

# WEEKLY NEWS REPORT ON GEORGIA

Date: June 18-24, 2018

## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Abkhazia Region

#### 1. Georgian president meets OSCE ambassadors, says occupied regions should be monitored

The president of Georgia Giorgi Margvelashvili told 25 OSCE ambassadors visiting Tbilisi that the country's occupied territories of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) should not be excluded from international monitoring.

Margvelashvili spoke about the actions of Russia in Georgia's occupied territories and in the region and thanked the ambassadors for their support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Russia and the de-facto leadership of the two occupied regions of Georgia have not allowed any international mission on the ground (*Agenda.ge, June 20, 2018*).

#### 2. What if your country was occupied like Georgia?

What would your country's map look like if a fifth of it was occupied by a foreign military?

A Georgian digital designer has created an [illustration](#) of the answer to that question, replicating the reality of 20 percent of Georgia's territory being under the control of an occupying force.

Creating for his design portfolio, Gigi Kadagishvili used minimalist digital maps of nearly 20 countries to shade a part of their total land area as if they were out of governmental control (*Agenda.ge, June 20, 2018*).

### ❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

#### 3. Occupants arrest three Georgian citizens for so called 'illegal border crossing'

The information was released by the de-facto state security committee. Ednar Mskhaladze, 38, Leimona Dvalishvili, 41, and Mansur Petrendishvili, 68, were detained near the villages of Disevi and Artsevi in Gori municipality.

"Ednar Mskhaladze has been handed to the Georgian side without sanctions while the cases of Dvalishvili and Petrendishvili have been handed to the Tskhinvali district court by the state security committee border service," the de-facto committee said.

Russian-occupied Tskhinvali calls the occupation line between Tskhinvali region and the rest of Georgia "the state border" and treats any cases of line crossing by locals as cases of "illegal border crossing" even though the line is not well differentiated in some areas (*Agenda.ge, June 19, 2018*).

#### 4. Russian deputy FM identifies whereabouts of Tatumashvili's internal organs

Karasin says that Tatumashvili's autopsy was conducted in Vladikavkaz and not in Moscow and that the Vladikavkaz laboratory carried out the investigation to establish the reason of the death of the Georgian soldier.

"You should understand that Russia cannot settle the problem as the issue should be solved by the governments of Georgia and South Ossetia," Karasin told the Georgian Public Broadcaster after the Geneva Internal Discussions held today (*Agenda.ge, June 20, 2018*).

#### **5. Foreign Ministry released statement on 44th round of Geneva International Negotiations**

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the 44th round of internationally mediated Geneva Negotiations, the issues regarding the execution of justice on the murder of Archil Tatunashvili and fulfilment of all the provisions of the ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008 were raised at the session. Georgian Foreign Ministry has released a statement about the 44th round of the Geneva International Negotiations.

According to the statement, the representatives of Georgia handed over the interim conclusion of Levan Samkharauli National Forensics Bureau to co-chairmen and Geneva International Negotiators, which clearly demonstrates the fact of torture and murder of Archil Tatunashvili (*ITV, June 20, 2018*).

#### **6. Two residents of Bershueti village detained by so-called border guards**

19-year-old Nikoloz Javakhishvili and 27-year-old Gocha Berianidze were near a temple in the outskirts of the village. The villagers say that the territory is controlled by the central government of Georgia and the occupation line had not been crossed by Javakhishvili and Berianidze (*IPN.GE, June 21, 2018*).

#### **7. State Minister for Reconciliation terms Tskhinvali statement as another provocation**

The statement of the occupational regime on the demarcation of the non-existent border has no legal or logical grounds, - State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality Ketevan Tsikhelashvili said.

She described creation of a border delimitation and demarcation commission in the so-called "de-facto" parliament of the occupied Tskhinvali region and claiming the village of Tsnelisi as another provocation. Ruslan Tedeev, a member of the Border Delimitation and Demarcation Commission, said that the population expressed concern over the fact that the village Tsnelisi did not fall under the borders of "South Ossetia" (*IPN.GE, June 21, 2018*).

### **❖ Foreign Affairs**

#### **8. After Javelins Georgia to receive further defence weaponry from US, Stingers**

The Acting Defence Minister Levan Izoria told lawmakers today that in the near future Georgia will receive the most modern, man-portable air defence system- FIM-92 Stingers from the United States.

Izoria said that together with Javelins, the new systems will significantly empower the country's self-defence capabilities.

Stinger (FIM-92) is a man-portable air defence system (MANPADS) developed by General Dynamics. The systems provide high accuracy and enhanced air defence capabilities to the armed forces. Raytheon Missile Systems is the main manufacturer of the Stinger. The missile is also produced under licence by EADS.

The shoulder-fired, fire-and-forget Stinger SAM system employs rolling airframe canard control concept. It is controlled by two operators under all weather conditions.

More than 30 Stinger missiles were successfully test fired in 2014.

Such support from the United States indicates that we have the right defence policy," Izoria said.

Izoria stated that his body has a long schedule, covering 2019-2025, over weaponry procurements, which he says will boost the country's self-defence capabilities (*Agenda.ge, June 20, 2018*).

#### **9. Number of Georgian asylum seekers reduced in Germany**

According to the statistics from the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), in May 2018, the number of asylum seekers from Georgia has been reduced. According to the BAMF statistics,

up to 700 Georgians requested refugee status in Germany in April 2018, in May this number decreased to 176.

As for the total statistics of January-May 2018, BAMF reports that 2 263 citizens of Georgia requested refugee status in 5 months (in January-April - 2 087) (*IPN.GE, June 21, 2018*).

#### **10. European Court addresses Georgia with 8 questions and Azerbaijan with 6 questions in connection with journalist Afgan Mukhtarli**

The European Court has addressed Georgia with 8 questions and Azerbaijan with 6 questions in connection with the case of journalist Afgan Mukhtarli, - said lawyer Archil Chopikashvili.

According to him, the countries are obliged to send answers to the questions until 31 July.

According to the lawyer, the states should answer questions of how the journalist's rights enshrined by the Convention were protected. The questions also concern alleged abduction of the journalist.

The lawyer says it will be difficult for the Georgian side to annul the questions of the European Court.

"The questions concern kidnapping, for instance, whether the journalist was forcedly transported to Azerbaijan, whether so-called agents were involved in it or whether his family's rights and security were protected or not," the lawyer explained (*IPN.GE, June 21, 2018*).

#### **11. Cooperation in defense and security with the US will move to a new level - Davit Zalkaliani**

US Senate version of the US Defense Authorization Act describes Georgia as an ally and partner of the United States.

"This confirms strong bipartisan support of the United States Congress and the fact that Georgia has an important part on the United States' political agenda. It is important to note that this act speaks about Georgia in the context of European security, which means that Georgia's security is directly linked to Europe, It is also important to note that this act speaks about NATO's open door policy and directly supports Georgia's integration into NATO.To summarize, this act will forward cooperation in defense and security with the United States to a new level,"- said the Foreign Minister (*IPN.GE, June 21, 2018*).

#### **12. President of Estonia – Georgia, we support you, assist you and please, do not disappoint us**

Giorgi Margvelashvili, President of Georgia, and Maka Chichua, First Lady, hosted President of Estonia Kersti Kaljulaid at the reception dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the first democratic Republic of Georgia held in Talinn. As the Administration of President informs, President Kaljulaid has once again reiterated support for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Georgian state delegation, visiting Estonia, includes: Giorgi Abashishvili – Head of President Margvelashvili's Administration, Davit Rakviashvili – Secretary of the National Security Council of Georgia, Tengiz Pkhaladze – Advisor to President Margvelashvili for Foreign Affairs, Tea Akhvlediani – Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Georgia to Estonia (*IPN.GE, June 22, 2018*).

#### **13. Resolution supporting Georgia submitted to US Congress**

A bipartisan resolution supporting Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova was submitted to the US Congress on June 20. The document affirms United States support to the nations of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova in their effort to retain political sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The resolution says that Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova are sovereign states and voting members of the United Nations (*IPN.GE, June 22, 2018*).

## ❖ Internal Affairs

### **14. Candidate for premiership says number of ministries will decrease**

The Georgian Dream ruling party candidate for Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze announced at today's briefing that the number of ministries will decrease from 14 to 11, which will make government activity more effective and save budget funds.

Bakhtadze did not name his renewed Cabinet of Ministers today as the decrease in the number of ministries requires legal changes.

Bakhtadze said that initially, in the coming two days, parliament will vote on the existing Cabinet of Ministers formally and if the Cabinet gains the parliament's support, they will initiate an amendment to decrease the number of ministries to 11.

Only after the amendment is approved, Bakhtadze said he will name the renewed Cabinet of Ministers (*Agenda.ge, June 18, 2018*).

### **15. Amnesty International: Criminal justice system reform should be new Georgian gov't top priority**

Amnesty International, a London-based non-governmental organisation focused on human rights, says that the reform of the country's criminal justice system, including the creation of an independent mechanism to investigate alleged human rights violations by police, should be the top priority of Georgia's new government.

The public statement of Amnesty International released today, also mentions high-profile cases of two teenage boys killed in Tbilisi last year and Pankisi anti-terrorist raid (*Agenda.ge, June 18, 2018*).

### **16. Acting Corrections Minister: time for small prisons, modern monitoring**

The acting Minister of Corrections of Georgia Kakha Kakhishvili told lawmakers today that a project has been prepared which envisages the building of small prisons in Georgia, which will house 500 prisoners each.

Kakhiashvili says that such prisons are easy to manage and carry lower risks, as dangerous, less dangerous and obedient prisoners are separated (*Agenda.ge, June 19, 2018*).

### **17. Salaries of police officers will increase starting July 1**

The salaries of 13 200 police officers will increase by 250 GEL starting July 1 – Giorgi Gakharia, candidate for post of Minister of Internal Affairs stated during the expanded sitting of the parliamentary Committees of Education, Sports and Healthcare (*ITV, June 19, 2018*).

### **18. PM candidate presents governmental program 'Freedom, fast development, prosperity'**

"When we talk about unfair rules in the economy, the clearest example of this is 2011-2012, when incorrect tax liabilities were imposed on our entrepreneurs and the major part of Georgian companies. Based on this, our first idea is to fully annul the tax arrears of the period before January 1, 2013", Bakhtadze said

This will apply to about 36,000 taxpayers. They have families, energy and opportunity to continue their full participation in the country's economic life", Bakhtadze said (*Agenda.ge, June 19, 2018*).

### **19. Mamuka Bakhtadze offers parliament introduction eco ombudsman's position**

Mamuka Bakhtadze, candidate for post of Prime Minister offered introduction of eco ombudsman's position to the parliament during the meeting of the parliamentary majority.

According to Bakhtadze, the initiative will give the opportunity to protect and develop Georgia's nature together with public sector. "Very important precondition will be created for development of green economy. Green economy will be the main trend of the 21st century," Bakhtadze stated (*ITV, June 19, 2018*).

#### **20. PM candidate: "Inclusive economic growth is our priority"**

In his speech Bakhtadze talked about how his new government sees the development of Georgia in various directions, including in the economic field. Bakhtadze stated that inclusive economic growth is the priority of the government's economic policy.

"This means the involvement of society in the development of economy. Yes, we have a good economic growth rate, but it lacks the component of inclusivity. In the development of the country's economy the private sector takes the leading role and its role should be increased even more. For this reason it is important to further improve the business environment", Bakhtadze said (*Agenda.ge, June 20, 2018*).

#### **21. Bakhtadze's Cabinet Wins Confidence**

The following ministers will be in Bakhtadze's cabinet:

- Minister of Corrections – Kakha Kakhishvili;
- Minister of Culture and Monument Protection – Mikheil Giorgadze
- Minister of Defense – Levan Izoria;
- Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development – Giorgi Cherkezishvili;
- Minister of Education and Science – Mikheil Chkhenkeli;
- Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture – Levan Davitashvili;
- Minister of Finance – Nikoloz Gagua;
- Minister of Foreign Affairs – Davit Zalkaliani;
- Minister of Internal Affairs – Giorgi Gakharia;
- Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia – Sozar Subari;
- Minister of Justice – Tea Tsulukiani;
- Minister of Labor, Health and Social Affairs – Davit Sergeenko;
- Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure – Maia Tskitishvili;
- State Minister for Reconciliation and Civil Equality – Ketevan Tsikhelashvili (*Civil.ge, June 20, 2018*).

#### **22. Prime Minister to present renewed Cabinet and new structure within 3 weeks**

Consultations on structural changes in the Georgian government will begin today – The Minister of Justice Tea Tsulukiani said about it.

Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze will present the renewed Cabinet and new structure of the government within 3 weeks.

As Prime Minister stated the composition of the government will be reshuffled after structural changes. Changes will refer to six ministries (*ITV, June 20, 2018*).

#### **23. National Centre for Diseases Control warns population about summer infections**

Paata Imnadze, Chairman of Scientific Council of National Centre for Diseases Control warns population about infections characteristic for summer season.

Imnadze recommends observance of hygienic norms especially washing of hands often and keeping of food products in a refrigerator.

Imnadze focused on talking about Enterovirus that can follow violation of temperature regime and pollution of food products. He also said that there was no risk of Malaria in the country (*ITV, June 20, 2018*).

#### **24. TI Georgia calls on State Audit Office to look into Mamuka Bakhtadze's statement**

“On June 19, at the presentation of the government program in the Parliament Mamuka Bakhtadze, a candidate for Prime-Minister, stated that the 20,000 GEL, that he donated to the United National Movement in 2012, wasn't his money and his bank account was used ‘only formally’.

According to Georgian legislation, it is illegal to donate money through third person. This violation envisages a fine of twice the amount that was illegally donated. However, on 12th of December of 2012, an Amnesty Act was approved that abolished administrative sanctions for this type of violation. Therefore, no sanction can be imposed in response to this violation.

Nevertheless, this case is connected to a candidate for the highest political position of the country and it is thus important to study it (*IPN.GE, June 21, 2018*).

#### **25. Audit Service to study issue of making donation by Mamuka Bakhtadze to UNM**

A non-governmental sector addressed us. Naturally, we will examine this issue and give an answer within our competence. There are questions, high public interest, and NGOs have officially applied to us. We will examine the issue, examination and give a reasonable answer within our competence, "said Irakli Mekvabishvili (*IPN.GE, June 22, 2018*).

#### **26. New face of Georgian politics to become Finance Minister**

A new face of Georgian politics, living in the US, will presumably be appointed to the post of Finance Minister in the reshuffled Cabinet. According to the information, obtained by InterPressNews, the future Finance Minister has been living in the US for years.

The ruling team members refrain from disclosing the identity of the person, who was offered the post of the Finance Minister in the new Cabinet.

Mamuka Bakhtadze will present his team to the Parliament within 2-3 weeks. Today, the ruling team will continue consultations over the structural and staff changes in the government (*IPN.GE, June 22, 2018*).

#### **27. Ruling team to agree on form and composition of new government**

The members of the ruling team will gather at the office of the Georgian Dream to agree on the form and the composition of the new government.

According to the information, obtained by InterPressNews, the issue of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Resettlement and Refugees is still unsettled. Some members of the ruling team deem that the ministry should be maintained as a separate agency due to political expediency.

It is almost decided that the issues related to construction will be the subject of the competence of the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure

The ruling team members are discussing the possible merge of the Ministry of Culture and Sports and the Ministry of Education and Science. The Ministry of Penitentiary and Probation is planned to be merged with the Ministry of Justice.

The staff changes depend on the structural reorganization of the ministries. Reports say, Davit Zalkaliani will maintain the post of the Foreign Affairs Minister. (*IPN.GE, June 22, 2018*).

**28. Coalition for Independent and Transparent Judiciary calls on government to select Chief Prosecutor through reformed rules**

Directing the process of selection of a new Chief Prosecutor by Tea Tsulukiani will not be free from political influence, - the Coalition for an Independent and Transparent Judiciary said in a June 22 statement. The coalition calls on the to select the new Chief Prosecutor through new, reformed Rules (*IPN.GE, June 22, 2018*).

**29. Irakli Kobakhidze - Ruling team continues discussions over new faces**

"So far we have talked about reorganization. The team continues discussions over new faces. Based on the discussion, the Prime Minister will present the reorganized government and parliament will vote approve it. After that, the discussion will continue with regard to the government members. There is a consensus on the substantial and principled issues in the team, "said Irakli Kobakhidze (*IPN.GE, June 24, 2018*).

**30. Patriarch - human rights should be protected, but traditional values, spiritual-cultural and intellectual capacities should be developed**

On the one hand, human rights should be protected, and at the same time, traditional values, spiritual-cultural and intellectual capacities should be developed in modern life, - His Holiness and Beatitude Iliia II Catholicos- Patriarch of All Georgia said during his speech at the Holy Synod meeting on June 21.

His Holiness said in order the country to reply the current challenges, it's important to take care of territorial integrity, protect the sanctity of language and the strength the belief (*IPN.GE, June 22, 2018*).

**31. Holy Synod says propaganda must be strengthened against abortion**

The Synod deems that Georgia is facing serious challenges in terms of demography and the country has to take decisive steps to improve the situation.

"One of the most important conditions is the timely implementation of programs by the state, which will contribute to the encouragement and support of having many children," the Synod meeting record says (*IPN.GE, June 22, 2018*).

**32. Georgian Orthodox Church is against permission for production of cannabis**

According to the Georgian Patriarchate, the Georgian Orthodox Church has never supported putting drug addicts in a prison, but it believes that the decision of the Constitutional Court of Georgia related to liberalization of drug offenses is a great threat and gives a stimulus to a wide distribution and consumption of drugs (*IPN.GE, June 22, 2018*).

**33. Bishop Shio criticizes media and social networks for lack of love, negligence, cruelty and obscenity**

It is unfortunate that we see lack of love, negligence, cruelty, unsubstantiated allegations, rudeness, obscenity and swearing in the media and social networks, - Bishop Shio said in the Holy Trinity Cathedral.

"No rituals are important if one is not a true Christian inside. The Lord will never fulfill your request or give you only little love due to his generosity. So, think about it. Think of what is to be changed in our life. It is unfortunate that we see lack of love, negligence, cruelty, unsubstantiated allegations, rudeness, obscenity and swearing in the media and social networks", Bishop Shio said (*IPN.GE, June 24, 2018*).

## ❖ Economy and Social Affairs

### 34. Q1 2018: Real growth of GDP in Georgia amounts 5.3%

In the first quarter (Q1) of 2018 the real growth rate of gross domestic product (GDP) amounts to 5.3 percent year-on-year (y/y) in Georgia, says the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

In the reporting period the GDP deflator increased by 4.3 percent and the nominal GDP totalled 9.15 billion GEL.

In Q1 of 2018, the estimated real GDP growth, compared to the same period of the previous year, was registered in the following activities:

- Real Estate, Renting and Business activities (13.4 percent)
- Other Community, Social and Personal Service activities (13.4 percent)
- Mining and Quarrying (11.4 percent)
- Hotels and Restaurants (10.9 percent)
- Electricity, Gas and Water Supply (10 percent)
- Financial Intermediation (9.1 percent)
- Construction (8.7 percent)
- Manufacturing (6.6 percent)
- Education (5.2 percent)
- Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles and personal and household goods (5.1 percent) (*Agenda.ge, June 19, 2018*).

### 35. Georgia's trade with EU worth \$1.34 billion in Jan-May 2018

Georgia is strengthening its trade relations with the European Union (EU), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and other countries.

In January-May 2018, trade turnover with European Union (EU) countries increased by 23 percent year-on-year (y/y) and amounted to \$1.34 billion, shows the data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

Exports were worth \$295.7 million (13.7 percent higher), while imports reached \$1.04 billion (25.9 percent higher).

The share of the EU countries in the external trade turnover of Georgia amounted to 27.4 percent - 23 percent in exports and 29 percent in imports (*Agenda.ge, June 19, 2018*).

### 36. Swiss company Stadler to open regional plant in Georgia

Swiss railcar-manufacturing company Stadler will build a regional plant to build, provide repair and maintenance services and operate rolling stocks in Georgia. InterPressNews was informed by Tbilisi City Hall that today, the Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between Tbilisi City Hall, "Georgian Railway" and the Swiss company "Stadler".

The document was signed by Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze, "Stadler" CEO Peter Spuhler and Director of the "Georgian Railway" Davit Peradze (*IPN.GE, June 22, 2018*).

### 37. Georgian scientists to develop grapevines for prospective Mars colonists

Georgia's ancient legacy of winemaking and aspirations of becoming a regional tech hub will be used to grow grapevines for prospective settlers of Mars.

Scientists will work in the country to create special environment for cultivating vines on the Red Planet in response to a NASA call for submissions.

The project, titled IX Millennium, involves building the first-ever vertical greenhouse lab in the Caucasus to grow grapevines in "closed, controlled" space (*Agenda.ge, June 23, 2018*).