

WEEKLY NEWS REPORT ON GEORGIA

Date: April 23 - 29, 2018

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. Remains of 22 people missing due to conflict in Georgia's Abkhazia region identified

"Today, the decades of uncertainty are over for another 22 families," said Biljana Milosevic, the head of the ICRC's delegation in Georgia.

"But more than 2,400 people remain unaccounted for as a result of the conflicts of the 1990s and August 2008. Families have the right to know what happened to them," Milosevic added (*Agenda.ge, April 23*).

2. Ombudsman: Impunity encourages violence in Georgia's occupied regions

It is necessary for the international community, together with Georgia, to take concrete steps, to use various instruments and mechanisms not to allow impunity regarding the cases of Archil Tatunashvili, Giga Otkhozoria and many others," Lomjaria said (*Agenda.ge, April 27*).

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

3. Georgia's Vice Premier delivers speech at UN underlining the country's peace initiative

Georgia's peace initiative and human rights violations in the occupied regions of the country were the two major topics Georgian Foreign Minister and Vice Premier Mikheil Janelidze underlined in his speech delivered at UN headquarters yesterday.

Janelidze's speech was part of a high level meeting on peace building and sustaining peace. He underlined the difficult situation in the occupied territories and cases of human rights violations by the occupational forces (*Agenda.ge, April 25, 2018*).

4. De facto Tskhinvali leadership announces restrictions for ethnic Georgian farmers

Governor Nugzar Tinikashvili says that de facto President of Tskhinvali Anatoly Bibilov said yesterday that those Georgian farmers who will take their cattle and sheep in other Georgian regions in winter will not be able to re-enter the region with their cattle and sheep (*Agenda.ge, April 27*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

5. Lithuanian FM believes Georgia will dispel of all doubts on visa liberalisation

Despite some problems we believe this will happen. We see Georgia's progress and advancement in many fields. The success is obvious within the Eastern Partnership program as well," The foreign minister told Georgia's Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia today in Lithuania (*Agenda.ge, April 24*).

6. Georgian soldiers leave for Afghanistan with military equipment made in Georgia

One hundred Georgian soldiers from the 11th battalion of the 1st Infantry brigade and 21st battalion from the 2nd Infantry Brigade have left for the NATO peace mission in Afghanistan equipped with

bulletproof vests and armor helmets made in Georgia by the State Military Scientific-Technical Center Delta.

The war equipment is in full line with NATO standards and the cost of the product, paid for by the Defence Ministry of Georgia, is more than \$2 million (*Agenda.ge, April 24*).

7. Georgia gets upgrade in index of Reporters Without Borders media rating

The 2018 World Press Freedom Index for Georgia is 61, while it was 64 in 2017. Georgia's media is pluralist but still very polarized. The reforms of recent years have brought improvements in media ownership transparency and satellite TV pluralism, but owners still often call the shots on editorial content," the report reads (*Agenda.ge, April 25, 2018*).

8. Embassy of Saudi Arabia to open in Georgia in May

Saudi Arabia is opening an Embassy in Georgia's capital of Tbilisi in May 2018 in order to promote the relationship between the two countries, Georgia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports.

The decision on opening the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Tbilisi came after the meeting of Georgian Ambassador Giorgi Janjgava with the representatives of the Saudi Arabian Foreign Ministry this week (*Agenda.ge, April 26*).

9. NATO staff commander hosted by Georgian officials, commanders

Georgia's defence officials and military commanders hosted Lieutenant General Jan Broeks, Director General of the NATO International Military Staff this week, for talks and meetings on cooperation between the alliance and the country.

The high-ranking official of the alliance was received by the Minister of Defence of Georgia Levan Izoria, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Georgian Armed Forces Colonel Nikoloz Janjgava and other military commanders in series of meetings (*Agenda.ge, April 26*).

10. US Assistant Secretary to visit Georgia

The Assistant Secretary at the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs Aaron Wess Mitchell is going to visit Georgia and provide a keynote address at a NATO-Georgia public diplomacy forum to be held in Tbilisi on April 30 – May 1 (*Agenda.ge, April 27*).

11. Exposition 'Georgia- the Cradle of Wine' planned for Japan

After making an impression in France, now the exposition 'Georgia- the Cradle of Wine' is planned to be held in Japan.

During the working visit in Japan, the Advisor to the Chair of the Georgian National Wine Agency Davit Tkemaladze and Executive Director of the Association Georgian Wine Tina Kezeli met with representatives of the famous exposition space Terrada Warehouse and Sony Music Communications company.

At the meeting, a member of the Georgian delegation introduced the detailed concept of the exhibition 'Georgia- the Cradle of Wine' and discussed organisational issues with the exposition space team (*Agenda.ge, April 27*).

12. Georgian PM congratulates Mike Pompeo on appointment as US state secretary

The Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili has congratulated Mike Pompeo on his appointment as the new state secretary of the United States, replacing Rex Tillerson in the post (*Agenda.ge, April 27*).

13. US State Department – Russia threatening neighboring countries including Georgia

“NATO is more relevant than any time since Cold War. Today, we focused on Russia’s continued aggression and ability to threaten, coerce, undermine, and invade its neighbors. Russia plays destabilizing role in Ukraine, Georgia, and Syria. NATO is a defensive alliance in face of threat,” Heather Nauert, Press Speaker of US State Department Twitted (*1TV, April 27*).

14. EU sees continued progress regarding human rights in Georgia

There has been continued progress as regards human rights in Georgia over the past year, reads the statement of Spokesperson for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Maja Kocijancic.

The statement was released following the 11th annual Human Rights Dialogue between EU and Georgia held on April 24 in Brussels.

The EU and Georgia agreed on the importance of unhindered access of international human rights monitoring mechanisms under international organisations, as well as the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) to the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and recalled that the Russian Federation has an obligation to implement the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement (*Agenda.ge, April 28*).

❖ Internal Affairs

15. Ex-Defence Minister Akhalaia sentenced to 9 years in prison

The Tbilisi City Court has sent Georgia’s former Minister of Defence under the United National Movement leadership, Bacho Akhalaia, to prison for nine years for a high-profile torture case involving Colonel Sergo Tetradze in 2011.

The court also sentenced deputy Minister of Defence Nikoloz Dzimtseishvili for four years in prison for the same case. Tetradze was detained for espionage charges in 2011.

Georgia’s Chief Prosecutor’s Office says that with the demand of Akhalaia the individual was severely tortured which caused death (*Agenda.ge, April 23, 2018*).

16. New station measures air pollution levels in Georgia

Georgia’s Ministry of Environment and Agriculture launched a mobile automatic station for monitoring atmospheric air quality today in Tbilisi. Thanks to this station, it will be possible to measure the air quality in the capital of Tbilisi and other regions of the country.

The mobile station has already measured air quality in Europe Square and Rose Square in Tbilisi, where air indicators were normal, announced the ministry (*Agenda.ge, April 24*).

17. 6 Iranian citizens detained for drug offences

In the beginning of the investigation police detained three Iranian citizens in Tbilisi for carrying drugs.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs says six bags of heroin were hidden in their footwear amounting to more than 1 kilogram.

Another three Iranians were detained after investigations in Tbilisi and Batumi who were found to have less than one kilogram of heroin in their possession: if convicted, all of them may face eight to 20 years of imprisonment (*Agenda.ge, April 25*).

18. MIA confiscated 18 kilograms of drugs during last 4 months

Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) confiscated 18 kilograms of drugs during the last 4 months and gave 754 persons criminally responsible for the crime.

Mamuka Chelidze, Head of Main Division of Struggle with Organized Crime of Central Criminal Police Department of MIA, reported during the briefing that operative-investigative activities were carried out throughout Georgia from January 1 to April 24 (*ITV, April 25*).

19. Prosecutor's Office charges ex-police official for unlawful raid of Imedi TV

The prosecutor's office reported that the riot police, chaired by then head of the Special Operative Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Kodua unlawfully raided the TV channel building on November 7, 2007, physically abused journalists and destroyed the property of the media outlet.

13 people were affected due to the raid and the damage inflicted to the media amounted to more than \$1.2 million", the Prosecutor's Office stated.

Earlier, for the same case, the ex-president of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili, former ministers of justice and internal affairs were also charged. Kodua is wanted by Georgian law enforcers and Interpol.

It is not the first charge for the former official. Kodua has already been sentenced to 9 and 2 years in prison for two other cases (*Agenda.ge, April 25*).

20. Patriarchate to support draft law on punishment of insulting religious feelings

"We will support the draft law, according to which, insulting the religious feelings is becoming a punishable offence. Presumably, we will meet the authors of the idea to discuss the details. We have a general idea that in many European countries this law is applied in practice," Father Michael said (*ITV, April 25*).

21. Kakha Kaladze confirms that changes are expected in Political Council of Georgian Dream

Kakha Kaladze, Tbilisi Mayor confirms that changes are expected to be carried out in Political Council of Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia Party. Kaladze will retain the post of Party's Secretary General, though.

The Party Congress will be held in May. Tbilisi Mayor did not confirm the information that Bidzina Ivanishvili, former prime minister would be named as presidential candidate. He also denied existence of any conflict or confrontation in the ruling team (*ITV, April 27, 2018*).

22. Georgian Dream candidate wins by-elections

Georgian Dream candidate wins parliamentary by-elections Georgian Dream party candidate Givi Chichinadze won 57.88 percent of the votes in parliamentary by-elections held yesterday in Vani and Khoni election districts.

Chichinadze's rival, the former mayor of Tbilisi Gigi Ugulava from the European Georgia party received 38.38 percent of votes.

By-elections in Vani and Khoni were held because former MP Grigol Liluashvili was appointed to the position of Deputy Head of State Security Service (*Agenda.ge, April 29, 2018*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

23. Georgia's Finance Minister on working visit to US

Georgia's Finance Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze is visiting the United States where he is holding meetings with various financial institutions and governmental officials.

Bakhtadze met representatives of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and received a positive assessment of Georgia's economic development from them (*Agenda.ge, April 24*).

24. IMF moves economic forecast for Georgia up to 4.5% in 2018

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is moving its forecast up, saying the Georgian economy will grow by 4.5 percent in 2018 and 4.8 percent in 2019 (*Agenda.ge, April 23*).

25. Georgia's Winery Khareba opens store in Italy

Georgian wine company Winery Khareba has opened the first Georgian brand wine shop in Bari, Italy.

Diplomats, Bari municipality representatives and a Georgian delegation attended the official opening ceremony on April 19 (*Agenda.ge, April 24*).

26. Austrian company to produce firefighting vehicles in Georgia

Austrian company Rosenbauer will start producing fire-service vehicles in Georgia, the Emergency Management Service of Georgia has announced.

As announced, Rosenbauer is going to manufacture firefighting vehicles on the base of Georgia's State Military Scientific Technical Centre Delta.

In the nearest future Rosenbauer, Delta and Emergency Management Service of Georgia will sign a tripartite agreement (*Agenda.ge, April 26, 2018*).

❖ Culture and Sport

27. Indian, Chinese, Japanese exhibits in largest oriental art display in Tbilisi

Hundreds of exhibits shedding light on the mesmerising world of oriental culture and art will be presented to museum-goers in the largest display of the kind in Georgia starting tomorrow.

At Tbilisi's Museum of Georgia venue, works in painting, sculpture and applied arts from India, China and Japan will introduce visitors to creations daring from BCE eras up to the 18th century.

A release from the Georgian National Museum said around 500 exhibits were selected for the exhibition that will host interested viewers until September (*Agenda.ge, April 25*).