

# WEEKLY NEWS REPORT ON GEORGIA

*Date: May 28 – June 3, 2018*

## ❖ Occupied Regions

### 1. Syria recognises independence of Georgia's occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Syria has released an official statement regarding the recognition of occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions.

“Expressing gratitude for the support during the terrorist aggression against Syria, the Syrian Arab Republic has decided to establish diplomatic relations with the republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia,” the Syrian foreign ministry said. The official statement also reads that the diplomatic ties will be established at the embassy level (*Agenda.ge, May 29, 2018*).

### 2. Georgia cutting diplomatic relations with Syria

Georgia has started procedures to cut diplomatic relations with the Syrian Arab Republic, announces the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia.

The decision came after Syria officially recognised the independence of occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions today (*Agenda.ge, May 29, 2018*).

### 3. NATO supports the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia

"The South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions are part of Georgia. NATO continues to call on Russia to reverse its recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia and to withdraw its forces from Georgia. All NATO Allies support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders," reads the statement in which NATO encourages all parties of the Geneva talks to engage constructively and pursue peaceful conflict resolution on the internationally recognised territory of Georgia." - reads a statement released by NATO Spokesperson Oana Lungescu (*Agenda.ge, May 30, 2018*).

### 4. US Department of State: South Ossetia and Abkhazia are integral parts of Georgia

"In terms of the news [as to] why Syria has now recognised Abkhazia and South Ossetia, this isn't a complete surprise to us simply because Bashar al-Assad is propped up by the Russian regime", the spokesperson of the US State Department Heather Nauert said during a press briefing on May 29 while speaking about Syria's recognition of the Russian-occupied Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (*Agenda.ge, May 30, 2018*).

### 5. Japan denounces Syria recognition of independence of Abkhazia, South Ossetia

"It is Japan's consistent position that the peaceful resolution of the issue concerning Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia in line with the principles of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders is essential for peace and stability of the country and the entire South Caucasus region," reads a press release published by Japan's embassy to Georgia based in Tbilisi today (*Agenda.ge, June 1, 2018*).

## ❖ Foreign Affairs

### 6. Term of living in Georgia for getting Georgian citizenship may be increased

The term of living in Georgia for getting Georgian citizenship may be increased. According to the amendments to the Law on Citizenship, the five-year living term will be increased to 10 years for getting ordinary citizenship. As for the simplified citizenship, two-year living term may increase to five years.

The draft amendments to the Law on Citizenship are ready for initiation. The project will be submitted to the Parliament at the next sitting of the Bureau (*IPN.Ge, May 28, 2018*).

#### **7. Georgian and Armenian Prime Ministers meet, vow new impetus in bilateral relations**

The newly elected Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan has met with Georgian PM Giorgi Kvirikashvili at the administration building of the Government of Georgia in Tbilisi today, where they vowed closer and friendlier relations between the two countries.

Pashinyan, the former protest leader who took up the post of the country's premiership on May 8, arrived in Georgia on the 100th anniversary of the First Republic of Armenia (*Agenda.ge, May 30, 2018*).

#### **8. Georgia tries to reduce asylum seekers from the country to Europe**

Georgian Interior Minister has discussed steps taken by Georgia towards reducing asylum seekers from the country with his German colleague Horst Seehofer pointing out that there is a positive dynamic in terms of a decrease in their number.

During his official visit to Germany Giorgi Gakharia met with Horst Seehofer, German Minister of Interior to discuss bilateral cooperation between the two countries as well as measures aimed at reducing asylum seekers from Georgia (*Agenda.ge, May 31, 2018*).

### **❖ Internal Affairs**

#### **9. NATO Sec-Gen: Georgia has all the tools needed for NATO membership**

"We will continue supporting Georgia which has all the tools needed to become a member of NATO," - Jens Stoltenberg said in Warsaw while attending the spring session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly today (*Agenda.ge, May 28, 2018*).

#### **10. NATO PA declaration urges alliance leaders to back Georgia's hope of joining NATO**

Parliamentarians from the NATO nations have appealed for Alliance leaders on Monday to continue providing strong political and practical support to Georgia in the process of NATO integration and to advance the further political dimension of the country's NATO membership process (*Agenda.ge, May 29, 2018*).

#### **11. Court verdict stirs controversy on high profile murder case of teenagers**

The Tbilisi City Court verdict on the high profile murder case of two teenagers in central Tbilisi last year has caused controversy as the court verdict failed to say who killed one teenage boy. After the verdict was announced hundreds of people gathered in front of Georgia's Chief Prosecutor's office, demanding fair investigation. The court found guilty both teenagers detained for the murder.

One of the detainees G.B. was found guilty for the premeditated murder of Levan Dadunashvili, while another detainee G.J. was found guilty for attempted murder of David Saralidze (*Agenda.ge, May 31, 2018*).

#### **12. Davit Saralidze's father urges political forces, ruling team and citizens to stand beside him and organized mass protest rally**

Zaza Saralidze, the father of 16-year-old boy Davit Saralidze, who was stabbed to death on Khorava Street in Tbilisi, calls on political forces, ruling team and all competent figures to stand beside him. Zaza Saralidze objects to the court verdict and demands punishment of “all murders and those, who are covering up the crime.” (*IPN.GE, May 31, 2018*).

### **13. Chief Prosecutor Irakli Shotadze resigns**

The Georgian Chief Prosecutor Irakli Shotadze has resigned in the wake of the Tbilisi City Court verdict on the high profile murder case of two teenage boys in central Tbilisi in December last year. In a special statement released on the official page of the Georgian Chief Prosecutor’s Office, Shotadze stated that his body has taken all measures to establish the truth on the case, but due to the protest of the people gathered in front of the Parliament, he decided to resign (*IPN.GE, May 31, 2018*).

### **14. Rally participants threw bottles at Prime Minister**

It's very important for me the process to be developed, therefore, I offer the case to be returned to the Internal Affairs Minister for the further investigation, - Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili said when addressing the rally outside the Parliament's building on Rustaveli Avenue.

Rally participants did not allow Prime Minister to finish his speech throwing bottles at him, whistling and shouting: "Go, Go!" The situation was extremely tense at the rally and the Prime Minister has already left the territory (*IPN.GE, June 1, 2018*).

### **15. Investigation of high profile adolescent murder case to be taken on by MIA**

After failing to address demonstrators PM Kvirikashvili has launched press-conference, where he explained to the society the future plans of the Governmental team over the investigation.

"The Minister of Internal Affairs will be heading the investigation process from now on and I am going to be involved at every stage, parents of the murdered teenagers will be informed on a daily basis about the process”, he said, adding that the Justice Minister was ordered to choose a new prosecutor with "maximum legitimacy” (*IPN.GE, June 1, 2018*).

### **16. Georgian President and public defender meet with protest leader**

The parents of other children dead or missing have united today to speak publicly about their cases and how they are seeking justice.

Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili met with Zaza Saralidze earlier today to express his support for a fair investigation. The one on one meeting was focused on the details of the investigation and continued about an hour.

'I will spare no efforts for Georgia to be a country where everyone finds justice and stability," President said.

"First of all, obviously, I have shared the pain that has filled up Zaza Saralidze’s heart and touched many people,” President said (*Agenda.ge June 1, 2018*).

### **17. Ministry of Internal Affairs says Zaza Saralidze’s life is in danger**

According to the available information, various provocations are expected from certain politically motivated forces against Zaza Saralidze, - reads the statement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

According to the agency, the provocations may be used for creating destabilization in the country. "As this risk is high and there is a real life-threatening danger, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia offers Zaza Saralidze a special protection program intended for witnesses", - reads the statement (*IPN.GE, June 1, 2018*).

### **18. Zaza Saralidze rejects protection offered by Ministry of Internal Affairs**

The government says it wants to protect me. I had been begging them to protect the rights of my son for six months and they insulted memory of my son. I do not need their protection," Zaza Saralidze said at the rally (*IPN.Ge, June 1, 2018*).

#### **19. Zaza Saralidze - SSSG attempted to kidnap me**

They have decided to take the last measures, to kill me,- Zaza Saralidze, father of Davit Saralidze murdered on Khorava Street, told rally in front of the Parliament's building in Tbilisi.

"They are taking the final measures. They decided to liquidate me," Zaza Saralidze said (*IPN.GE, June 1, 2018*).

#### **20. Interior Minister ready to meet with Davit Saralidze's father**

Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia is ready to meet with Zaza Saralidze, father of teenager Davit Saralidze murdered on Khorava Street, unconditionally, and provided him with the details of the ongoing investigation,- the Ministry of Internal Affairs said in June 2 statement.

Giorgi Khorava has already met with Davit Dadunashvili, father of another teenager Levan Dadunashvili murdered on Khorava Street, and his lawyer (*IPN.GE, June 2, 2018*).

#### **21. Davit Saralidze's father refuses to meet with Interior Minister**

Two months ago I kneeled before the Minister begging him to meet. Today, I will not," Saralidze said (*IPN.GE, June 2, 2018*).

#### **22. Rally organizer to start negotiations with representatives of political parties**

Zviad Kuprava, one of the organizers of the protests underway on Rustaveli Avenue, will start negotiations with representatives of political parties.

As InterPressNews was told by Kuprava, political process is underway and all those who are willing to fight against the regime will be involved in the process (*IPN.GE, June 3, 2018*).

#### **23. Republican Party - It is categorically unacceptable to artificially turn the protest rallies in the pseudo-revolutionary scenario**

We have supported thorough investigation of the murder of adolescents and immediate punishment of offenders from the first day. We will always stand beside the man oppressed by the state.

However, yesterday's events pushed the fair protest to artificially turn into a bipartisan confrontation. This is a scenario in the interests of the Georgian Dream and Bidzina Ivanishvili, who are creating the image of an enemy from the National Movement and Misha Saakashvil. The organizer of yesterday's events was the very National Movement, which inadequately assesses the current situation and fails to realize that the aim of the fight against the violent system is not its eplacement by the previous government. Consequently, the proposed scenario and the call for pseudo-partnership will not contribute to, but on the contrary, prevent the consolidation of the society and ultimately only the government will benefit from it," reads the statement (*IPN.GE, June 3, 2018*).

#### **24. Radical groups want to create the instability and have unlawful political demands - Prime Minister**

Radical groups want to create the instability and have unlawful political demands. We will not give anyone grounds for creating instability, - Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili told journalists after the Georgian Dream political board meeting (*IPN.GE, June 3, 2018*).

#### **25. Our goal is to select new Chief Prosecutor with maximum legitimacy - Giorgi Kvirikashvili**

"From tomorrow, the Ministry of Justice will start discussion of the Prosecutor General's candidacy. These consultations will be as broad as possible. Our goal is to select the candidate of Chief Prosecutor with maximum legitimacy of the society", - said the PM (*IPN.GE, June 3, 2018*).

#### **26. Opposition parties to announce joint action plan at today's rally**

"We agreed on a common action plan. Today we will stand beside Zaza Saralidze and Malkhaz Machalakiashvili. We will politically back their demands. We fully support their demands", - said Giorgi Vashadze, a representative of the New Georgia party.

The European Union is also planning to participate in the protest rally. "We also agreed that we will continue consultations on some issues that cause different positions among us," said Sergo Ratiani, one of the leaders of the European Georgia party (*IPN.GE, June 3, 2018*).

#### **27. Demonstrators in Vake Park say they will not go home until rallies on Rustaveli Avenue are not over**

We will be here until the rallies in front of the parliament will not end, - one of the organizers of the rally in the Vake Park said. According to the organizers, they will put up tents and will continue the demonstration all night long.

The demonstration is being organized in the Vake Park by youth. They are demanding objective investigation of the murder of two teenagers and are protesting against the political demonstration in front of the parliament (*IPN.GE, June 3, 2018*).

## **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

#### **28. World Bank supports Georgia to improve living standards**

The new CPF is fully aligned with the government's vision for the country's development, which is driven by the "Georgia 2020" program that emphasizes freedom, rapid development, and prosperity through four policy goals - economic reform, education reform, spatial arrangement and infrastructure, and governance, says the World Bank (*Agenda.ge, May 29, 2018*).

#### **29. Georgia's Economy Minister highlights de-dollarization progress**

Georgia's Economy Minister Dimitry Kumsishvili says that as of April 2018 the use of the US dollar in Georgia's economy has "reduced significantly".

In his words the share of the US dollar in deposits has declined from 70 percent to 62 percent, while the share of the US dollar in total loans fell from 65 percent to 55 percent.

Kumsishvili stated that the use of the domestic currency, the lari, in Georgia's economy is increasing thanks to efforts taken by the government to strengthen lari-denominated economic activity (*Agenda.ge, May 30, 2018*).

#### **30. Georgia launches construction of 230 MW Gardabani Thermal Power Plant 2**

A new Combined Cycle Thermal Power Plant will be built in Georgia to increase the country's power generation and move Georgia one step closer towards energy independence.

Georgian government officials laid the foundation for the 230 MW Gardabani Thermal Power Plant 2 in Georgia's Kvemo Kartli region yesterday (*Agenda.ge, May 30, 2018*).

#### **31. 2017 data: 21.9% of Georgia's population under absolute poverty line**

Almost 22 percent of Georgia's population is under the absolute poverty line, shows the latest data of 2017 poverty indicators published by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat). Georgia's

population has reached 3,729,600 people. Most people under absolute the poverty line live in the country's rural areas.

Geostat said that the share of the population under absolute poverty line is 26.6 percent in rural Georgia and 18.6 percent in urban areas (*GEOSTAT.GE, May 31, 2018*).

### **32. TANAP natural gas pipeline via Georgia opens on June 12**

The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), a natural gas pipeline from Azerbaijan passing through Georgia and Turkey to Europe, will be opened on June 12 in the Turkish city of Eskisehir.

Presidents of all three countries will attend the ceremony. President of Georgia Giorgi Margvelashvili was invited to the ceremony by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The two presidents talked over the phone today.

Erdogan congratulated Margvelashvili on the 100th anniversary of the first Georgian Republic and invited him to the opening ceremony of the TANAP project to be held in Eskisehir, on June 12 (*Agenda.ge, June 2, 2018*).