the mission hotline (*Feb. 26*).

2. Parliamentary majority initiates resolution on death of Georgian citizen in occupied Tskhinvali

“We think that we will initiate the resolution during the next plenary session. The resolution text will cover many aspects, including the conducting of an international investigation over the case,” the majority leader Archil Talakvadze said. Talakvadze believes that as the issue concerns the country's occupation the resolution will be supported by the opposition (*Feb. 26*).

3. PACE Co-rapporteurs concerned with death of Georgian citizen in occupied Tskhinvali

“We call upon the separatist authorities, as well as the authorities of the Russian Federation, as the de facto power in control, to conduct a full and transparent investigation into the death of Archil Tatumashvili, and to prosecute those responsible”, the two co-rapporteurs Lundgren and Corlatean said in their joint statement (*Feb. 27*).

4. The body of Tatumashvili was transferred to Russia for the expertise

According to the recent information Tatumashvili's body had to be transferred to Georgian controlled territory on Feb. 25, but South Ossetian side did not fulfill the promise. They have given explanation that the body needs expertise and taking into consideration the fact that de-facto Tskhinvali has not enough resources to provide examination, they have transferred the body to Russia. (*Feb. 27*).

5. Extraordinary Session of Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism.

Extraordinary session of Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) had been held based on the demand of Georgian side but so called South Ossetian side did not revealed any additional information regarding Tatumashvili or two others who are in the detention center now. Meanwhile, relatives and friends of Tatumashvili have blocked so called Natakhtari road (Direction to Kazbegi check-point), according to them this route is frequently utilized by Russians and they wanted to show to the occupants that Georgians will not tolerate their illegal actions (*Feb. 27*).

6. US Embassy demands full investigation of Tatumashvili's death

“The United States is deeply concerned by the death of Georgian citizen Archil Tatumashvili during his February 22 arrest and detention in Tskhinvali. We express our condolences to Mr. Tatumashvili's family and call on the responsible persons, including Russian officials exercising de facto control over Georgia's South Ossetia region, to provide the Georgian government with a full accounting of the circumstances of this tragic incident,” – reads the statement of the Embassy (*Feb. 27*).

7. US State Department calls for accurate and transparent investigation of Tatumashvili incident

On Feb. 27, Spokesperson of US Department of State held press briefing and talked about different topics relevant for US foreign policy, including the incident occurred on Georgia's occupied territory. “I'd like to say that the United States is deeply concerned by the death of a Georgian citizen, Archil Tatumashvili, during his February 22nd arrest and detention in the Russian-occupied Georgian territory of South Ossetia. We express our condolences to his family...”, said Heather Nauert (*Feb. 27*).

8. UN Human Rights Office urges investigation on Tatumashvili's case

"We are concerned about the death in detention of Georgian citizen Archil Tatumashvili on Feb. 22 in Tskhinvali. We call for a credible & transparent investigation into the facts surrounding his death & stand ready to support the process," – reads the tweet of UN Human Rights Office (*Feb. 27*).

9. CoE Congress concerned by death of Georgian citizen in occupied Tskhinvali

The Council of Europe Congress President Gudrun Mosler-Törnström shared her concern over the death of Georgian citizen Archil Tatumashvili in the Russian occupied region of Georgia – Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) (*Feb. 28*).

10. NATO official concerned by death of Georgian man, detention of 2 others in occupied Tskhinvali

James Appathurai, NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia has expressed his deep concern with the latest developments in the Russian occupied region of Georgia – Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) (*Feb. 28*).

11. "Tatumashvili grabbed escort's weapons which caused physical confrontation," - Occupied Tskhinvali makes announcement

The so-called Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the occupied Tskhinvali releases information on details of Archil Tatumashvili's death. The statement reads that Tatumashvili resisted the escort, grabbed their weapon and physical impact became necessary, which eventually ended with his death (*Mar. 1*).

12. Patriarch of Georgia asks Patriarch of Russia to help in transferring Tatumashvili's body

The parents of Archil Tatumashvili, who was killed in Tskhinvali prison, were in the Patriarchate. Their meeting with Ilia II lasted for more than an hour. Patriarch blessed the family and read the prayers for the soul of the deceased (*Mar. 2*).

13. Japan concerned by death of Georgian citizen in occupied Tskhinvali

"We express our condolences to Mr. Tatumashvili's family. We hope a thorough investigation of the case will be conducted so that such a tragedy will never be repeated and [we hope for] the early return of other detainees to their homes," the embassy wrote (*Mar. 2*).

14. PM says efforts underway to retrieve body of Georgian citizen from occupied region

"The Government of Georgia is sparing no effort to have the body handed to the family as soon as possible. All our friends, the international community, are standing by our side in this process, and the role of the Patriarch and our Church is immensely important", he added (*Mar. 4*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

15. Interior Ministry announces plans to control borders better

"The technological development is of the highest importance and our foreign allies are supporting us in the direction," Deputy Interior Minister Natia Mezvrishvili said (*Feb. 27*).

16. Georgia seeks recognition of its driving license in Spain, Italy, Ukraine

Georgia's Ministry of Internal Affairs is negotiating with three countries – Spain, Italy and Ukraine - on granting international legitimacy to Georgian driving licenses. The negotiations aim to make it possible for drivers living in these three countries to continue using their Georgian licenses for up to six months after the expiration of their driving documents (*Feb. 27*).

17. Justice Ministry creates Schengen/EU app to prevent overstay in EU

The Georgian Ministry of Justice and its Service Development Agency have created an application to help Georgian citizens calculate their days in the Schengen Zone and avoid the violation of the terms of legal stay. The application, called Schengen/EU App, is managed by the Foreign Ministry and can be easily downloaded onto smartphones (*Feb. 27*).

18. So called Georgian “Intelligentsia” addresses all diplomatic missions in Georgia

Unilaterally, for the last 30 years, we have had a large number of casualties due to partnership with NATO, we believe that the alliance should be bilateral, so the proposal is extremely incorrect and does not fit into the relations between allies” – reads the statement signed by Robert Sturua, Rezo Amashukeli, Ketii Dolidze, Elizbar Javelidze, Tamaz Tsivtsivadze, Gogi Kavtaradze, Gogi Kharabadze, Jondi Bagaturia and Temo Gotsadze (*Feb. 28*).

19. Georgian Prime Minister visits Armenia

Following the official welcome ceremony, the two prime ministers had a face-to-face meeting during which Kvirikashvili and Karapetyan praised the long-lasting friendship between Georgia and Armenia. PM Kvirikashvili has also scheduled a meeting with Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan (*Mar. 2*).

20. Czech Development Agency to support Georgia’s chemical waste management

The Czech Development Agency will help Georgia develop management capabilities for chemical waste and create proper legislation, announces Georgia’s Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture. The Ministry and the Agency have today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) within the "Strengthening of Sustainable Management Capabilities of Georgia’s Chemical Waste” project (*Mar. 2*).

❖ Internal Affairs

21. Georgia to tighten sanctions against advertising violations

Those who violate the Law of Georgia on Advertising and use only non-Georgian language inscriptions on the facades of their buildings or on billboards will be fined. Part of Kaladze’s pre-election campaign promised to tackle a range of advertising issues in the country (*Feb. 26*).

22. "This was intentionally burned , it is only in Ivanishvili’s interests" - strong fire has destroyed another market

Shop owners suspect that fires at the market was deliberate. According to them, the electrical system has been replaced by the new system, thus the fire caused by the failure of the wiring is excluded. Most of the shop owners say the goods are not insured and the damage reaches thousands of GEL. Up to 40 fire brigades and dozens of firefighters tried to extinguish the fire. According to the initial information, the area of at least 3000 square meters has been burned. The traders say that the fire was intentionally started (*Feb. 27*).

23. President pardons 116 prisoners

President of Georgia Giorgi Margvelashvili has pardoned 116 prisoners, 73 inmates will leave prisons today, while the remaining 43 will see their prison terms commuted. From the pardoned 73 prisoners four are women, the head of the Pardon Commission Zviad Koridze has announced (*Feb. 28*).

24. Former Tbilisi Mayor found guilty of exceeding authority

Tbilisi City Court has found former mayor of Tbilisi Gigi Ugulava guilty of exceeding official powers and sentenced him to one year and two months in prison. However, other sentences by the Tbilisi Court of Appeals against Ugulava have absorbed the sentence and he has not been sent to prison. According to the Georgian penalty system, lesser penalties are absorbed by greater ones (*Feb. 28*).

25. Open Data Lab - new open data platform launches in Georgia

A new open data platform - Open Data Lab – was launched today in Georgia, enabling users to explore datasets on public policy issues in open formats. The visitors of www.DataLab.ge will be allowed to find data, basic visualisation tools, and resources to analyse data, design data visualisations, conduct research, develop web and mobile applications (*Feb. 28*).

26. Official detained for taking bribe

Georgia's State Security Service has detained a member of Tbilisi City Assembly, Georgian Dream ruling party majoritarian of the Krtsanisi administrative unit Temur Gorgadze. The Security Office reported that Gorgadze demanded from a citizen of Georgia 7,000 USD as a bribe and in return promised to release his relative from custody through the pardon council. Gorgadze faces 7 to 11 years of imprisonment (*Feb. 28*).

27. Former head of criminal police arrested in Tbilisi airport

Zurab Bakradze, former head of criminal police was detained in Tbilisi International Airport, - Ministry of Internal Affairs confirms the information. The former head of the criminal police, who was convicted of Buta Robakidze's case, has not been in Georgia since 2013 (*Mar. 1*).

28. Common presidential candidate - Opposition responds to Mikheil Saakashvili's offer

The political parties in Tbilisi have responded to the address of the third president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili to the "United National Movement" in which he spoke about the selection of a common presidential candidate, Non-parliamentary opposition draws attention to the necessity of unification. The "National Movement" says they are ready to start consultations. "Our National Movement, the main opposition force, is ready to start the consultations with the opposition parties," Nika Melia says. Representatives of "European Georgia" have different positions (*Mar. 5*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

29. Georgia strives to become regional hub for electricity trade

Large European energy companies Nord Pool and Blubberies will prepare recommendations for Georgia to help the country become a regional hub for electricity trade. Economy Minister Dimitry Kumsishvili has met the representatives of both energy companies in Georgia's capital of Tbilisi today. As a result of this meeting the sides agreed to sign a Memorandum of Cooperation (*Feb. 26*).

30. Taxi drivers set to pay profit taxes

Representative of NGO Vector, Sergi Gigani believes that registration of taxi drivers is the first part to monopolize particular segment of economy. According to him registration is important due to one reason, City Hall plans to impose profit taxes for Taxi Drivers (*Feb. 27*).

31. Georgian air market expanding with new local airline company Myway Airlines

Georgia's Civil Aviation Agency has already issued an Air Operator Certificate (AOC) and Operating License (OL) to Myway Airlines. The carrier's fleet includes two Boeing B 737-8AL aircrafts. The financial reliability of Myway Airlines is approved by Georgia's Civil Aviation Agency. As reported, the new Georgian airline company will launch its first flight in May this year (*Feb. 27*).

32. Georgia's economy grows 4.4% in January 2018

Georgia's economy is growing steadily, reaching 4.4 percent growth in the first month of 2018, show the latest data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (*Feb. 28*).

33. New rule to regulate currency exchange operations in Georgia

The National Bank of Georgia has ratified a new rule for the registration and regulation of currency exchange offices to protect customers' interests. The new rule obliges currency exchange offices in Georgia to agree to refund exchanges and return exchanged money back to a customer if he or she presents a confirmation receipt within 30 minutes after the initial transaction (*Mar. 1*).

34. Large Korean corporation looks to invest in Georgia

Georgia has attracted the interest of a large Korean corporation SK E&C. Georgia's Economy Minister Dimitry Kumsishvili met the Executive Vice-President of the Korean corporation SK E&C, Seung Su Lee, in Tbilisi today (*Mar. 1*).