

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

July 27-29

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Date: *July 30, 2018*

❖ Occupied Regions

1. Georgian FM speaks about violation of religious rights in occupied regions

Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani has spoken about the violation of religious rights of Georgian citizens in the country's two occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) at a ministerial in Washington DC yesterday.

At the international event initiated and hosted by US Vice President Mike Pence and State Secretary Mike Pompeo with the participation of more than 40 foreign ministers worldwide, Zalkaliani condemned Russia's illegal actions in Georgia.

The religious rights of Georgian citizens have been blatantly violated by Russia in Georgia's occupied regions since the Russia-Georgia 2008 war. Representatives of the Georgian church are unable to conduct services in the churches which are now under the Russian control," Zalkaliani said (*Agenda.ge, July 27, 2018*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

2. Military Police of US Armed Forces launched investigation against 4 Georgian soldiers deployed in Afghanistan

The case concerns the alleged offense committed on the territory of the military base. Courier's source tells us that several Georgian military are accused of stealing.

According to the source, Georgian soldiers stole items from the military unit and then the items were found in barracks during the search. Some of the items were transferred from the base area and sold at the Kabul market (*Rustavi 2, July 28, 2018*).

3. Ministry of Defense of Georgia is waiting for the materials from American law enforcers

The materials from the Military Police of the American Armed Forces are expected in the Ministry of Defense of Georgia. The case concerns the alleged crimes committed in the military bases in Afghanistan, where several Georgian soldiers are involved. In addition, Military Police of Georgia's Defence ministry will be involved in the investigation (*Rustavi 2, July 29, 2018*).

4. Interior Minister meets head of FBI, discusses cooperation prospects

Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Internal Affairs Giorgi Gakharia met with the director of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation Christopher Wray as part of his official visit to the US yesterday evening to discuss bilateral cooperation in fighting transborder organised crime and cybercrime.

The two officials discussed challenges for Georgia in terms of cybercrime and agreed on priorities in further cooperation involving US support to the MIA for improving investigation standards, as well as the training of Georgian police officers at the FBI Academy (*Agenda.ge, July 29, 2018*).

❖ Internal Affairs

5. Georgian government approves atmospheric air standard

The government of Georgia has approved the atmospheric air standard, which will enter into force starting from August 1, 2018, announces the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture.

We have adopted a European level standard on the marginal norms in the air, on the norms of pollutants in the air. Here are definitions of different types of pollutants, including heavy metals and dioxides... we will have the opportunity to assess atmospheric air according to European principles”, said the Minister of Environment Protection and Agriculture Levan Davitashvili.

At the same time a special web-portal will be launched where citizens will be able to get information about air quality in certain locations online (*Agenda.ge, July 27, 2018*).

6. Villagers in Svaneti Protest against Logging Inspection, Block Road Leading to Mestia

Several hundred residents of villages Khaishi and Chuberi in Georgia’s north-western Zemo Svaneti region blocked yesterday the only road leading to Mestia, the district center, protesting against the authorities’ inspection of wood processing plants in the area.

The protesters gathered in Khaishi early morning on July 26, following what they described to be the authorities’ crackdown on logging plants in the two villages. The incident escalated with the arrival of additional police forces, who formed a cordon in front of the protesters.

Locals, holding wooden sticks, threw stones at the riot police, but the incident was diffused quickly. The standoff ensued, however, with protesters calling for the withdrawal of police officers. Locals said their livelihoods depend on wood-processing plants and urged the authorities to offer alternatives for employment.

The Investigation Service of the Ministry of Finance, which carried out the inspection in the two villages, said similar measures have been implemented all across the country for the purpose of identifying illegal wood processing plants.

The authorities’ wood logging crackdown comes less than a month after village Chuberi was hit with heavy floods. PM Bakhtadze stressed then that the flooding could have been caused by “chaotic logging” and pledged to “deal with the people involved in it.” (*Civil.ge, July 27, 2018*).

7. 98 charged for drug crimes in past 7 months

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia says that 98 individuals have been charged for drug crimes over the past seven months.

In the reported period the ministry seized:

- Up to 15 kg of heroin.
- 7,191 pills of subutex and suboxone.
- 1.4 kg of cocaine.
- Up to 2 kg of MDMA.
- 1.2 kg of hashish.
- Up to 1kg of new psychoactive drugs and pills (*Agenda.ge, July 27, 2018*).

8. NDI’s Pre-Election Assessment: Georgia Approaches Presidential Elections with Uncertainty

According to NDI’s pre-election assessment, “Georgia enters the election with numerous democratic assets,” with fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly, and association “largely respected.” The country, however, “heads into this presidential election with uncertainty.”

"The date still has not been set; the ruling party has not yet determined whether it will field a candidate; the current president has not decided whether or not he will run; parties are divided about the relevance of this election given the limitations of the office, sending a message of ambivalence to the public," NDI's [statement](#) reads (*Civil.ge, July 27, 2018*).

9. Salome Zurabishvili reportedly discusses participation in presidential election with Bidzina Ivanishvili

According to unofficial reports, Salome Zurabishvili has had talks with Bidzina Ivanishvili on the issue of her participation in the forthcoming presidential election.

Zurabishvili allegedly talked to Ivanishvili about the presidential election before Ivanishvili's comeback to politics. As a source told InterPressNews, Zurabishvili has offered Ivanishvili to participate in the presidential election as an independent candidate and is seeking support of Georgian Dream.

The Georgian Dream has not yet made a decision about its participation in the presidential election in October, but reports say many members of the Georgian Dream oppose Zurabishvili's candidacy (*Civil.ge, July 27, 2018*).

10. Six terrorism suspects found guilty by Tbilisi City Court

Six terrorism suspects, who were detained before, during or after the 2017 large-scale counter terrorism raids in Tbilisi and Pankisi, have been found guilty by Tbilisi City Court today.

Ruslan Shavadze and Shoaip Borziev have been found guilty of membership in a terrorist organisation, illegal carrying of firearms for terrorist aims and illegally crossing the border. Both have been sentenced to 13 years in prison.

The remaining four have been charged with support of terrorist activities and providing terrorists with necessary material items.

The court found all four suspects guilty and sent Ruslan Aldamov and Anatoli Berdzenishvili to 11 years in prison, Ramaz Margoshvili to 12 years in prison and Zurab Idoidze to 10 years in prison (*Agenda.ge, July 27, 2018*).

11. Georgia has an ambition to become the first country defeating hepatitis C by 2020

In 2020, when the implementation of the strategy against Hepatitis C will be finalised, Georgia might become the first country successfully defeating the disease, Prime Minister of Georgia, Mamuka Bakhtadze said today at an event devoted to World Hepatitis Day.

"This would be a unique success giving hope to other countries too that despite the complexity of the disease, proper strategy and public mobilisation makes it possible to defeat it," PM Bakhtadze added. He said Georgia has already made steps to address the disease and became 'a unique country in the region and the whole world which succeeded' (*Agenda.ge, July 28, 2018*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

12. Georgia promoted 11 places in World Bank's logistic performance index

The 2018 [Logistics Performance Index](#) scores countries on how efficiently they move goods across and within borders.

In the index Georgia takes 119 place with a score of 2.44 among 160 countries across the world. Georgia improved its position in almost every component of the index:

- Efficiency of the clearance process (i.e., speed, simplicity and predictability of formalities) by border control agencies, including customs – 2.42.
- Quality of trade and transport related infrastructure (e.g., ports, railroads, roads, information technology) – 2.38.
- International shipments - 2.38.
- Competence and quality of logistics services (e.g., transport operators, customs brokers) – 2.26.
- Timeliness of shipments in reaching destination within the scheduled or expected delivery time – 2.95 (*Agenda.ge, July 27, 2018*).

13. Georgian PM presents Green Economy concept

The ‘Green Economy’ strategy presented to public by the Prime Minister of Georgia yesterday evening focuses on environmental protection to improve the ecology across the country and save natural resources for the next generations.

The government has two priorities in this strategy: neutralise the results of previously careless environmental management and preserve existing natural resources in a way to ensure that Georgia is perceived as a country with a green economy (*Agenda.ge, July 28, 2018*).

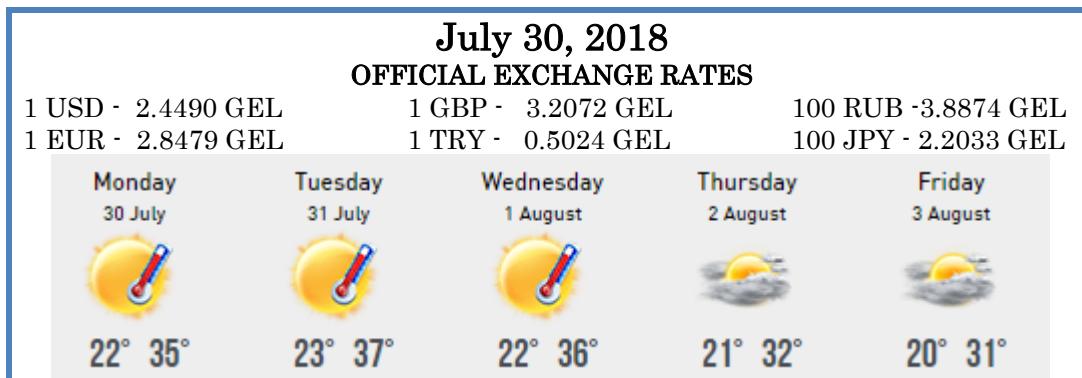
❖ Sports and Culture

14. Georgian tennis player wins German Open Championships

Georgian tennis player Nikoloz Basilashvili beat Argentinian Leonardo Meyer in the final of German Open Championships in Hamburg (6: 4, 0: 6, 7: 5). He earned 349 200 euros and 500 points.

After this win Nikoloz Basilashvili is ranked the world’s 35th tennis player.

Additional Information



- Movie Events - English Sessions - [Tickets](#)
- Friends of Museum (Membership to access Georgian National Museums For free of charge after one payment) - [Membership](#)
- Marjanishvili Theatre – [Events and Tickets](#)
- Rustaveli Theatre - [Events and Tickets](#)
- Opera and Ballet – [Events and Tickets](#)
- Concerts – [Events and Tickets](#)
- Sports – [Events and Tickets](#)