

WEEKLY NEWS REPORT ON GEORGIA

Date: May 7 - 13, 2018

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

1. Breakaway Tskhinvali closes so-called administrative boundary line

Georgia's eastern occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) leadership has announced that it is closing the so-called administrative boundary line with the rest of Georgia today, regarding the 73th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War, when the Soviet Union defeated Nazi Germany in the 1941-1945 armed conflict (*Agenda.ge, May 7, 2018*).

2. Georgia to file complaint in Strasbourg Court into Archil Tatumashvili's death case

Georgia will file a lawsuit in the European Court of Human Rights regarding deprivation of life to Georgian citizen Archil Tatumashvili, who died in occupied Tskhinvali region.

Minister of Justice of Georgia Tea Tsulukiani the statement on May 7. Working on the complaint will be completed soon. The plaintiff side will be Georgia, while the defendant — Russian Federation (*ITV, May 8, 2018*).

3. Russia-controlled occupied Tskhinvali makes anti-fire ditches at occupation lines

The de facto leadership of Georgia's eastern occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region has started digging of anti-fire ditches near the occupation lines, which separate the breakaway territory from the rest of Georgia.

The Radio Liberty reads that the occupants dug the ditches not only the Russia-controlled territory, but also on the Tbilisi-administered area.

The government of Georgia strongly condemned the fact and appealed to the international community to react to the illegality (*Agenda.ge, May 9, 2018*).

4. US concerned by the decision of de-facto South Ossetian authorities

The United States is concerned by the decision of de facto South Ossetian authorities to temporarily close control crossing points in Georgia along the administrative boundary line in the Russian-occupied territory of South Ossetia (*Agenda.ge, May 9, 2018*).

5. EUMM : Mission confirms that some of the lines ploughed in May are indeed ploughed across ABL

The EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) has responded to statements regarding the situation in the area of Nikozi close to the South Ossetian Administrative Boundary Line (ABL). The EUMM, has monitored these works closely and maintains a reinforced patrolling presence in the Nikozi area (*IPN.GE, May 11, 2018*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

6. Georgian embassy in Lithuania posts new sign - Sakartvelo Ambasada

After Lithuania recently changed the official name of Georgia in the Lithuanian language from Gruzija to Sakartvelo, the Georgian embassy has placed a new sign on its premises reading 'Sakartvelo Ambasada', or Embassy of Georgia in Lithuanian (*Agenda.ge, May 8, 2018*).

7. Gov't initiates EU integration roadmap to go beyond expectations

The government of Georgia has initiated the elaboration of the EU integration roadmap, which will ensure European integration at a faster rate.

The Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili stated that with the help of the roadmap the government aims to do more than it has taken upon itself to do in the Georgia-EU Association Agreement deal.

The conception of the roadmap was approved at the 57th meeting of Georgia's EU Integration Commission (*Agenda.ge, May 9, 2018*).

8. Georgian PM congratulates Nikol Pashinyan on election as new prime minister of Armenia

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili has congratulated Nikol Pashinyan on his election as the new prime minister of Armenia, wishing him "all the best in his future endeavors." (*Agenda.ge, May 9, 2018*).

9. Parliament Speaker: Russian propaganda is absolutely unacceptable

Georgian Parliament Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze stated today that Russian propaganda is "alarming and certain measures are needed to prevent such risks." Kobakhidze made the statement during a ceremony dedicated to WWII victory day (*Agenda.ge, May 9, 2018*).

10. 68 citizens of Georgia were expelled from Germany

68 citizens of Georgia were expelled from Germany. The special operation was held yesterday evening. Citizens of Georgia were transferred from different cities to Dusseldorf, from where they were sent to Tbilisi. Some of them have been living in Germany and other EU countries for years, however, most of them have gone to ask for the shelter after a visa free regime was launched (*Rustavi 2, May 10, 2018*).

11. Readmission of 68 Georgian citizens from Germany, Switzerland, Belgium has been carried out - MIA

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia responds to the process of deportation of Georgians from EU countries. According to the agency, 68 citizens from Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and Iceland have been readmitted. According to the Ministry, the citizens of Georgia who violated visa regime of European countries. returned by the Düsseldorf-Tbilisi flight (*Rustavi 2, May 10, 2018*).

12. Georgian, Armenian PMs held phone call

Upon the initiative of the Armenian side, telephone conversation has been held between Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Kvirikashvili and newly-elected Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinian.

InterPressNews was informed by the Administration of the Government of Georgia that Giorgi Kvirikashvili congratulated Nikol Pashinian on his election as the Prime Minister. The sides underlined further development of traditional good neighborly relations between the two countries (*IPN.GE, May 11, 2018*).

❖ Internal Affairs

13. Georgian government presents the education system action plan

The action plan presented by the Minister of Education and PM Giorgi Kvirikashvili today introduces several changes at every stage of the educational system aiming to increase the quality of education in Georgia.

In terms of general education changes include supporting teachers and their professional development, better quality books for students and development of their creative thinking, as well as introducing modern technologies in schools.

We clearly understand that Georgia's success, stability and democratic development can only be built on knowledge and education, PM Kvirikashvili said while delivering a keynote address at the presentation of the action plan attended by government representatives, students and teachers (*Agenda.ge, May 7, 2018*).

14. Georgian police detain 7 drug traffickers

The Georgian Interior Ministry reported at a special briefing in the afternoon that they have detained seven narco traffickers who possessed and sold drugs in especially large quantities.

The drug dealers have not been identified. However, the ministry press speaker stated that one is a Turkish citizen who has been pursued by Georgian law enforcers for three months. The rest of the detainees are Georgians, only one with dual, Georgian-French citizenship.

If convicted, the individuals will be sent to prison for 8-20 years for the possession and sale of especially large amount of drugs (*Agenda.ge, May 7, 2018*).

15. Georgian police arrest two for online drug trafficking

After a two-month investigation, the Interior Ministry has opened an investigation into two individuals in Tbilisi yesterday for drug trafficking.

A 26-year-old woman and 23-year-old man have been charged with distribution of narcotics online. Drug trafficking via the internet remains the most difficult challenge, the Deputy Interior Minister Natia Mezvrishvili said at today's briefing (*Agenda.ge, May 8, 2018*).

16. Georgia celebrates WWII victory day

On May 9 Georgia is celebrating World War II Victory Day commemorating the surrender of Nazi Germany in 1945.

Up to 700,000 Georgians served in WWII and nearly 400,000 died, according to the numbers released by the State Service of Veterans Affairs of Georgia. 224,000 received different awards while 164 were given the title of hero (*Agenda.ge, May 9, 2018*).

17. Number of fatalities in car accidents increased in first quarter of 2018

A total of 107 people died in car accidents in the first quarter of 2018 according to SaqStat Statistics National Service of Georgia. The number was 104 in the same period of 2017 (*ITV, May 9, 2018*).

18. President signs changes to party funding rules

President Giorgi Margvelashvili has signed the amendments to the law on the Political Unions of Citizens, introducing new rules in the political party financing regulations. The opposition parties have called on the President to veto the amendments. Under the new regulations, the parties which manage to obtain at least one majoritarian seat will be eligible for budgetary funding (*IPN.GE, May 11, 2018*).

19. Transparency International - 44% of respondents say Margvelashvili should pardon Saakashvili

According to the survey, conducted by the Transparency International – Georgia, 44% of respondents say President Giorgi Margvelashvili should pardon former President Mikheil Saakashvili in case he arrived in Georgia. The survey, which is ordered by organization, reflects the results of the public opinion survey and is carried out by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC).

According to the same survey, 38% of respondents say that President Margvelashvili should not pardon Saakashvili. 18 % - refrained from replying to the question.

The survey was conducted on March 3-28 and a total of 1843 people were interviewed throughout Georgia. The average margin of error is 2.8 percent (*IPN.GE, May 11, 2018*).

20. Kaladze – New changes will become a powerful impulse for moving to a new level of political life in Georgia

I am convinced that today's changes will become a powerful impulse for moving to a new level of political life in Georgia, - Tbilisi Mayor, Secretary General of the Georgian Dream, Kakha Kaladze, said during his speech at the 5th congress of the Georgian Dream on Friday (*IPN.GE, May 11, 2018*).

21. Bidzina Ivanishvili unanimously elected as Georgian Dream chairman

The delegates of the Georgian Dream 5 th congress unanimously elected Bidzina Ivanishvili as the chairman of the Georgian Dream party. Former Prime Minister has replaced Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili on the post (*IPN.GE, May 11, 2018*).

22. Ivanishvili - Elite corruption no longer exists in the country, private property is fully protected and inviolable

"Today we have the authorities elected based on people's trust and not through falsified elections, threat and violence. The authorities focused on human, as a main value. The clear example of this is providing the access to universal health care. Today, one of the main social institutions, the main basis for development of human beings - private property, that was trampled and destroyed during the previous government, is fully protected and inviolable today. Elite corruption no longer exists in the country. There are no fields, monopolized by the businessmen grown with the authorities," Bidzina Ivanishvili said (*IPN.GE, May 11, 2018*).

23. Ivanishvili says confrontation in the team was one of the reasons of his comeback

"Amid the challenges facing the country, certain internal confrontation started in the government that has gone beyond the borders the democracy and the diversity of opinions acceptable for the political team and this is the third reason why I am back in politics. I strongly believe that we do not have the right to spend time, energy, and resources in vicious squabbling over nothing. It is inadmissible to create even a minor obstacle for implementation of the common party and, moreover, national tasks. I felt that the party, created by me - the "Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia" would be separated from people in case these processes were deepened. So I decided to return, yes - the second entry in public policy," - Bidzina Ivanishvili said during his speech at the 5th congress of the party on Friday (*IPN.GE, May 11, 2018*).

24. Bidzina Ivanishvili : I do not intend to change the Prime Minister in any case

I do not intend to change the Prime Minister in any case, - Bidzina Ivanishvili, Chairman of the Georgian Dream party, said during his speech at the 5th congress of the party on Friday (*IPN.GE, May 11, 2018*).

25. 8 drug dealers detained in night clubs last night

"The Ministry of Internal Affairs had been conducting intensive operative-investigative activities for detecting drug trade in the Basiani and Gallery night clubs for 12 months. On May 12, 2018, relevant investigative actions were conducted on the basis of a court order and 8 persons were detained," reads the statement (*IPN.GE, May 12, 2018*).

26. Clashes occur between protesters and police in front of Parliament

Clashes took place between protesters and police at the rally outside the Parliament, where people protested against the special operations carried out in the Basiani and Gallery night clubs last night. The protesters attempted to block a road, which was not allowed by the police. Several people were detained during the incident (*IPN.GE, May 12, 2018*).

27. What has happened last night is incomprehensible and harmful for each of us - Sergi Gvarjaladze

My persistent advice is to provide detailed explanation about yesterday's operation and to launch dialogue with people who have different position, especially the young people who are still struggling for the future of a modern and free country, - Sergi Gvarjaladze, Head of the Tbilisi Nigh Economics, says on Facebook (*IPN.GE, May 12, 2018*).

28. White Noise Movement demands resignation of Prime Minister and Interior Minister

Protesters have completely blocked Rustaveli Avenue in front of the Parliament. Organizers of the rally thanked law enforcers for allowing them to occupy the road. Traffic is fully blocked on Rustaveli Avenue (*IPN.GE, May 12, 2018*).

29. President's Parliamentary Secretary attending protest on Rustaveli Avenue by President's instruction

"We are here by the President's instruction and we are very closely watching the rally. Citizens have a constitutional right to express their opinion, including protest, and this right should be protected. We hope that every state agency will do its best to ensure that people can enjoy access to their constitutional rights", - said Ana Natsvlishvili (*IPN.GE, May 12, 2018*).

30. NGOs release statement on last night's special operation

"Obviously, we realize the importance of combating drug trade and the state obligations in this regard. This process should start with identifying influential criminal networks and strong response to them. At the same time, state policy towards drug addicts should be substantially changed. Regrettably, the ruling political team suspended reform in this direction", says the statement (*IPN.GE, May 12, 2018*).

31. White Noise Movement rally and counter-protest in Tbilisi

The protest rally, organized by the White Noise Movement, goes on at Parliament's building on Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi. Counter protesters are gathered on the opposite side of the road. The participants of the rally "for My Freedom" called on the counter protesters to stay calm. The participants of the counter-rally are trying to move to the Parliament's building, but law enforcers did not allow them to do so. There is a police cordon between the protesters (*IPN.GE, May 13, 2018*).

32. Counter protesters give one-hour deadline to protesters at Parliament

Counter protesters gave one-hour deadline to the participants of the protest rally outside the Parliament's building. They vow to use "radical measures" in case the protesters do not leave the territory in an hour.

Law enforcers set up a cordon between the participants of two separate rallies in order to avoid any incident. Traffic movement is closed on Rustaveli Avenue (*IPN.GE, May 13, 2018*).

33. PM - I am a guarantor that nothing will threaten your right to freedom of speech and expression

I am a guarantor that nothing will threaten your right to freedom of speech and expression, - Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili said at a special briefing held at the Administration of Government today (*IPN.GE, May 13, 2018*).

34. Minister of Internal Affairs apologizes to protesters

"I apologize not only on my behalf, but on behalf of any representative of the Interior Ministry if he endangered you or your security. At the same time, I'd like to ask you, who insulted people wearing uniforms and were protecting your security, to apologize to them," the Minister said (*IPN.GE, May 13, 2018*).

35. White Noise Movement gives Minister of Internal Affairs one-week deadline to fulfill promises

"You know that this fight has not started today and we are not going to finish it tomorrow if we do not get results. Therefore, our protest will be always legitimate. If the promise is not kept, we will continue to express protest. We are giving the Minister of Internal Affairs a one-week deadline to fulfill promises and we will organize a large-scale rally on Saturday", said Beka Tsikarishvili (*IPN.GE, May 13, 2018*).

36. Minister of Internal Affairs promises protesters to review drug policy

"Our common goal is to end this evening peacefully. You know that your freedom of expression has been protected here. And you know that each policeman cares about your security. In order to achieve our goal, which is to find a solution together, we have to move to a working regime. I promise you that tomorrow at 10:00 am, together with your representatives, we will discuss in detail what happened on Friday. If we find that rights were violated, they will be restituted.

I also promise that we will achieve specific results in the direction of drug policy. And if promises are not kept, we will always be able to dance or listen to music in a free city," said Giorgi Gakharia (*IPN.GE, May 13, 2018*).

37. Minister of Internal Affairs thanks both parties for allowing police to fulfill their duties

"This is the main goal now. Our task is to observe the law and protect the safety of citizens, regardless of which party they belong to. I would like to thank participants of both rallies, as they accepted our proposal and promised to allow police to fulfill their duties," said Gakharia (*IPN.GE, May 13, 2018*).

38. Patriarchate calls on everyone to refrain from confrontation

"Our citizens have been moved by recent developments in Tbilisi. Although fight against drug trades is a necessity for us, as well as for the government and population, the special operation carried out on Friday raised questions (though the relevant agency has its position in this regard); but it should also be said that the statements and behavior of a part of the youth gathered in front of the governmental palace caused negative reactions and grounds for holding a counter rally (*IPN.GE, May 13, 2018*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

39. New regulations for commercial banks to protect consumer rights in Georgia

New regulations on responsible lending practice set by the National Bank of Georgia (BOG) for commercial banks are coming into force today.

The regulations aim to protect consumer rights and bolster healthy credit portfolios at commercial banks.

Starting from May 7, 2018 commercial banks in Georgia will be restricted in issuing loans without meaningful analysis of consumers' solvency. The total amount of these loans must not exceed 25 percent of the supervisory capital of commercial banks (*Agenda.ge, May 7, 2018*).

40. Georgia looks to Iranian companies for investments

Georgia's Economy Minister Dimitry Kumsishvili visited Iran on May 7 where he met with governmental officials to strengthen ties between Georgia and Iran.

During his one-day visit Kumsishvili met with the Foreign Minister of Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif and spoke about Georgia's willingness to welcome the investments of Iranian companies in the country (*Agenda.ge, May 8, 2018*).

41. 18 historical houses in resort Abastumani will be given new life

Eighteen historical wooden houses in Abastumani, a small town and climatic spa in Georgia's Samtskhe-Javakheti region, will soon be given new life as a rehabilitation project is starting today.

The 18th and 19th centuries houses located on the central street in Abastumani will be completely rehabilitated and their historic features maximally sustained.

The total cost of the project is 3.7 million GEL (about \$1.51m/€1.27m*), which will be funded by the World Bank (*Agenda.ge, May 8, 2018*).

42. EBRD left prognosis of Georgia's economic growth at 4.5%

The prognosis of Georgia's economic growth is unchanged – 4.5%. The rate of growth will be retained for 2019.

Based on Statistics National Service of Georgia, the average index of economic growth in January-March is 5.2% (*ITV, May 9, 2018*).

43. Economy Minister meets with representatives of large Chinese port and world's largest carrier

According to their information, at the meeting the sides discussed Georgia's involvement in the process of "Belt and Road" initiative. The Georgian government's efforts within the global initiative were also underlined at the meeting, including development of so-called "middle corridor". The meeting was focused on projects, including the Anaklia Deepwater Port, East-West Expressway, Railway Modernization Project, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway crossing and etc (*IPN.GE, May 11, 2018*).

44. First stage of longest Georgian tunnel design project completed

International Engineering Company Institute IGH has already submitted the Lentekhi-Mestia connecting road and tunnel draft version to the Roads Department of Georgia. The received comments will be taken into consideration and the final design will be submitted to the client before the end of May.

The new Lentekhi-Mestia connecting road will connect the already existent Lentekhi-Tsageri and Zugdidi-Mestia roads, which means from Kutaisi by bypassing Tsageri and Lentekhi one will be able to travel to Mestia in the span of three hours. And the distance from Tbilisi to Mestia will be decreased by 105km, shortening a trip time by 2.5 hours.

According to the design, the pavement of the new 47,7 km Lentekhi-Mestia road will be made up of asphalt/concrete. The construction of 15 new bridges, 27,7 km new road, the longest, 9,03 km, tunnel in Georgia and the improvement of the 11 km road from Leshguani to Mestia is planned (*IPN.GE, May 14, 2018*).