

WEEKLY NEWS REPORT ON GEORGIA

Date: May 14 - 20, 2018

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. Two years from Otkhozoria's murder: Occupied Abkhazia refuses to punish a killer

The Russia-controlled Abkhazia region leadership continues to refuse to punish so-called border-guard Rashid Kanjiogli, who brutally killed Georgian citizen Giga Otkhozoria with six gunshots on Tbilisi-controlled territory two years ago.

"We strongly demanded the punishment of Kanjiogli during the 56th meeting of the Gali Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meeting today. However, the answer of the breakaway region was absolutely unclear," a representative of Georgia's State Security Service Irakli Antadze told the media (*Agenda.ge, May 18, 2018*).

2. PM Kvirikashvili expects better results if the Geneva talks are held on a higher level

"I think the Geneva International Discussions format needs to be used as much as possible. If the level of the format increases with the involvement of our partners we could reach an important breakthrough about very important issues", Kvirikashvili said (*Agenda.ge, May 19, 2018*).

3. Georgian citizen detained in Gali

Georgia citizen Aleksandre Natsvlishvili has been detained by so-called border guards near the occupation line in Gali district, Georgia's breakaway Abkhazia region today.

The detainee is from Kutaisi and occupants have arrested him for so-called illegally crossing the so called border at the river Enguri.

The information was released by the de-facto interior ministry of Abkhazia and later confirmed by the State Security Service of Georgia (*Agenda.ge, May 20, 2018*).

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

4. Georgia demands Tatumashvili's internal organs from Russia-controlled Tskhinvali

The government of Georgia representatives demanded the handover of Archil Tatumashvili's internal organs during the 86th Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meeting in Ergneti village yesterday (*Agenda.ge, May 16, 2018*).

5. Occupants detain Georgian citizen with heart disease near breakaway Tskhinvali

The Russia-controlled so-called border guards have detained Georgian citizen David Chalauri near the occupation line with Georgia's breakaway Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region today.

Locals say that Chalauri, 29, allegedly could not find a way and accidentally appeared on the territory which is under Russia's control (*Agenda.ge, May 18, 2018*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

6. Georgian President: 'I dream of the day when I have a rational dialogue with the Russian leader'

The Georgian president Giorgi Margvelashvili stated today that Georgia is ready to have a "rational" dialogue with Russia, while the country [Russia] still acts with a strategy from the medieval ages. We are ready and we offer Russia a rational dialogue. What is a rational dialogue? Rational dialogue is based on the interests of people and not some individuals who run the country.

"Margvelashvili spoke at Georgia's Medical University today during an event dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the First Republic of Georgia."

The president says that the current actions of Russia are similar to those in the medieval ages, when stronger countries suppressed weaker ones (*Agenda.ge, May 16, 2018*).

7. Freedom House corrects its report on Georgia after being criticized by Georgian Gov't

"An earlier version of this report incorrectly stated that the second channel of the public broadcaster GPB was closed down. The channel still operates but its content has been reduced," the report reads now.

"An earlier version of this report incorrectly stated that the Georgian Dream government returned ownership of Imedi TV to the family of deceased businessman Badri Patarkatsishvili. It was the United National Movement which had returned control of the broadcaster to the family after Georgian Dream defeated UNM in elections in October 2012." – reads report (*Agenda.ge, May 16, 2018*).

8. Georgia hosts US Army and NATO Supreme Allied Commander

Commander of US European Command and NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe Curtis Scaparrotti was hosted by the Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Kvirikashvili, President of Georgia Giorgi Margvelashvili and the Minister of Defense Levan Izoria today.

The American general will attend the Georgian Defence Readiness Program launch ceremony with the defence minister and also will participate in the opening of the Combat Training Center at Vaziani military base (*Agenda.ge, May 18, 2018*).

9. Defence Minister: 'We launch the most ambitious Georgia-US military project'

The Georgian Defence Minister Levan Izoria has announced the launch of the "most ambitious" US-Georgia project-Georgia's Defence Readiness Program (GDRP), which will be carried out with the United States over the course of three years to boost the country's self-defence capabilities.

The trainings will take place at the NATO standards Combat Training Center (CTC) built in Vaziani, on the outskirts of Tbilisi, which was officially opened today (*Agenda.ge, May 18, 2018*).

10. Georgian envoy to discuss trade issues during upcoming meeting with Russian deputy FM

The next regular working meeting between the Georgian PM's special representative for relations with Russia Zurab Abashidze and the Russian deputy foreign minister Grigory Karasin will be held on May 24 in Prague (*Agenda.ge, May 19, 2018*).

11. Georgian PM to visit US

Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Kvirikashvili and the ministers of economy, foreign affairs and defence will visit the US from May 21-24.

During his working visit PM Kvirikashvili will open the plenary meeting of the Georgia-US strategic partnership council with the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Also, Kvirikashvili will take part in the US-Georgia strategic partnership annual conference which is being organised by the Heritage Foundation and the US Institute of Peace in Washington DC (*Agenda.ge, May 19, 2018*).

12. State Department hosts the U.S.-Georgia Partnership Commission Working Group Meeting on Democracy

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, both sides have exchanged information on the strategies and plans of the government for deepening the partnership. Also, the development of democratic processes in Georgia positively assessed.

The meeting was attended by representatives of various state agencies of Georgia and the United States. The meeting was led by Georgia's First Deputy Minister of Justice Aleksandre Baramidze and Georgian First Deputy Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani (*ITV, May 20, 2018*).

❖ Internal Affairs

13. Giorgi Margvelashvili - We saw complete collapse of political and administrative actions and series of mistakes

In recent days, we saw a complete collapse of political and administrative actions and series of mistakes starting with a raid and followed by subsequent developments. How could they manage to arrive at such a zenith of civil confrontation in a few hours? This question requires a direct answer.

Our aim is to maintain freedom of expression and freedom of speech and at the same time, to keep order on the streets and in the political-public processes,"- Margvelashvili said (*IPN.GE, May 14, 2018*).

14. President initiates launch of anti-drug campaign

According to the President, drugs are a catastrophe and they instantly take away the lives of our citizens or destroy them and this needs to be recognized without any politicization.

"Campaign should be made not by people like me, not some groups who cannot understand the youth, but the artists, musicians and representatives of the community who speak the modern language. Our initiative is that representatives of electronic and club music should carry out the anti-drug campaign", Giorgi Margvelashvili said (*IPN.GE, May 14, 2018*).

15. It is wrong to say that a decision on the review of the drug policy was made after Bera spoke about it - Kakha Kaladze

"It is wrong to say that a decision on the review of the drug policy was made after Bera spoke about it. You can get a lot of materials, including my statement made the day before yesterday, when is said that the drug policy should be changed. This is a serious problem for our country and people living in this country. Generally, the state should not punish but protect people from drugs. We all need to fight drug dealers together and I'm sure many people will join this fight," said the Mayor (*IPN.GE, May 14, 2018*).

16. I do not have a feeling that we will get some significant progress - Davit Subeliani

I do not have a feeling that we will get some significant progress, - Davit Subeliani, a representative of the White Noise Movement, said after meeting with Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia. He said that the topic of today's meeting was to determine the format and content of the next meeting (*IPN.GE, May 14, 2018*).

17. If we see that the format of cooperation does not work, we will go back to the street - Beka Tsikarishvili

"Today's message is that we are not going to make any more concession. Yesterday's temporary termination of protests was a compromise. Tomorrow is the day when we will discuss in detail the night of May 12.

As for the issue of drug policy, the principal objection was artificially created, as nobody justifies drug trafficking in this country. Fight against dealers is legitimate, but users should not be punished. The starting point for us is a caretaker policy and this message has been voiced today", Tsikarishvili said (*IPN.GE, May 14, 2018*).

18. The Public Defender's Office has not received any notification about abuse of power by police on May 12 - Giorgi Gakharia

"We are ready to discuss all the issues and answer all the questions about the night of May 12. We promised our guests that we would discuss in detail the cases of abuse of power. At the same time, I want to point out that the Public Defender's Office has not received any notification about the abuse of power by police on the night of May 12, but we are ready to discuss this issue again," Giorgi Gakharia said (*IPN.GE, May 14, 2018*).

19. Minister of Internal Affairs to talk about 3 issues in parliament

Gakharia will discuss results of work carried out in 2018, ongoing and planned reforms in MIA and the special operation conducted on May 12 in night clubs "Basiani" and "Gallery" in detention of drug dealers.

According to Tamar Chugoshvili, Vice Chairperson of the Parliament, minister will deliver his speech and will then answer questions of lawmakers (*ITV, May 16, 2018*).

20. Natia Mezvrishvili – Search in night clubs was legitimate

The police had the right to carry out search at night clubs in Tbilisi. Drugs were sold at these clubs – Natia Mezvrishvili, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs stated about the special operation carried out on May 12 at "Basiani" and Gallery" night clubs in Tbilisi.

According to Mezvrishvili, the facts of drugs selling were confirmed with evidence and video material and therefore, search in night clubs was legitimate (*ITV, May 16, 2018*).

21. Akaki Zoidze – Legislation will become stricter to block so-called pharmacy drugs consumption

Akaki Zoidze, Chairman of the Parliamentary Healthcare Committee says that the government has to prevent risks of drugs consumption, and limitations have to be imposed against drugs consumers on driving rights, working as a doctor and being employed in public institutions.

According to Zoidze, there is difference in opinions among lawmakers mainly over amount of consumed drugs, terms of decriminalization and border existing between consumption and realization of drugs (*ITV, May 16, 2018*).

22. "Equality Movement" says "LGBT activists made hardest decision" to cancel the May 17 rally

"It is known that on May 17 of this year unprecedented mobilization has been announced by the groups who show hostility towards us, including the Patriarchate of Georgia and the fascist group suspected of cooperating with Russian special services. We have a reasonable doubt that these forces are preparing unprecedented mobilization on May 17 to create unrest and civil confrontation in the city. As far as we realize all existed and real threats, LGBT activists have made hardest and consolidated decision to give up our constitutional right to self-expression and to cancel the rally planned outside the Georgia's Chancellery for May 17," the statement by the "Equality Movement" reads (*IPN, May 17, 2018*).

23. 'Georgian March' cancels May 17 rally

Sandro Bregadze explained LGBT activists announced that they cancelled their rallies, therefore the "Georgian March" made the decision to cancel its planned protest, instead they will gather near the Administration of the Government. (*IPN, May 17, 2018*).

24. Parliament legal committee supports draft against femicide

The initiative by the NGO appeals to several state structures over gender-based hate crimes:

- To the parliament of Georgia- to prohibit femicide or declare gender-based murder as an aggravated circumstance, envisaging imprisonment of 13-20 years.
- To the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia- to address a judge to consider that the crime was gender-based, until the changes come into play.
- To the Interior Ministry of Georgia- for the body to elaborate mechanisms for the evaluation of femicide risks and take all measures to prevent such crimes.
- To the president of Georgia-not to pardon convicts sentenced for femicide and other gender-based hate crimes (*Agenda.ge, May 18, 2018*).

25. Interior Minister arrives in parliament over anti-drug raid in night clubs

The Georgian Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia came in parliament today to speak about the police raid in nightclubs in Tbilisi on May 12 and to answer to the lawmakers' questions.

"No one has yet provided even a single fact that the police exceeded their power during the raid," Gakharia said.

"If such a fact is revealed and confirmed, we are ready to react appropriately," Gakharia said.

"The minister stated that the police raided in the two nightclubs only after they had evidence over the sale of drugs.

"We chose the midnight for the operation as club life starts at night. Police excused for disturbing of people and explained the reason of the raid.

"We created discomfort for 70-100 people in the clubs who arrived there for entertainment. However, the raid took place because of the public interests and the benefits brought by the raid are significant," Gakharia stated.

Gakharia said that no one can say that "even a hair was dropped" from them due to the actions of police inside the clubs (*Agenda.ge, May 18, 2018*).

26. 11 persons detained for sex trafficking

Officers of Samtskhe-Javakheti police department of Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) carried out investigative measures on the fact of engagement in prostitution in Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia.

Investigative activities were conducted in nine so-called Turkish bars and five restaurants during the last week.

MIA informs that owners of bars and restaurants in Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki, a total of 11 persons, were detained on the fact of engagement in prostitution using violence, threat of violence or of destruction of property, blackmail or deception. The crime is punishable by a fine or imprisonment for up to 2 years," the Ministry said (*ITV, May 19, 2018*).

27. I think we will manage to reach an agreement - Kobakhidze speaks about drug policy

The parliamentary majority has a week to come to an agreement on the draft law on drug policy. Speaker of the Parliament Irakli Kobakhidze explains that discussions are underway in parliament to form a common position.

The ruling team is convinced that the process will finally be successful and it will be possible to develop a better drug policy (*Rustavi 2, May 21, 2018*).

28. Intimidation and psychological pressure - Inga Grigolia's interrogation ended late last night

The interrogation of journalist Inga Grigolia finished late last night at Tbilisi Police Main Division. The reason for questioning the journalist was letter publicized by her, according to which she had been threatened and asked law enforcement agencies to ensure her safety.

Law enforcers questioned Levan Kirvalidze, producer of the program "Reaction" who personally handed a threat letter to Inga Grigolia. TV "Pirveli" operator Zviad Sisauri also. Law enforcers are expected to question the journalist's family and other employees.

According to Inga Grigolia, an unknown man has been calling her since 2011 inflicting psychological pressure on the journalist (*Rustavi 2, May 21, 2018*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

29. Russia, Greece, Italy are largest remittance senders in April 2018

Last month Georgia received \$35.3 million in remittances from Russia, \$14.5 million from Italy and \$14.9 million from Greece.

Overall, the volume of money transfers from abroad to Georgia constituted \$123.9 million, which is 17.1 percent more than the amount in April 2017 (*Agenda.ge, May 15, 2018*).

30. 30m GEL planned for infrastructural projects in Tbilisi for 2019-2020

A total of 30 million GEL (about \$12.35m/€10.43m) will be allocated from the state budget for the implementation of infrastructural projects in Georgia's capital of Tbilisi planned for 2019-2020.

The decision was made at a working meeting held yesterday between Georgia's Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili, Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze and Finance Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze (*Agenda.ge, May 16, 2018*).

31. YouTube to promote Georgia's summer destinations

New advertising campaign on YouTube will be launched on May 29 and last until August 29. The target countries will be the Great Britain, Germany, Italy, France, Poland, Ukraine, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.

It is expected that the number of impressions as a result of the campaign will be 95,237,500 and the number of views - 21,052,500 (*Agenda.ge, May 18, 2018*).

32. New factory in Georgia's Kutaisi city produces clothing for H&M

Men and women's clothing of Swedish fashion retailer H&M will be made in Georgia's western city of Kutaisi at a newly opened clothing manufacturing enterprise MGMtex.

MGMtex was created by Georgian-Romanian investment where in total 7 million GEL (about \$2.81m/€2.38m*) was invested.

The enterprise was opened yesterday with the support of state agency 'Produce in Georgia'. State support allowed the company to purchase the sewing machines of latest technology (*Agenda.ge, May 18, 2018*).

