

WEEKLY NEWS REPORT ON GEORGIA

Date: May 21 - 27, 2018

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

1. **Zurab Abashidze: Archil Tatumashvili's murder was one of the issues discussed at the meeting with Grigory Karasani**

"He said that this is a very sad fact and everything should be done in order to prevent any similar case in the future. He said what I had expected - that discussion of the issue should continue in the Geneva format," Abashidze said (*IPN.Ge, May 24, 2018*).

2. **Grigory Karasin: Archil Tatumashvili's death was, of course, a tragedy**

"I was asked about Archil Tatumashvili's death - of course, it is a tragedy and everything should be done in order to prevent any similar case in the future. This issue should be discussed through direct contacts with the involvement of representatives of Georgia and South Ossetia. Moreover, we have incident prevention mechanisms. I think serious conclusions should be made on the basis of this case", Karasin said (*IPN.Ge, May 24, 2018*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

3. **More than a thousand Georgian citizens repatriated from European countries during past four months**

1,260 Georgian citizens have been returned to their home country from the EU/Schengen area over the course of January-April of this year.

As the Ministry of Internal Affairs reports, they received 1290 applications about readmission from January 1st to April 30th while 1260 of them were confirmed and only 30 rejected (*Agenda.ge, May 21, 2018*).

4. **17 Georgian citizens arrested in Athens, Greece**

All detainees are Georgian citizens and are connected to crime boss Nodar Shukakidze who was arrested during a large-scale police operation named *Caucase Normandie* held simultaneously in France and Greece on April 18, 2018 (*Agenda.ge, May 21, 2018*).

5. **Secretary Pompeo: "US unequivocally condemns Russia's occupation on Georgian soil"**

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili has started his visit to the United States with a meeting with the Secretary the Department of State Mike Pompeo today.

They met before the plenary session of the U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership Commission and delivered remarks regarding further cooperation between the countries in different spheres including defence, security, economy, democracy building, trade and Georgia's NATO integration.

Kvirikashvili thanked Pompeo for convening the plenary session so soon after his appointment in this office (*Agenda.ge, May 21, 2018*).

6. **US allies support Georgia's sovereignty and deoccupation**

"We won't stop until Georgia's sovereign state is returned its territories and the Russian occupation comes to an end", Congressman Gerald Connolly, Co-chair of the Georgia Caucus of the US Congress, said in his keynote address at an event dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the first Democratic Republic of Georgia (Agenda.ge, May 22, 2018).

7. US senators confirm their support for Georgia

Georgia is the only country in the neighborhood of Russia which pursues a clearly western policy and does it in a thoroughly reasonable and rational manner" Republican Senator Lindsey Graham said at a meeting held with Georgian PM Giorgi Kvirikashvili yesterday.

The senator from South Carolina said Georgia enjoys strong support from the US Senate, as has been demonstrated on numerous occasions both in its Resolutions and Consolidated Bills with supporting provisions and support for Georgia (Agenda.ge, May 23, 2018).

8. US Vice President hosts Giorgi Kvirikashvili at his residence

Giorgi Kvirikashvili, Prime Minister of Georgia has been hosted by Mike Pence, Vice President of the USA at his residence.

According to the governmental administration, the leaders of strategic partner countries discussed all items on the agenda of relations between the two countries in fine detail.

It was once again clearly affirmed at the meeting that the USA stands by Georgia in addressing all the challenges and in embracing the opportunities and achievements (IPN, May 24, 2018).

9. European Court completes final hearing on Russia-Georgia war

The final hearing in the case of Georgia v. Russia has come to the end at the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg.

Georgia's British lawyer Ben Emerson, a representative of Russian Justice Ministry and the lawyer of the state of Russia, addressed a panel of 17 judges.

Georgia's Deputy Minister of Justice Gocha Lortkipanidze said after the hearing that it was an uncompromising, struggle for fairness and justice. Tsikhelashvili said the final decision after today's last hearing will be announced "in a few months". (Agenda.ge, May 23, 2018).

10. We are holding regular talks with Mr. Abashidze in order to have progress in the development of relations and prepare a meeting between the leaders of Russia and Georgia - Grigory Karasin

"In order to hold a meeting between the Russian and Georgian presidents, it is necessary to carry out serious preparatory work, resolve important political and economic issues between our countries," Karasin said.

According to him, Moscow knows that the President of Georgia is ready for such a meeting. "We are holding regular talks with Mr. Abashidze in Prague in order to have progress in the development of relations between Russia and Georgia and preparing a meeting between the leaders of our countries", Karasin said (IPN.Ge, May 24, 2018).

11. Lietuva - a Lithuanian name of Lithuania established in Georgian language

Lietuva - a Lithuanian name of Lithuania has been established in the Georgian language. As InterPressNews was informed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, the recommendation was issued by the State Language Department in accordance with the May 11 decision of the Commission of Experts (IPN.Ge, May 24, 2018).

12. PM Kvirikashvili meets Armenian President

Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Kvirikashvili has today met with Armenian President Armen Sarkissian. InterPressNews was informed by the Administration of Government that PM Kvirikashvili congratulated Armen Sarkissian on his election to the post of the President and thanked for visiting Georgia (IPN.Ge, May 25, 2018).

13. President of Lithuania congratulates Georgia on 100th anniversary of establishment of first independent republic in Georgian language

"Hello Georgia. I congratulate the population of Georgia on the 100 anniversary. From now on, we we call your country Sakartvelo. This is our symbolic gift to you. Glory, Georgia!"- Grybauskaite said in Tbilisi's Freedom Square (IPN.Ge, May 26, 2018).

14. Prime Minister expresses hopes that Georgia will become member of NATO for 2021

"We hope that in 2021, after 100 years from the Soviet occupation, Georgia will acquire the status of a member of the North Atlantic Alliance. We are very confident that the world's civilized community, in particular the North Atlantic Alliance, will find the strength to consolidate the necessary decisions that are essential for our region and not only for our region. Georgia is ready for this challenge. Georgia is working hard every day to become a member of the European and Euro-Atlantic community," Kvirikashvili said (IPN.Ge, May 26, 2018).

15. Morozov says NATO may accept Georgia as member in order to make pressure on Russia

NATO may break its requirements set for the candidate states and accept Georgia in the Alliance it in order to impose pressure upon Russia,- Oleg Morozov, a member of Russia's Federation Council international affairs committee, told RIA Novosti.

"This does not depend on Georgia. As it is known, according to NATO rules, the countries with territorial problems and unsolved military conflicts, are not allowed to join the Alliance. Here is a full combination of it", said Morozov (IPN.Ge, May 27, 2018).

16. Resolution in support of Georgia initiated in US Congress

According to the Foreign Ministry, the resolution emphasizes the US-Georgia strategic partnership and alliance. The resolution supports further strengthening of partnership between the US and Georgia in the field of defense and security, as well as the development of trade and commercial relations between the two countries.

"It is noteworthy that the US Senate reiterates strong support for Georgia's NATO membership and emphasizes Georgia's great contribution to Euro-Atlantic security. Georgia is described as a leader in the democratic development of the region and strengthening of the parliament's role (IPN.Ge, May 26, 2018).

17. Chairman of Ukrainian Parliament hopes Georgian Patriarch will support Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church

"We have a huge hope that the Patriarch and the Georgian Orthodox Church will support the desire of Ukraine and all Ukrainians to establish the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. I hope that this idea is fully supported by President and Parliament's Chairman and hope that the idea will be supported by the Patriarch," the press office quoted Andriy Parubiy as saying (IPN.Ge, May 27, 2018).

❖ Internal Affairs

18. Mamuka Mdinardze – Sanctions will be stricter towards drugs sellers

Mamuka Mdinardze, Chairman of Georgian Dream Faction claims that sanctions towards drugs sellers will be stricter than envisaged by the current legislation while the legislation will be more human toward drugs consumers.

Mdinardze told journalists that viewpoints of members of the parliamentary majority regarding drug policy had moved closer to each other, but consultations would continue. He did not rule out holding of internal ballot over the issue either (1TV, May 22, 2018).

19. Public defender on restriction of metro workers’ right to strike: “Harmful precedent”

The decision of the Tbilisi City Court, by which the right of the employees of Tbilisi Metro to strike has been restricted, is a harmful and dangerous precedent for labour rights, says Georgia’s public defender Nino Lomjaria.

Metro drivers planned a strike on May 3, 2018, but the strike was postponed for a maximum period of 30 days by a court decision. June 3 was announced as the new date of the strike, although this time, the court restricted the metro drivers’ right to strike during working hours for an indefinite period of time (Agenda.ge, May 23, 2018).

20. Patriarchate urges clergy to stop any communication with Rustavi 2

The statement says that the Patriarchate of Georgia addressed the head of the abovementioned TV station to react to the release of false information (which could cause trouble between the world’s patriarchate and our church), but in the same evening they prepared a "new program condemning God" (IPN.Ge, May 24, 2018).

21. Patriarch about relationship between the Church and Rustavi 2 TV

"I would like to make a few comments about the recent days' relationship between the Church and Rustavi 2. I want to tell you not to be rude to the religion, Christianity - it will not remain unpunished. Every person who lives and recognizes Orthodoxy is our spiritual son and we are praying for you and we hope that the relationship between us will be improved, "said the Patriarch (IPN.Ge, May 27, 2018).

22. Rally demanding fair investigation of Khorava Street murder case is underway outside parliament

Rally under the slogan #Don't kill me is underway outside the parliament. The protesters are demanding a fair investigation of Khorava Street murder case

The demonstrators ask for answers to questions about why the crime scene was destroyed - why the murder organizer and those persons who escaped from the crime scene have not been held accountable and etc.

The rally, organized by Davit Saralidze, father of murdered Zaza Saralidze, was joined by representatives of various political parties, NGOs, Temirlan Machalikashvili's father Malkhaz Machalikashvili(IPN.Ge, May 27, 2018).

23. Term of living in Georgia for getting Georgian citizenship may be increased

The term of living in Georgia for getting Georgian citizenship may be increased. According to the amendments to the Law on Citizenship, the five-year living term will be increased to 10 years for

getting ordinary citizenship. As for the simplified citizenship, two-year living term may increase to five years.

The draft amendments to the Law on Citizenship are ready for initiation. The project will be submitted to the Parliament at the next sitting of the Bureau (IPN.Ge, May 28, 2018).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

24. 2017 data: Unemployment rate in Georgia slightly declines to 13.9%

In 2017 the annual unemployment rate in Georgia declined by 0.1 percentage points and equaled 13.9 percent, shows the employment and unemployment annual data of 2017 of the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) (Agenda.ge, May 21, 2018).

25. International Monetary Fund to support Georgia's credit guarantee reform

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) will team up with Georgia's Ministry of Economy to create a credit guarantee fund for Georgia.

The Credit Guarantee Mechanism, initiated by Georgia's Economy Minister Dimitri Kumsishvili, is a guarantee fund that comes as a guarantor for loans of small and medium-sized businesses to be received from commercial banks.

It makes it easier for small and medium businesses to access financing which will give a significant boost to economic growth (Agenda.ge, May 23, 2018).

26. Vice-Speaker of Parliament says it is very important that negotiations be launched with the US about free trade agreement

"The support of the United States is expressed in several different components, such as development of democracy, economic empowerment and economic cooperation, which is becoming more and more important. Direct American investments are rising and it is also very important that negotiations be launched about free trade agreement. Consequently, the messages made during this visit and high-ranking meetings give us reason to think that America, as our main strategic partner, will become more active and will further assist Georgia in terms of security, as well as democratic and economic development. I want to express the opinion of the Parliament about the visit - we would like to note with happiness that relations with the United States of America are becoming deeper and I am confident that in the nearest future it will be expressed in concrete results and steps," Chugoshvili said (IPN.Ge, May 24, 2018).

27. Finance Minister submits legislative package on excess loans

The initiative is based on five principles: 1. All lenders will be prohibited to require any property from subscribers other than items on mortgage; 2. Pawnshops and private lenders will be prohibited to mortgage cars and real estate property. 3. The upper edge of effective interest rate will be 50%; 4. Current irresponsible and unfair system of fines will be abolished and all the lenders will be prohibited to calculate the fine from the total volume of the credit; 5. The rules of the game will be extended to all financial sectors, including banks, microfinance organizations, pawnshops, private lenders.