

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

July 30-August 1

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Tskhinvali Region

1. Anatoly Bibilov: Bashar Assad will visit South Ossetia by all means

"On behalf of our people, I invited Assad to our Republic and he accepted this invitation. However, it is not known yet whether he will arrive for the 10th anniversary of the recognition of independence," Bibilov said.

He said that Assad expressed willingness to pay a visit "South Ossetia", while the exact date of the visit depends on the situation in Syria and Assad's busy work schedule (*IPN.Ge, July 31, 2018*).

2. So-called border guards kidnap Georgian citizen from village Sakorintlo

As InterPressNews was told by the State Security Service, the person was detained for illegal crossing of the so-called border. EUMM has already been informed of the incident and the hotline has been activated (*IPN.Ge, July 31, 2018*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

3. Finance Minister, Ambassador of Japan discuss Georgia-Japan relations

Minister of Finance of Georgia Ivane Machavariani met with the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to Georgia, Tadaharu Uehara, the Ministry of Finance told InterPressNews on Monday.

At the introductory meeting, the sides discussed the issues of cooperation between Georgia and Japan and implemented and pending reforms of the Government of Georgia (*IPN.Ge, July 30, 2018*).

4. German Chancellor to pay official visit to Georgia

Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze recently met with German Ambassador to Georgia Heike Peitsch.

As InterPressNews was informed by the Government's Administration, the parties discussed a potential visit by the German Chancellor to Georgia, bilateral relations and the issues of European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

The Prime Minister noted that any official visit by Chancellor Merkel to Georgia (which he hoped would take place in the near future) would be a very important event in the development of bilateral relations (*IPN.Ge, July 31, 2018*).

5. US Embassy releases statement on the 10th anniversary of the August war

"Next week marks 10 years since Russia's armed forces poured across international border with Georgia, attempting to change those borders by force. Several thousand Russian forces moved into the city of Gori and other areas far from the conflict zone, such as Georgia's main port of Poti, far from the main area fighting.

Russia also seized the last Georgian-held portion of Abkhazia, where there had been no fighting. Russia's assault on Georgia had begun as its army crossed an internationally recognized boundary in an attempt to change by force the borders of another country.

Russia still occupies Georgian territory. We again call on Russia to withdraw its forces to pre-war positions, as it agreed in 2008", reads the statement (*IPN.Ge, July 31, 2018*).

6. "Noble Partner 2018" opens in Georgia

The multinational exercise "Noble Partner 2018" has officially opened in Vaziani military airfield today.

"Noble Partner 2018", which is held for the fourth time in Georgia, is a Georgian Armed Forces and US Army Europe led exercise, which intends to enhance participating nations' readiness and interoperability. US generals have arrived in Georgia in connection with this day (*IPN.Ge, August 1, 2018*).

7. Defence Minister - "Noble Partner 2018" is the symbol of our joint worthy partnership

"Noble Partner" is the result of our bravery and self-sacrificing work of our soldiers. This training is a symbol of our joint worthy partnership, - Georgian Defense Minister Levan Izoria said during his speech at the opening ceremony of the international exercise "Noble Partner" 2018 (*IPN.Ge, August 1, 2018*).

8. High-ranking guests to visit Georgia on 10th anniversary of 2008 Russia-Georgia war

The Foreign Ministers of Poland (Jacek Chapatovic), Lithuania (Linus Linkevičius), Latvia (Edgars Rinkēvičs) and Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine (Pavlo Rozenko) will visit Georgia on August 6-7, on the 10th anniversary of the 2008 Russia-Georgia war.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, these visits are an expression of their support and friendship towards Georgia (*IPN.Ge, August 1, 2018*).

❖ Internal Affairs

9. Georgian Dream alleges Adigeni incident had no political motives

As Simon Paruanshvili, Chairman of the Adigeni organization of the European Georgia party, told InterPressNews earlier, Zurab Shainidze, a majoritarian MP of the European Georgia, was physically abused in Adigeni. Shainidze was abused by Georgian dream supporters and the incident was not accidental.

"The political union condemns all violence and rules out any political retribution. We hope that the investigation into the incident will establish the truth and the offenders will be punished properly," the statement reads

Ministry of Internal Affairs started investigation over this case (*IPN.Ge, July 30, 2018*).

10. Half of vehicles in Georgia are more than 20 years old

Almost half of the vehicles in Georgia are more than 20 years old. According to the Ministry of Economy of Georgia, the whole fleet in Georgia consists of 899,600 cars. The number of vehicles up to 3 years is 1,3% (11 695), 2,3% (20 691) cars are 4 - 6 years old, 5,4% (48 578) - 7 - 10 years old, 45% (404 820) - 11 - 20 years old and 46% (413 816) - more than 20 years old (*IPN.Ge, July 30, 2018*).

11. 46 people died and more than 1800 people were injured in car accidents during first half of 2018

“A few days ago, we heard a new transport policy from Tbilisi Mayor and I can positively assess it. In general, I can say that this vision is really European one, which will promote construction of a European city. The only issue I would add [to the policy] is to make more emphasis on the road safety issue. Safety of pedestrians as well as arrangement of infrastructure was mentioned in passing and I think that there is a need of making a separate presentation. According to the statistics, as a result of car accidents 46 people died and more than 1800 people were injured during the six months of the current year. The number was smaller last year, when 43 died and less than 1800 were injured in car accidents,” Eka Laliashvili said (*IPN.Ge, July 30, 2018*).

12. Those, who call themselves “European Georgia” have caused all troubles in the country – Grigol Vashadze says

“Those, who call themselves “European Georgia”, have caused all troubles in the country, then they left the party and now, they think people have forgotten who committed these mistakes and crimes. Last year, the “European Georgia” and the “Georgian Dream” spent a lot of money in local elections last year, however, they failed to avoid the second round of elections,” Grigol Vashadze said.

With this statement candidate for President’s post from United National Movement, Vashadze had violated so called Brussels Agreement according to which UNM and European Georgia have agreed not to insult each other during presidential campaign (*IPN.Ge, July 30, 2018*).

13. Georgian Constitutional Court abolishes sanctions against marijuana use

The court discussed a joint complaint, filed by Presidential candidate of “Girchi” Zurab Japaridze and member of the party Vakhtang Megrelishvili, involving cancellation of administrative penalty for using marijuana (*IPN.Ge, July 30, 2018*).

14. Consumption of marijuana is fully legalized in Georgia - Zurab Japaridze

"I would like to congratulate everybody on the Constitutional Court ruling. By this decision Georgia became a more free country. Administrative punishment on consumption of marijuana was cancelled by the decision of the Constitutional Court. It means that marijuana use is fully legalized in Georgia, "said Zurab Japaridze (*IPN.Ge, July 30, 2018*).

15. Constitutional Court releases statement regarding ruling on legalization of marijuana consumption

The Court says that consumption of marijuana is an action protected by the right to free development. “The court considers that imposition of liability for marijuana use is justified when these facts take place in educational institutions, in some public places, for example in public transport, in presence of minors, etc., "the statement reads (*IPN.Ge, July 30, 2018*).

16. Akaki Zoidze supports ban on marijuana use in juveniles

The Constitutional Court told us that we no longer had any legislative leverage to enforce the legislative norms on marijuana ban. Of course, this applies to consumption only, - Akaki Zoidze, the Chairperson of the Healthcare Committee, said on the PalitraNews TV (*IPN.Ge, July 31, 2018*).

17. Archbishop Andrea Jagmaidze terms Constitutional Court’s decision as betrayal

I think the Constitutional Court should be abolished, - archbishop Andrea Jagmaidze said when commenting on the abolition of sanctions on the use of marijuana.

According to him, four judges cannot neglect the will of 4 million citizens by their incomprehensible logic (*IPN.Ge, July 31, 2018*).

18. Salome Zurabishvili has the highest chance of winning in the first round - Eka Beselia

"I have this feeling especially when I look at the candidates who were named - she is a woman who has gone through many political difficulties. She occupied a leading position in a very difficult, dangerous and responsible period. It is not decisive how a politician smiles. Biography, practice and the state vision are decisive factors," Eka Beselia told journalists (*IPN.Ge, July 31, 2018*).

19. Giorgi Margvelashvili is not interested in the long-term party-political activity - Davit Usupashvili

"The meeting between me and the President ended with an agreement that I will participate in the presidential marathon. Giorgi Margvelashvili is not interested in long-term party-political activity. Since he cannot see himself in the party, I am undertaking the entire responsibility", Usupashvili said (*IPN.Ge, July 31, 2018*).

20. Working group to be set up to review creation of Security Council

As InterPressNews was informed, the Working Group will be composed of representatives of executive agencies, members of the parliament, and experts to prepare the relevant legislative draft. The subject of the discussion is establishment of a new agency under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister, which will be involved in the security policy planning process and will coordinate elaboration of national-level conceptual documents (*IPN.Ge, August 1, 2018*).

21. NDI – 74 % of respondents do not support legalization of marijuana

According to the survey of the United States National-Democratic Institute (NDI), 74% of respondents are against legalization of marijuana in Georgia. The survey was fielded between June 23 and July 8 and 2 409 respondents were interviewed in all. It has a margin of error plus, minus 1.9% (*IPN.Ge, August 1, 2018*).

22. NDI – 81 % of respondents support Georgia's EU membership

According to the survey of the United States National-Democratic Institute (NDI), 81% of respondents support Georgia's EU membership. According to the same survey, 12% are against it, while 6% could not answer the question (*IPN.Ge, August 1, 2018*).

23. NDI – Support for Georgia's NATO membership increased

The poll shows that 75% of respondents support Georgia's integration into the Alliance, up from 60% in previous survey.

According to the survey, 17% of respondents are against the country's NATO membership, while 8% could not answer the question (*IPN.Ge, August 1, 2018*).

24. NDI – 20% of respondents would vote for Georgian Dream, 11% - for National Movement of elections were held tomorrow

20% of respondents would vote for the Georgian Dream if parliamentary elections were held tomorrow; 11% said they would vote for the United National Movement, 4% - for European Georgia and 3% - for the Labour Party.

30% of respondents said they did not have the answer, 15 % said they would support none of the parties, while 10% refused to answer (*IPN.Ge, August 1, 2018*).

25. Presidential elections to be held on October 28

"This decision has been made in agreement with the Prime Minister of Georgia. A relevant resolution will be sent to the Prime Minister today and then the relevant procedures will be implemented, "said Margvelashvili (*IPN.Ge, August 1, 2018*).

26. CEC approves schedule of election activities for upcoming presidential elections

"The Presidential Elections will be held on October 28, 2018. The decree on the appointment of elections, issued by the President of Georgia with the counter-signature of the Prime Minister, has entered into force today.

The CEC session was held today. At the sitting, the CEC approved the schedule of election activities, which describes election-related activities and terms in details. The Commission also identified various important procedures related to the elections," the CEC said.

According to the Central Election Commission, the CEC has also set a minimum number of signatures required for nomination of a candidate to the presidential elections. The nomination of a presidential candidate by the political union and the initiative group of voters shall be confirmed by signatures of no less than 25 923 voters.

CEC spokesperson Ana Mikeladze said at the briefing that the process of registration of candidates and initiative groups begins from today. She said that organizations and media outlets can apply to relevant election commissions for accreditation.

"As for the rules of conducting pre-election campaign (agitation) as well as prohibition of use of budgetary funds, official title, position or authority - these norms will take effect 60 days before the polling day, according to the election legislation, "said Ana Mikeladze (*IPN.Ge, August 1, 2018*).

27. President Margvelashvili says he is not ready to talk about his participation in elections

"It's too hard when you are the first person of the country, where there is so much hardship, and cannot help your citizens, you feel empathy for. I will inform you about my decision when I consider it necessary," the President said (*IPN.Ge, August 1, 2018*).

28. Georgia's fifth president Grigol Vashadze will enter the President's Palace – Saakashvili

"On October 28, 2018, the Georgian people will shake off leeches from their body, will escape from the monster and the swamp. And it will start on a path to success...

In connection with St. George's Day, Georgia's fifth President Grigol Vashadze and First Lady Nino Ananiashvili will enter the President's Palace," Saakashvili wrote (*IPN.Ge, August 1, 2018*).

29. "Georgian Dream" has not made decision regarding Salome Zurabishvili - Irakli Kobakhidze

"We need discussions and these discussions will be held within both the political council and the majority format and we will make a decision based on it. It does not mean that we have decided and do not speak about it, we must first take the decision on our participation in the presidential election and then we will talk about the content of the decision, "said Irakli Kobakhidze (*IPN.Ge, August 1, 2018*).

30. Irakli Kobakhidze - We never rely on NDI surveys

"We have our internal studies, and predictions are based on it. There are some questions related to CRRC [the Caucasus Resource Research Centers, fielded the survey]. We never rely on NDI surveys. We conduct the surveys, which eventually coincides with the election results. When you take 56% in the elections and this indicator does not appear in the survey, it is easy to explain," Irakli Kobakhidze said (*IPN.Ge, August 1, 2018*).

31. Cancellation of administrative penalty for the use of marijuana has created a legal vacuum - Parliament's Chairman

"It creates a serious legal vacuum, which needs to be filled and a strict regulation should become a way out. We did not share the position that was expressed in the decision of the Constitutional Court. We need to take measures within our competence. The parliament will work very hard in August, in

order to eradicate the vacuum, created by the decision of the Constitutional Court, "Kobakhidze said (IPN.Ge, August 1, 2018).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

32. Economic growth was 4% in June

The estimated real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate was 4.0 percent year-on-year in June, according to the Georgian statistics office (Geostat). Geostat says that an average estimated real GDP growth amounted to 6.0 percent for the Q2 2018 and 5.7 percent for the first half of 2018 y/y (IPN.Ge, July 30, 2018).

Additional Information

August 2, 2018
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.4482 GEL	1 GBP - 3.2133 GEL	100 RUB -3.9056 GEL
1 EUR - 2.8607 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4968 GEL	100 JPY - 2.1873 GEL

Thursday 2 August	Friday 3 August	Saturday 4 August	Sunday 5 August	Monday 6 August
				
20° 33°	20° 32°	20° 29°	20° 31°	21° 30°

- **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](#)**