

# DAILY NEWS REPORT ON GEORGIA

Date: *March 12-18, 2018*

## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Abkhazia Region

#### 1. Another Georgian man detained for crossing occupation line with Abkhazia

A Georgian citizen Giorgi Zarandia has been illegally detained for allegedly crossing the occupation line between Georgia and its Russian-occupied region of Abkhazia. The de-facto security service of occupied Abkhazia said Zarandia, 34, was detained by so-called Russian and Abkhazian border guards in the region of Gali (*the most Georgian populated region of Abkhazia*) (*March 14*).

#### 2. Georgia condemns opening of Russian polling stations in occupied Abkhazia, Tskhinvali

Georgian Foreign Minister has released a statement condemning the opening of 33 polling stations in the Russian occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) for today's Russian presidential elections. "This is yet another clear example of occupation of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali and an illegal step towards annexation", the ministry said (*March 18*).

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

#### 3. Russian MFA: Tatumashvili's case is beyond scope of Russian-Georgian agenda

The Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation has responded to Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili's recent appeal to act jointly to resolve the complicated situation concerning Georgian citizen Archil Tatumashvili's death in occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) (*March 13*).

#### 4. Irakli Kobakhidze: Russia not responding to our pragmatic attitude with same position

Kobakhidze said that it was necessary to find the ways for resolution of the problem. "We are doing our best to resolve Georgian-Russian conflict through peaceful means. This has been our pragmatic attitude since 2012. Russia should also portray constructive approach," Kobakhidze said (*March 13*).

#### 5. Zurab Abashidze: Russia tries to stand aside from tragic fact of Archil Tatumashvili's death

According to Abashidze, Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili also made a step and applied to Russian authorities with the request to resolve the problem. "However, Russia tries to stand aside from the tragic fact of Archil Tatumashvili's death and only expresses concern. Russia will not evade the responsibility of what had happened," Abashidze stated (*March 13*).

#### 6. Giorgi Kvirikashvili – Russia's response leaves space for dialog

According to PM, the country needs prospect for stable life. "There is format of Geneva internationally mediated negotiations and we should take steps that may bring some progress," PM claimed. Russian Foreign Ministry responded to the March 9 statement of Prime Minister Kvirikashvili on March 12. Foreign Ministry of Russia said that Moscow was pleased with the attitude expressed by Georgian PM in the statement (*March 14*).

#### 7. Bibilov says speculation around Tatumashvili's death is linked with pre-election campaign in Georgia

"Today, there is an acute political struggle against the background of the presidential elections in Georgia. Various political forces are trying to score political points at the expense of populist

statements and actions. We know that these points are easily scored through using nationalism and revanchist expressions,” Bibilov said (*March 13*).

## ❖ Foreign Affairs

### **8. Davit Bakradze - 'Playing games' with Geneva format is dangerous**

“We must understand that any discussion on revision of the Geneva format means opening the Pandora Box, which will greatly benefit Russia as Russia will try to put an end to Geneva format discussions and to use Karasin-Abashidze’s format as an alternative”, – Bakradze said (*March 12*).

### **9. Russian Foreign Ministry responds to Giorgi Kvirikashvili's statement**

“Giorgi Kvirikashvili’s aspiration to make progress in the Geneva International Discussions raises hopes for the constructiveness of the Georgian side within the next round of negotiations, scheduled for March (*March 12*).

### **10. Shio Mujiri - No further communication held with Russian Patriarchate on repatriation of Archil Tatumashvili's body**

“It was said that the body would be returned in the nearest future, but unfortunately it has not happened yet. We pray for returning these occupied and conquered territories” – Shio Mujiri, Patriarch’s locum tenens told journalists when visiting the Tatumashvili’s family (*March 12*).

### **11. MFA- We hope that during next round of Geneva talks we will take specific steps for leaving deadlock**

“We hope that during the next round of Geneva talks we will be able to take specific steps for leaving the deadlock we have been staying for many years and for peaceful resolution of conflict, – Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia said in response to the statement of Russian Foreign Ministry (*March 13*).

### **12. Archil Tatumashvili’s murder case - Kutashvili and Pavliashvili questioned till late night**

The persons who were detained along with Archil Tatumashvili killed in the Tskhinvali prison have given testimonies to the law enforcers for the second time, although they do not make public statements. Presumably, they know how Archil Tutunashvili was killed (*March 13*).

### **13. Georgian President meets with NDI and IRI heads in Washington**

The Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili has met with the heads of American non-profit organisations in Washington - the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI) which conduct polls worldwide. “The visit of President Margvelashvili to Washington aims at strengthening US support for Georgia's security and promoting Georgia's NATO integration process,” the President’s press office reported (*March 13*).

### **14. New Eastern Partnership cooperation set-up launches**

A new institutional set-up of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative has been launched in Brussels in the presence of senior officials from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and the EU Member States. The new structure for institutional cooperation between the Eastern Partnership countries and the EU Member States is more compact and focuses on the efficient delivery of reforms that bring real results to citizens (*March 13*).

### **15. Georgian President discusses security issues with US Senators, Congressmen**

Meeting with Congressman Gerry Connolly, President Margvelashvili thanked the US politician for supporting Georgia's territorial integrity and the country's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. "On my way to meet Congressman Gerry Connolly; We will discuss our countries' strategic partnership; Situation in Georgia's occupied territories will be once again raised on the meeting" Margvelashvili shared on his Twitter. He believes the consolidation of international support for Georgia is vital (*March 14*).

#### **16. Georgia first country in the region with statistical data openness**

Georgia ranks 38<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries in the world and is the first country in the region in the third report of the Open Data Inventory, which contains statistical data on openness and a full coverage of issues reported on by the official websites of statistics offices. After Georgia is coming Armenia 43<sup>rd</sup> and Azerbaijan 49<sup>th</sup>. Turkey scored 51<sup>st</sup> and Russia 55<sup>th</sup>. Japan is ranked 35<sup>th</sup> (*March 14*).

#### **17. Jens Stoltenberg – It will be incorrect to speculate about conditions under which Georgia may become NATO member**

Luke Coffey, Head of Heritage International recommended that Georgia become a member of NATO without activation of the 5th Article on the country's occupied territories. NATO Chief underlined that he had called on NATO member states for increasing support to Georgia. "NATO supports ongoing reforms in Georgia. Georgia has accrual progress on path to NATO membership," Stoltenberg stated (*March 14*).

#### **18. Ian Kelly - Georgia will become member of NATO, but I don't know when**

"If somebody had asked me how long it would take Georgia to become independent in 1976 when I first came to Georgia, I would have looked at that person as if he were insane. But, in less than 20 years, Georgia did become independent. Let me say that Georgia will become a member of NATO, but I don't know when." – said Kelly (*March 14*).

#### **19. UK Foreign Office releases video about pattern of Russian aggression**

Foreign Office of the United Kingdom has released a video showing a pattern of Russian state aggression including against Georgia. The video lists Russian aggressive activities as follows: Aleksander Litvinenko deliberately poisoned in London; Russia shows blatant disregard for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity; Russia illegally annexes Crimea from Ukraine. Russian cyber-attack on German Parliament; Russia hacks Danish Defense and Foreign Ministries; Russia interferes in Montenegro elections; Campaign of cyber espionage and disruption against Ukraine's government and financial institutions; The Russian military continues to violate national space of several countries (*March 14*).

#### **20. Theresa May – We have constantly called on Russia for pullout of troops from Georgia's occupied territories**

"I want to confirm that the British government has constantly called on Putin's Administration for pullout of troops from Georgia's occupied territories," May stated. The UK would also cut off all top-level ties with Russia, and would send no ministers or royals to the World Cup (*March 14*).

#### **21. Georgia supports the British people and the government - Mikheil Janelidze**

"We strongly condemn the attack in Salisbury and we fully support our strategic partner, the United Kingdom, and the process of establishing the truth," - writes Mikheil Janelidze on twitter (*March 15*).

#### **22. NATO Gen-Sec highlights Russian occupation of Georgian lands in his annual report**

“This behaviour includes the illegal annexation of Crimea and military support to separatists in Eastern Ukraine. The military presence in Moldova and Georgia against these countries’ will. Meddling in Montenegro and elsewhere in the Western Balkans; attempts to subvert democratic elections and institutions and the military build-up from the North of Europe to the Middle East,” Stoltenberg stated (*March 15*).

#### **23. 4 years since annexation of Crimea: Georgia supports Ukraine’s territorial integrity**

Georgia supports the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine within its internationally-recognized borders and condemns the so-called referendum conducted in Crimea four years ago, Georgian Foreign Ministry said in a statement released today on the fourth anniversary of the annexation of the Crimea (*March 16*).

#### **24. Venice Commission praises Georgia’s constitutional reforms in final report**

“The Venice Commission issues another positive opinion and states that the Constitutional reform completes the evolution of the political system of Georgia to the Parliamentary system and is a step forward in improving and consolidating the Constitutional arrangement of the country on the basis of the fundamental principles of democracy and the rule of law (*March 17*).

### **❖ Internal Affairs**

#### **25. Tbilisi City Hall terminates contract with C.T. Park**

Kaladze named irresponsibility and inadequate fulfillment of public duties on part of the Company that causes problems to parking system and violates citizens’ rights as the reason for cancellation of the agreement. Tbilisi Transport Company will take functions of C.T Park before establishment of a new parking system in the city (*March 13*).

#### **26. Georgia’s Patriarchate – Mounting of new discrediting wave is planned**

According to Michael Botkovei, Secretary of Georgian Patriarch the campaign is linked to the standpoint of Patriarchate over drug policy, gambling and LGBT persons. Also based on the statement, certain forces are not pleased with the high authority and rating of Catholicos-Patriarch. “We appeal to all those who care for the country and the church, to act reasonably and stand aside from the slander, provocations and deliberate evil actions. I think it will soon be revealed, in fact, what is the purpose of this campaign and what it serves”, says the statement (*March 14*).

#### **27. Irakli Okruashvili – Saakashvili told me that Vano Merabishvili did what I failed to do**

Irakli Okruashvili, former defense minister of Georgia gave evidence to Prosecutor’s Office into case of physical abuse of businessman and former MP Valery Gelashvili in 2005. Okruashvili said that former President Mikheil Saakashvili asked him to physically assault Gelashvili seeing an ally in him and hoping that the information would not leak. Okruashvili recalled the meeting with former president at Shavnabada. He confirmed that the attack was organized. “Two month later Saakashvili and I met again and Saakashvili told me that what I failed to do was done well by Vano Merabishvili (former prime minister),” Okruashvili told the court (*March 14*).

#### **28. Meeting in Georgian Dream’s office - majority denies discussing governmental changes**

The meeting was attended by the Prime Minister, the Chairman of the Parliament and the members of the Cabinet of Ministers. Members of the parliamentary majority say that discussion was about of the legislative body in the next week. They discussed the initiative and constitutional amendments

quotation of women in the Parliament. According to this initiative, every party will be demanded to include certain amount of people in the Parliamentary Election List (*March 15*).

**29. Another meeting of the parliamentary majority with the Prime Minister ended late last night**  
The ruling party's meeting in the office of the "Georgian Dream" party ended late last night. Representatives of the parliamentary majority who came out of the session asserted that the topic of the conversation was not a resolution on Tatumashvili (*March 16*).

**30. Ski-lift accident in Gudauri leaves 11 with minor injuries**  
A ski-lift accident in Gudauri has left 11 with minor and moderate injuries, the Mountain Resorts Development Company of the Ministry of Economy of Georgia has reported. No fatalities have been recorded. Four of the 11 have already been discharged from hospital. Those injured were immediately transported to a local hospital by three emergency brigades. The other seven will receive treatment in Tbilisi. Officials said none of the individuals have life-threatening injuries. All the treatment and transportation expenses will be covered by the Ministry of Economy (*March 16*).

**31. International experts arrive in Georgia to investigate Gudauri ski-lift accident**  
Georgian Minister of Economy Dimitri Kumsishvili wrote on his official Facebook page that the government welcomes an impartial investigation of the accident to ensure both the safety of citizens and tourists and to protect the international reputation of Georgia (*March 18*).

## ❖ Economy and Social Affairs

**32. Georgia attracts \$1.86 billion in foreign direct investments in 2017**  
FDI by major economic sectors in 2017 was the following: Transports and communications \$527.1 million, Financial sector \$304.3 million, Construction \$294.6 million (*March 12*).

**33. Azerbaijan's President: "Investment climate in Georgia is the best"**  
"Trade turnover between Georgia and Azerbaijan is increasing year after year and Azerbaijan is Georgia's top investor country, which indicates that the investment climate in your country is one of the best", Aliyev told Georgia's Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili, who started his official visit to Azerbaijan today (*March 12*).

**34. Georgia's external trade up 16.3 % in January-February**  
Georgia's external trade grew by 16.3% this year and reached \$1.68 billion in January-February 2018, says the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat). This year the value of Georgia's exports increased by 25.5% to \$446.4 million, while the value of imports also increased 13.3% to \$1.23 billion with respect to January-February 2017, said Geostat (*March 13*).

**35. Bruno Balvanera of EBRD: "Investors are really interested in Georgia"**  
The amount of investments has really increased and investors are really interested in Georgia, but the point is that these are big investment projects, such as gas pipelines, railways, hydro power plants, and therefore it is a long-term aim that will make itself felt in the long run, but we really want to say that there is a real interest in Georgia", Balvanera said after opening a seminar on Building SME Business Compliance and Integrity (*March 13*).

**36. Jan-Feb 2018: Passenger traffic at Georgian airports increases 34.38%**

More specifically: Tbilisi International Airport served 433,202 passengers - a 37.54% increase y/y, Kutaisi International Airport served 48,890 passengers - 6.69% increase, Batumi International Airport served 18,129 passengers - 67.06% increase (*March 13*).

### **37. Georgia avoids double taxation with Saudi Arabia**

This means that people or businesses working abroad in either country will not have to pay taxes in both countries, and will instead pay income and capital taxes in only one. The deal was signed in Saudi Arabia, where Georgia's Finance Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze is on official visit (*March 15*).

### **38. European Parliament approves €45 million in financial aid to Georgia**

The European Parliament has endorsed a European Commission's proposal to provide further macro-financial assistance worth of €45 million to help Georgia cover part of its external financing needs for the period of 2017-2020 (*March 15*).

### **39. Georgia receives almost \$114m in remittances in February 2018**

Russia (\$33.4 million), Italy (\$14.1 million) and Greece (\$13.4 million) were the largest remittance senders in February 2018 (*March 15*).

### **40. EU allocates 11.8 million GEL to fund 8 new civil society projects in Georgia**

EU is allocating 11.8 million GEL (about \$4.79m/€3.89\*) to fund eight new projects for 2018-2020 in Georgia in order to support civil society and human rights in the country. Focus areas include support to vulnerable groups like people with disabilities or mental disorders, children and economically challenged people, as well as support to active civic participation (*March 16*).

## **❖ Culture and Sport**

### **41. Tbilisi, Batumi set for European Chess Championships for men and women**

Over 300 contestants are about to converge in the Black Sea city of Batumi for nearly two weeks of competition within the European Individual Chess Championships, before European Women's Rapid and Blitz Chess Championships take place in capital Tbilisi. The former tournament is set to run during March 16-28 and host 311 players from 34 countries. The roster of competitors will include 30 entrants from Georgia (*March 13*).

### **42. Medieval David Gareji complex named among Europe's most endangered sites**

The David Gareji Monasteries and Hermitage, one of Georgia's most cherished cultural heritage sites, has been included on a list of Europe's seven most endangered monuments of this year, facilitating upcoming international efforts for its preservation (*March 15*).

### **43. Georgia defeats Romania, wins Rugby Europe Championship**

Georgia's national rugby team has won the Rugby Europe Championship in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi today. The Georgian 'Lelos' handed a defeat to Romania 25 to 16 at Dinamo Arena (*March 18*).