

WEEKLY NEWS REPORT ON GEORGIA

APRIL 30 - May 6

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❖ Occupied Regions

1. Council of Europe praises Georgia's peace initiative

The Committee of Ministers' Deputies of the Council of Europe adopted a decision on May 2 which praises the peace initiative of the Georgian government - A Step to a Better Future.

The committee has assessed the initiative "as a vivid sign of Georgia's firm commitment to promote confidence and interaction between the societies split by the dividing lines." (*Agenda.ge, May 3, 2018*).

2. PM Kvirikashvili discusses gov't's peace initiative with EU special representative

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili met with EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia Toivo Klaar yesterday evening.

The major topic of discussion at the meeting was the Georgian government's peace initiative A Step to a Better Future.

This initiative seeks to improve the socio-economic conditions of the populations in the occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali aiming to step up the reconciliation process (*Agenda.ge, May 5, 2018*).

3. Occupied Tskhinvali road inspection says they detained Georgian citizen

The so-called Road Inspection Service of Georgia's occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region has announced that they detained a 22-year-old Georgian citizen from Tbilisi yesterday. The de facto agency has not identified the detainee.

They only reported that the individual was detained for the "illegal crossing of border" in the village of Satikhari late at night." (*Agenda.ge, May 3, 2018*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

4. Georgia, Armenia building €6m 'Friendship Bridge'

Georgia and Armenia are one step closer to build a new bridge, named 'Friendship Bridge' that will help the countries to facilitate regional trade and passenger flow.

Located 60 kilometres from Georgia's capital Tbilisi, the bridge at the Sadakhlo-Bagrashen checkpoint is the main crossing between Georgia and Armenia.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has provided a sovereign loan of up to €6 million to Georgia in order to co-finance works to build the cross-border bridge connecting Georgia with Armenia (*Agenda.ge, April 30, 2018*).

5. Ireland puts Georgia on the list of secure countries

The Ministry of Justice of Ireland has decided to put Georgia on the list of secure countries, Georgian foreign ministry said yesterday. The decision of the Ireland government came into force on April 16.

In doing so, Ireland becomes the ninth EU country out of 12 classifying countries according to their security level which have decided to consider Georgia as a secure country (*Agenda.ge, May 1, 2018*).

6. Lithuania changes Georgia's name from Gruzija to Sakartvelo

From now on, the official title of Georgia will be Sakartvelo, not Gruzija. Sakartvelo is a Georgian name of the country, while Gruzija is of Russian origin (*Agenda.ge, May 4, 2018*).

7. US Department of State summarises Assistant Secretary Wess Mitchell's visit to Georgia

The US Department of State Spokesperson has briefed public about the US Assistant Secretary at the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs Aaron Wess Mitchell's recent visit to Georgia and Ukraine. The Department of State reported at a news briefing yesterday that Wess Mitchell reiterated the US support to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and held meetings with the country's top officials (*Agenda.ge, May 4, 2018*).

8. US congress delegation visiting Georgia

A delegation headed by the Chairman of the US House Judiciary Committee Bob Goodlatte held a meeting with PM Giorgi Kvirikashvili today.

While discussing the positive dynamics in US-Georgia relations, Kvirikashvili underlined the importance of strengthening the strategic partnership with the US calling it "the top priority" for Georgian government. He also thanked Congress for supporting the major points of Georgia's 2018 budget law (*Agenda.ge, May 5, 2018*).

9. Ten people arrested for trying to illegally cross Georgian border

Eight citizens of Bangladesh, one citizen of Georgia and one citizen of Azerbaijan were arrested by the Georgian police for trying to cross the country's border illegally in the Samtskhe-Javakheti southern region of Georgia bordering Turkey (*Agenda.ge, May 6, 2018*).

❖ Internal Affairs

10. Ex-PM Ivanishvili unanimously elected as a head of ruling party political council

The former Prime Minister of Georgia, founder of the current ruling Georgian Dream party Bidzina Ivanishvili has been unanimously elected as the new head of the Georgian Dream Political Council today, about a week Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili announced Ivanishvili intended to re-enter politics. The Georgian Dream political council has been recomposed and its members decreased from 21 to 15 (*Agenda.ge, May 2, 2018*).

11. President delivers annual address in parliament and leaves the Parliament due to protest

The president said that serious progress has been achieved in terms of human rights protection and media freedom. However, he said that "without using forcible methods, journalists still have to work in a tense environment."

Margvelashvili stated that despite the progress in terms of the protection of human rights, those individuals who carried out violence against people still retain jobs in law enforcement agencies and other state structures.

During the session of debates president was largely criticized from Georgian Dream, European Georgia and United National Movement. Meanwhile president asked the Speaker of the Parliament to give him floor for responses and Kobakhidze set this initiative for the vote, MPs rejected initiative

of Margvelashvili and the President had left the session due to protest (*Agenda.ge, TV Pirveli, May 2, 2018*).

12. Georgia moves to a new stage of emergency situation management

The Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili announced today that Georgia has moved to a new model of emergency situation management, which means the Emergency Management Service will be more independent in decision making and additional funds will be spent on the purchase of anti-fire equipment.

“A volunteer system will be established, as well as an alternative military service to provide more people in emergency situations on time. In order to prevent crises the agency will be tasked to closely cooperate with scientists,” Kvirikashvili stated (*Agenda.ge, May 3, 2018*).

13. Air pollution in Georgia not higher than in Eastern European countries

Georgia’s National Agency of Environment has reported based on the latest data of the World Health Organisation (WHO) that the air pollution in the country equals the average air pollution levels of Eastern European countries (*Agenda.ge, May 4, 2018*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

14. Germany allocates €253m for sustainable development in Georgia

Germany is offering about €253 million to Georgia for sustainable development.

Georgia’s Finance Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze and German Ambassador to Georgia Heike Peitsch signed the financial agreement today.

The money will be spent on various projects, including vocational education, improving utility infrastructure in different regions of Georgia and expanding the power transmission network (*Agenda.ge, April 30, 2018*).

15. Inflation data: Food, transport, housing and health-related prices increase in Georgia

Prices of milk products, meat, fish, coffee, tea and cocoa have increased in Georgia year-on-year, shows the latest inflation data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

A decrease was noted in prices for sugar, jam, honey, chocolate and confectionary (-3.7 percent), said Geostat.

In April 2018 the prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages increased by 2.1 percent, contributing 0.66 percentage points to annual inflation.

Prices decreased for the following subgroups:

Fruit and grapes (19.7 percent),

Oils and fats (3.5 percent)

Meat (3.2 percent)

Fish (2.4 percent)

Milk, cheese and eggs (2.1 percent)

Coffee, tea and cocoa (1.6 percent) (*Agenda.ge, May 3, 2018*).

16. Georgia hosts 25% more tourists in April 2018

The number of international travellers visiting Georgia is increasing year-on-year, show the latest data from the Georgian National Tourism Administration.

A total of 596,703 international travellers visited Georgia in April 2018 of which 278,032 were tourists, show the statistics.

Year-on-year, the number of international travellers (tourists, transit, other) increased by 16.8 percent, while the number of tourists (individuals that spend more than 24 hours in the country) increased by 24.9 percent (*Agenda.ge, May 3, 2018*).

17. Export of Georgian agricultural products to EU on rise

Georgia's leading exports - wine and spirits, hazelnuts, wine and mineral waters – added value back into the country's economy.

In the first quarter of 2018, Georgia exported agricultural goods worth \$37.8 million which is a 22.1 percent increase compared to the same quarter of 2017 (*Agenda.ge, May 3, 2018*).

18. Jan-April 2018: Georgian wine exports up 36 percent

Georgia exported 25 million bottles of wine to 43 countries in the first four months of 2018, announces the Georgian National Wine Agency. In January-April of 2018 Georgia generated about \$59.2 million from the sale of wine abroad.

Revenue increased by 43 percent from January-April 2018, while the volume of exports increased by 36 percent, said the Georgian National Wine Agency.

Export growth was notable in Japan – 139 percent increase (73,122 bottles). While top five exporting countries are as follows:

- Russia – 16,246,021 bottles
- Ukraine – 2,389,280 bottles
- China – 1,802,792 bottles
- Kazakhstan – 1,108,938 bottles
- Poland – 1,012,774 bottles (*Agenda.ge, May 6, 2018*).

19. Georgian government aiming for equal living standards in different regions of country..

Georgian PM Giorgi Kvirikashvili spoke about the government's view on local self-government reforms today in the south-western city of Akhaltsikhe, where the annual forum – "Institutional dialogue between the state and local government" is being held.

As Kvirikashvili said, the government plans to double the financing for local governments during the next 10 years. In doing so the government hopes to address the problem inequality of life in different regions of the country (*Agenda.ge, May 6, 2018*).

❖ Sports and Culture

20. Judoka Varlam Liparteliani: We'll not take part in tournaments and stop training until Kevkhishvili's resignation

“The Georgian judo team needs support from the federation, both with the provision of training conditions, and with the selection of the proper coaches, support in the international arena and other important directions.

Due to unacceptable and harmful situation, by the decision of the team we declare that we will not participate in any tournament and stop training until the president of the federation resigns from his post.

He occupies three different positions, including he is the chairman of the Kvareli Sakrebulo. The fact is that he does not cope with his duties.

Avtandil Chrikishvili deliberately did not depart for Bosnia to participate in the tournament yesterday as he joins our desire to save the judo in Georgia” – Captain of Georgia’s National Judo Team Varlam Liparteliani said (*ITV, May 4, 2018*).