

WEEKLY NEWS REPORT ON GEORGIA

Date: April 16 - 22, 2018

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. Janos Herman – EU ready to support Georgia’s peace initiative with practical steps

“The initiative will serve interests of citizens residing on both sides of the dividing line. This is part of our non-recognition and engagement policy. We believe that we could contribute to bringing benefits from the initiative including with facilitation of trade, mobility and education,” Herman told First Channel (*ITV, April 18, 2018*).

2. Minister of Economy of Abkhazia met with Syrian counterpart

So called Minister of Economy of the Republic of Abkhazia Adgur Ardzinba met with Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade of the Syrian Arab Republic Mohammed Samer Khalil within the framework of the IV Yalta International Economic Forum.

Muhammad Samer Khalil invited Abkhazia to take part in the Damascus International Fair this year too. Adgur Ardzinba stressed that the people of Abkhazia are in solidarity with the people of Syria (*Apsnypress, April 20*).

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

3. The tactical drills of the 58th Army were completed in South and North Ossetia

Bilateral tactical exercises of motorized rifle formations of the 58th All-Arms Army of the Southern Military District, which took place on the territory of South and North Ossetia, were completed. This was reported by the head of the press service of the South-Eastern Military District, Colonel Vadim Astafyev.

According to him, during the exercises, the commanders of motorized rifle units in cooperation with reconnaissance, artillery and tank divisions worked out a number of tasks to search for, block and destroy the conventional enemy (*Cominf.org, April 16, 2018*).

4. Lawyer says Tatunashvili’s organs were removed

A lawyer from NGO Human Rights Centre has told the media that Archil Tatunashvili, a Georgian citizen killed by Russian-controlled border guards in February, was returned to his family with his bodily organs missing.

Lawyer Tamar Avaliani, who accompanied Tatunashvili’s father to the Mtskheta Prosecutor’s Regional Department, told the media on Monday that the Tatunashvili family has addressed the Georgian government to demand the de facto leadership of Tskhinvali to transfer the organs and accompanying medical documentation (*Agenda.ge, April 17*).

5. Giorgi Gakharia pledges that Georgia will use all tools to hold thorough examination into Archil Tatunashvili’s case

“The investigation is in progress over this tragic case. As for handing over organs, our main task is to make an examination effective and comprehensive. The examination is a main tool to complete the

investigative process. Therefore, we will use all the tools required for conducting a comprehensive examination, including invitation of international experts,” Gakharia said (*ITV, April 17*).

6. Georgian citizen detained by occupants released

Georgian citizen Tamaz Iluridze, who was detained by Russian-controlled border guards earlier today, has been released, Georgia’s State Security Service has confirmed.

Locals say that Iluridze were herding cattle with his neighbor Gela Giunashvili when armed individuals detained him while Giunashvili managed to escape and inform the police (*Agenda.ge, April 18*).

7. Davit Zalkaliani – Situation across occupied territories require immediate reaction of international community

Davit Zalkaliani, Georgian First Deputy Foreign Minister discussed the situation across Georgia’s occupied territories during presentation of the 17th consolidated report “Conflict in Georgia” by Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, at the 1314th sitting of Committee of Deputy Ministers of CoE.

Zalkaliani focused on the situation with respect to human rights across occupied territories, murder of Georgian soldier Archil Tatunashvili and latest abduction facts of Georgian locals (*ITV, April 18*).

8. Akaki Misireli, kidnapped from Shida Kartli, remains in custody

Akaki Misireli, kidnapped two days ago from Shida Kartli, remains in custody. He is kept in Tskhinvali isolator.

The Georgian Foreign Minister explains that the Georgian side uses all the tools to respond to the facts of human rights violations on the occupied territories.

According to Mikheil Janelidze, the matter will be discussed during the visit to the United States and the next round of Geneva talks (*Rustavi2, April 23*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

❖ 4 Georgian criminal bosses and 34 others detained in France and Greece

Four Georgian criminal bosses and 34 Georgian members of criminal groups were detained in France and Greece on April 16-17 through cooperation with the Georgian Interior Ministry.

The operation named Caucase Normandie was held simultaneously in French and Greek cities to detain the suspects accused of hundreds of robberies, the possession and sale of robbed items and money laundering (*Agenda.ge, April 17*).

9. PM Kvirikashvili congratulates Serzh Sargsyan on election as Prime Minister

“I congratulate my dear friend, Serzh Sargsyan on his election as the prime minister of Armenia. I am confident that friendship between our countries and the friendship between the nations will be further deepened and strengthened,” Giorgi Kvirikashvili has tweeted (*ITV, April 17*).

10. State Security Service: Threat of terrorism remains low in Georgia

“There were attempts to finance terrorism in Georgia last year, as well as to support terrorism ideas and radicalize some Georgian citizens. The Security Service acted in line with law to prevent terrorism attacks, neutralise threats and reveal suspects,” Gomelauri said.

Gomelauri stated that one of the key challenges for the State Security Service is the current situation in the country’s occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) regions.

Russia is carrying out the gradual annexation of Georgian regions,” Gomelauri said. He stated that Archil Tatumashvili’s death once again confirmed the “very grave security situation” in the breakaway regions (*Agenda.ge, April 18*).

❖ Internal Affairs

11. President suspends pardoning of prisoners convicted of violent crimes

The Georgian President has announced today that he is temporarily suspending pardons for individuals convicted of violent crimes in the wake of the murder of a 25-year-old woman in front of her two children by her stepfather in central Tbilisi on April 13.

The stepfather, 45-year-old Vepkhvia Bakradze, who was arrested in 2015 for injuring his wife and violating of traffic rules, was pardoned by Margvelashvili back in May 2017.

The president expressed his deep sorrow over the fatal incident and stated that consultations must be held over the pardon and other similar cases.

“The Pardon Commission, acting under my supervision, will continue receiving pardon applications. However, I will not pardon anyone for violent crimes until the consultations are over,” Margvelashvili stated (*Agenda.ge, April 16*).

12. Tamar Chugoshvili: If president suspends pardoning, it will not recover the life of a particular person

“We saw the result – pardoned person committed a brutal murder. President and his administration should exercise extreme caution when it deals with any violent crime. If president suspends pardoning, it will not recover the life of a particular person. Such form of mechanism does not fit any logic. Maybe in other countries there is such an analogue and I have not heard about it, but pardon is an act used in isolated cases, and not an act in respect of hundreds, dozens of people” – Vice-Speaker of the Parliament said (*ITV, April 16*).

13. Giorgi Margvelashvili – Public witnessed wave of dirty Black PR

“We have launched consultations over pardoning issues to make the mechanism more refined,” Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili said.

President said he believed that dirty Black PR was mounted against him regarding pardoning mechanism.

“The public saw the beginning of filthy campaigning and its shabby ending. Unfortunately, we live in this reality,” President said (*ITV, April 18*).

14. New bill may prevent prisoners from phoning wives, ex-wives, if requested

The Georgian Minister of Corrections Kakhi Kakhishvili has told the Georgian media that he intends to initiate a draft in parliament to restrict “undesired” phone calls by inmates to ex-wives or wives, if the women address the ministry with such a request (*Agenda.ge, April 18*).

15. Kakha Kaladze – Discussions over Presidential candidate launched in ruling team

“It is much time before presidential elections, discussions are launched and we will present our presidential candidate in time,” Kaladze stated (*ITV, April 17*).

16. Legislation to combat organized crime passed by parliament

Amendments to a law on combating organised crime and racketeering has been passed by the Georgian parliament.

Prepared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the amendment package specifies definitions of the terms: "criminal underworld", "member of the criminal underworld", "thieves-in-law", and "criminal discussion" (*Agenda.ge, April 19*).

17. Rally demanding granting status of victim to Temirlan Machalikashvili and punishing criminals will be held in Pankisi today

The residents of Pankisi Gorge demand the recognition of innocence of Temirlan Machalikashvili who was killed during the special operation, granting him the status of the victim and demand punishment for the offenders. The protest rally will be held in the village of Duisi in Pankisi Gorge today. According to Malkhaz Machalikashvili, father of Teimirlan Machalakashvili, the protesters will give the government some time to fulfill the demands, after which large-scale rallies will be moved to Tbilisi (*Rustavi2, April 20*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

18. International Monetary Fund supports Georgia's economic policy

The International Monetary Fund has completed the second review on the Extended Fund Facility approved last year under which Georgia is receiving \$285.3 million over a period of three years. The Georgian Government pledged to ensure fiscal consolidation over the medium term as well as to shift spending towards capital investment to address infrastructure bottlenecks. After the IMF Executive Board approves the second review Georgia will receive \$43.6 million over the course of this year (*Agenda.ge, April 16*).

19. Russia, Italy, Greece are largest remittance senders in March 2018

Last month Georgia received \$38.1 million in remittances from Russia, \$15.5 million from Italy and \$13.7 million from Greece (*Agenda.ge, April 16*).

20. 16 Georgian wine companies on display at Wine and Gourmet Japan fair

"Leading wine professionals, wine traders and importers from the entire region of Asia attended the event, which means the further promotion of the progress of Georgian wine publicity in Japan and neighbouring countries", read the press release by the Georgian National Wine Agency (*Agenda.ge, April 17*).

21. Turkey, Russia, China – Georgia's top trading partners in 2018

Georgia's top 10 trade partners in January-March 2018 made for 67.1 percent of the country's total trade turnover, with Turkey (\$404.6 million), Russia (\$311.1 million) and China (\$270.2 million) filling the top three spots (*Agenda.ge, April 19*).

22. Kakha Kaladze: I hope business will be engaged in Tbilisi Night Economy Development project

The business support in the process of implementing Tbilisi Night Economy Development project is very important, – Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze made the regarding statement at the presentation of the project concept. According to him the Night Economy Development project is of utmost importance for economic development of the city and involvement of all parties, including business sector is essential (1TV, April 20).

❖ Culture and Sport

23. Art of Japanese doll crafting coming to Signaghi Museum in Georgia's east

Starting this weekend, the Signaghi Museum in Georgia's winemaking Kakheti province will invite visitors to see handmade Japanese dolls representing ancient customs from the Land of the Rising Sun.

Presented in cities including St. Petersburg in Russia, Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and Dublin in Ireland, the exhibition will now introduce viewers in Georgia to the mastery and heritage of doll-makers from Japan (*Agenda.ge, April 18*).