

WEEKLY NEWS REPORT ON GEORGIA

Date: *March 26-April 1, 2018*

❖ Occupied Regions

1. **Georgian PM: Tatumashvili is a hero, his murderers must face the law**

"I think the more time that passes, the more everyone will realize what a great hero Archil Tatumashvili is", Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili said at today's government session. Georgian soldier Archil Tatumashvili, who died in unclear circumstances in occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region a month ago, was laid to rest with the military honours last Saturday (*Agenda.ge, March 27*).

2. **Kakha Imnadze - Occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions became territories where murder and torture remain unpunished**

Occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions became territories where murder and torture remain unpunished, – Kakha Imnadze, Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations made the regarding statement.

Imnadze delivered at the open debates of UN Security Council on topic: Collective Action to Improve United Nations Peacekeeping Operations.

He stressed on the importance of peacekeeping operations in global security and changes in coping of facing challenges. Kakha Imnadze talked about experience when UNOMIG mission was stopped in 2009 that became a dangerous precedent in the history (*Agenda.ge, March 29*).

3. **Gregory Karasin – We failed to agree on text of Agreement on Non-Use of Force**

"Unfortunately, we failed to agree on text of the agreement. The 2008 agreement is differently perceived in Tbilisi, Tskhinvali, Sokhumi and Moscow," Karasin stated.

The 43rd round of Geneva talks took place on March 27-28. Davit Dondua, Deputy Georgian Foreign Minister headed up the Georgian delegation (*Agenda.ge, March 28*).

4. **Gregory Karasin – Statement of Georgian PM was targeted at positive move forward of Abkhazia and Ossetia**

The latest statement of Georgian Prime Minister was targeted at positive move forward of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, we also heard harsh statements of the parliament – Gregory Karasin, Deputy Russian Foreign Minister told journalists after completion of the 43rd round of internationally mediated negotiations in Geneva.

Karasin underlined that he had impression that it was high time that official Tbilisi chose to remain rigid or flexible (*Agenda.ge, March 28*).

5. **Dondua – Geneva format needs political will to ensure security**

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Dondua talked with the media after the end of Geneva discussions.

"Geneva format does not need changes, it needs political will to ensure security in the region. There was not talk about change of the format at the meeting."

"Russian federation avoided discussion of non-use of force agreement. They have made several inadequate questions and succeeded."

“We have not heard anything from Russian federation, while representative of Tskhinvali Region had made demagogic statement.” – told Dondua to his Journalists (*Agenda.ge, March 28*).

6. Gov't boosts financial support for internally displaced families living near occupation line

The Government of Georgia, with the help of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), will finance greenhouse farming for internally displaced families living near the occupation line, the Georgian Ministry of Refugees has stated (*Agenda.ge, March 30*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

7. Visit of Georgian delegation to Geneva continues

The visit of the Georgian delegation to Geneva under the leadership of the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia continues. Irakli Kobakhidze met with Vice-President of the German Bundestag in the framework of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly. Claudia Roth once again reiterated Germany's clear support towards Georgia.

- ✓ Bilateral meetings in Geneva were also held with Singapore, Bolivia, Japan and Austrian parliamentary delegations (*Rusatvi2, March 26*).

8. Georgian Parliamentary Speaker: Russia committing numerous grave human rights violations

Georgian Parliamentary Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze has addressed the members of the 138th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Geneva, Switzerland over issues concerning migrants and refugees.

IPU is a global organization of national parliaments, which works with parliaments to safeguard peace and drive positive democratic change through political dialogue and concrete action (*Agenda.ge, March 26*).

9. Georgian, Polish Presidents meet in Tbilisi

President of Poland Andrzej Duda has paid a transit visit to Georgia after his recent trip to Afghanistan. Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili met his Polish counterpart at Tbilisi International Airport. The two presidents discussed issues of bilateral cooperation between Georgia and Poland.

They also discussed the current situation in Georgia's Russian occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia). (*Agenda.ge, March 27*).

10. Georgia and Israel to establish joint IT ventures

Georgia's Economy Minister Dimitry Kumsishvili spoke with representatives of Israeli companies yesterday during his official visit to Israel about economic trends in Georgia, ongoing and scheduled reforms as well as the business and investment climate in the country.

“We offered Israeli companies to establish ventures in Georgia and benefit from the advantages that...Free Trade Agreements provide for companies producing in our country”, said Kumsishvili (*Agenda.ge, March 27*).

11. One year since historic decision, Georgia proud of visa-free travel with EU

Almost a year ago, visa-free travel regulations for Georgian citizens traveling to the European Union (EU) went into force.

Welcoming the special anniversary at a government session this morning, Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili said this is one of the country's greatest achievements (*Agenda.ge, March 27*).

12. Georgians visit Europe 258,663 times since visa-free agreement

Within a year of the Georgia-EU visa free agreement, 192,453 Georgian citizens have visited the Schengen Zone 258,663 times, the Georgian Interior Ministry reports.

Deputy Interior Minister Nino Javakhadze stated that in total 1,001 Georgians were refused entry into the EU passport-free zone (*Agenda.ge, March 27*).

13. Georgian gov't saddened by deadly fire in Russia

I would like to express my sorrow over the death of dozens of people, unfortunately including children, at a shopping mall fire in Kemerovo, Russia. I offer my sincere condolences and sympathies to the families and loved ones of the victims, and the Russian people,” Georgian PM Giorgi Kvirikashvili wrote on his Twitter account (*Agenda.ge, March 27*).

14. Three Georgians arrested in Spain

Three Georgian citizens were arrested in Spain in suspicion of burgling apartments. The age of the detainees ranges from 28 to 54.

They were arrested red-handed. One Georgian resisted to the police, another – tried to escape. All the three Georgian citizens are transferred to prison (*ITV, March 27*).

15. Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Luxembourg visits Georgia

Georgia has very firm support from Luxembourg for its European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations, Georgian Foreign Minister Mikheil Janelidze said at a joint press conference with the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Luxembourg Jean Asselborn.

Janelidze said it is symbolic that Asselborn arrived to Georgia on the day of its first anniversary of the visa-free travel agreement with the European Union (EU) (*Agenda.ge, March 28*).

16. Mariya Gabriel – I am proud that we succeeded together with Georgian government and people

“Willingness of Georgian government and Georgian people is noteworthy. Institutional reforms and political will of the government as well as commitment to the values such as democracy, supremacy of law and fundamental rights are welcoming,” Gabriel European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society told First Channel in an exclusive interview (*ITV, March 28*).

17. CoE Congress sums up local elections in Georgia

“The vote followed a mainly peaceful and competitive electoral campaign during which democratic values and freedoms were generally respected and candidates were able to campaign freely. An increasingly professional media environment fostered a more vivid political debate”, the report reads (*Agenda.ge, March 29*).

18. Georgia expels Russian diplomat over Skripal poisoning

Georgia has expelled one of 10 Russian diplomats serving at the Interests Section at the Embassy of Switzerland in Tbilisi in a show of solidarity with the United Kingdom (UK) over a recent nerve agent poisoning on the territory of UK, referring to the case of Sergei Skripal and his daughter.

Georgia and Russia have no direct diplomatic ties since the Russia-Georgia 2008 war and Switzerland is the third country mediating diplomatic issues between the two countries (*Agenda.ge, March 29*).

19. Swiss Embassy: Note of Foreign Ministry handed over to Russian Federation Interests Section

The Embassy of Switzerland has already handed the note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia about expelling Russian diplomat over to the Russian Federation Interests Section – the Swiss Embassy told the First Channel in that regard.

As stated in the Embassy, the above mentioned request will not have any impact on a Swiss mandate to represent Russia's interests in Georgia and Georgia's interests in Russia (*ITV, March 29*).

20. Pascal Meunier: Many countries, including Georgia, expressed solidarity with UK; we are expelling Russian diplomats

"I think this is a powerful message for Moscow. I hope Russia will understand this. We have good relations with Russia; we respect Russia, Russia's history and people. We are not the enemy of Russia, but Russia should also understand that we have principles, values and it will be better if these values be shared by Russia,"- the French ambassador noted (*ITV, March 29*).

21. Agile Spirit defence drills in Georgia to feature amphibious operations for first time

The Ministry of Defence of Georgia announced the news earlier today, as Minister Levan Izoria met Major General Russell Sanborn, US Marine Corps Forces Commander in Europe and Africa.

"[The 2018 Agile Spirit] will be special for involving an addition of a new element in the form of [developing] amphibious capacities [of participating troops], which will create a more solid basis for following exercises", Izoria said following the meeting (*Agenda.ge, March 29*).

22. Janos Herman – Visa Free regime has to be further consolidated by combating high number of abusive asylum seekers and organized crime

Visa Free regime should be further consolidated by combating high number of abusive asylum seekers and organized crime – Janos Herman, US Ambassador to Georgia wrote in Twitter in connection with one anniversary of enforcement of visa liberalization of Georgia with EU.

Herman also underlined that one quarter million of Georgian citizens visited EU countries during one year. He said that more contact among peoples, more knowledge and trade was welcoming (*ITV, March 21*).

❖ Internal Affairs

23. Law enforcers detained five persons for attempting to cross border illegally

Law enforcers detained five persons for attempting to cross the border illegally. The detainees are citizens of Turkey, Syria and Uzbekistan. They tried to illegally cross the state border of Georgia with fake passports. Part of the offenders were taken to Sarpi and border sector "Kirnati", part to Tbilisi International Airport (*Rustavi2, March 26*).

24. Tamar Chugoshvili - Delay in presenting President's annual report is already beyond the law frames

Tamar Chugoshvili, the First Vice-Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia does not exclude that President Giorgi Margvelashvili tries to select a favorable time for the election campaign and therefore he delays to present report in the Parliament.

Chugoshvili responded to the question of the First Channel about the President's report. According to the Vice-Speaker, the MPs have been waiting for the President's report since the opening of the spring session (*ITV, March 26*).

25. 10 million GEL allocated for Georgia's mountain areas

The Georgian government will continue to support Georgia's high mountain regions to improve infrastructure and conditions for those living there in a bid to reduce migration from rural areas to the city.

At today's government meeting Georgia's Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili announced that out of 20 million GEL (about \$8.24m/€6.63m*) allocated for the high mountainous settlements development fund, 10 million GEL (about \$4.12m/€3.31m*) will be spent on infrastructure projects (*Agenda.ge, March 27*).

26. Giorgi Kvirikashvili: "Timer will not ring for several years"

"Those who are flying above the Governmental Administration like ravens and have their timers set, I tell them to have a rest and sleep until Georgia moves forward, because the timer will not ring for several years," Kvirikashvili stated (*ITV, March 30*).

27. Maia Tskitishvili takes post of Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure

Maia Tskitishvili, Head of Governmental Administration replaced Zurab Alavidze on post of Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure.

Giorgi Kvirikashvili, Georgian Prime Minister talked about governmental changes during the briefing at Governmental Administration.

Tskitishvili has served as head of Governmental Administration since 2012. According to PM, it will be difficult to find a person to replace Tskitishvili on the post.

However, Kvirikashvili said that position of Minister of Regional Development was very important that prompted him to make such a decision (*ITV, March 30*).

28. Georgian leaders pay tribute to anniversary of historic referendum on independence

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili said March 31, 1991 has been decisive for Georgia's new history.

"The referendum held on this day has laid a foundation to the restoration of Georgia's independence and defined the future of Georgia", PM Kvirikashvili said (*Agenda.ge, March 31, 2018*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

29. Georgia-Israel trade turnover to reach \$1 billion in next 5 years

Trade turnover between Georgia and Israel is strong and steady, but the partnership can intensify and reach \$1 billion over the course of the next five years, announces Georgia's Ministry of Economy. Developing trade and economic relations was one of the main topics of discussion at today's meeting between Georgia's Economy Minister Dimitry Kumsishvili and the Minister of Economy and Industry of Israel, Eli Cohen (*Agenda.ge, March 26, 2018*).

30. Silknet and Geocell Companies unite

Silknet and Geocell Companies officially united. Silknet became 100% owner of Geocell's shares. The value of the deal amounts USD 153 million.

TBC Bank managed to attract USD 133 million with syndicate consisting of 9 banks. Silknet plans to invest about 500 million GEL for improvement of services and introduction of new technologies. It is not yet known whether brand Geocell will be maintained (*ITV, March 27*).

31. Georgian \$93m aircraft-parts factory to open in May 2018

A new Georgian factory that will produce civil aircraft parts for Boeing, Airbus and Bombardier passenger planes will be opened in May in the capital city of Tbilisi.

The construction of the high tech and modern aviation plant began in September 2016 and is expected to release production by 2020.

For the implementation of the project, the Georgian and Israeli sides founded a joint venture company, the Aerostructure Technologies Cyclone (ATC) in Georgia. The ATC will be officially opened in Tbilisi on May 10, 2018 (*Agenda.ge, March 28*).

32. Georgia develops \$40m National Innovation Ecosystem project

Georgia is trying to increase the innovative activities of firms and individuals and their participation in the digital economy by developing the National Innovation Ecosystem (GENIE).

The total cost of the GENIE project, which will support innovative ideas and start-ups in Georgia, is \$40 million.

Georgia's Economy Minister Dimitry Kumsishvili discussed the project implementation process with representatives of the World Bank today. The project is being implemented with the financial assistance of the World Bank (*Agenda.ge, March 28*).

33. First Cryptocurrency Terminal Installed in Tbilisi

The first cryptocurrency terminal in the Transcaucasia was installed in Tbilisi. The Terminal is owned by Company TPC, which enables the clients to buy and sell digital currency through terminals and web pages.

According to Marketer.ge, the first terminal has been placed in the restaurant New-York Burger Tbilisi (Kostava # 71) (*Commersant.ge, March 29*).

34. French company opens electric heaters factory in Kutaisi, Georgia

French company Atlantic Group has opened a factory of electric heaters in Georgia's western city of Kutaisi.

The factory, which was constructed in the Kutaisi Free Industrial Zone, is already fully equipped and produces up to 500 electric heaters a day while twice a week the production is exported abroad, including to neighboring countries. (*Agenda.ge, March 29*).

35. PM expects Georgia to host over 8m international visitors in 2018

Over 8 million international visitors will arrive in Georgia in 2018, believes Georgia's Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili.

Last year Georgia hosted 7,554,936 international visitors and received \$2.7 billion in tourism, showed statistics (*Agenda.ge, March 29*).

36. Georgia's economy grows almost 5% in Jan-Feb 2018

Georgia's economy grew 4.9 percent in the first two months of 2018, show the latest data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) (*Agenda.ge, March 30*).

37. Georgia's external debt totals \$17 billion in fourth quarter of 2017

Georgia currently owes \$17.2 billion in external debt, and this amount is growing, says the National Bank of Georgia (NBG).

During the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2017, the gross external debt of Georgia increased by \$342.9 million. Out of that a \$335.7 million increase was due to transactions, and \$12.6 and \$10.5 million increase was due to price and other changes respectively. Exchange rate changes led to its decrease by \$15.9 million (*Agenda.ge, March 30*).

❖ Culture and Sport

38. Making history: Georgia's U18 rugby team wins European Championship

Georgia's Under 18 rugby team has won its first European Championship in the Polish city of Poznan today. The young Georgian 'Lelos' handed a defeat to France with the score of 8 to 3 (*Agenda.ge, April 1, 2018*).

39. Georgian judokas end Tbilisi Grand Prix with 14 medals

Georgian judokas have triumphed at Tbilisi Grand Prix receiving five gold, three silver and six bronze medals at a competition hosted in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi.

Georgia has hosted the competition for the fifth time uniting 302 judokas from 38 nations, including 39 Georgian judokas, 28 men and 11 women (*Agenda.ge, April 1, 2018*).