

# WEEKLY NEWS REPORT ON GEORGIA

Date: June 4 - 10, 2018

## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

#### 1. Two kidnappings near occupation line Priest and shepherd detained in Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia)

A priest was detained by Russia-controlled guards of the occupying forces near the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) in Georgia's Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia) early morning today.

Ioane Okhanashvili is the pastor of Saint Georgia's Church in the village Dirbi, located a few kilometres away from the South Ossetian ABL.

The news about the other detention came from the village of Tsitelubani. The shepherd Teimuraz Dudashvili was taken by force to Tskhinvali by Russian border guards, according to his neighbours (*Agenda.ge, June 5, 2018*).

#### 2. National Forensics Bureau: Tatumashvili sustained over 100 injuries while alive

The results of the autopsy carried out by the Georgia's National Forensics Bureau shows that 35-year-old soldier Archil Tatumashvili, who died in unclear circumstances in occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region on February 23 2018, sustained more than 100 injuries all over his body while alive.

"All injuries were received while he was alive. They were caused by the multiple use of a blunt tool," says the findings of the Forensics Bureau. This document is only a part of the complex examination, which should find the real reasons behind the death of the Georgian soldier (*Agenda.ge, June 5, 2018*).

#### 3. Tatumashvili murder case investigation to include charges of torture

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia has decided to add the charge of torture to the investigation of Archil Tatumashvili murder case after the results of an autopsy have revealed new evidence.

The investigation has been carried out over charges of murder and the illegal deprivation of liberty so far.

The results of the autopsy carried out by the Georgian National Forensics Bureau show that 25-year-old Archil Tatumashvili, who died in unclear circumstances in occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) on February 23, sustained more than 100 injuries all over his body while alive (*Agenda.ge, June 6, 2018*).

#### 4. Occupants release illegally detained Georgian man

The de facto leadership of Georgia's eastern occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region has released a Georgian citizen Temur Dudashvili, who was illegally detained by the Russia-controlled so-called border guards yesterday.

The man was detained near Khurvaleti village of Gori municipality when he was herding the cattle. The government of Georgia and the European Union Monitoring Mission have been involved in the negotiations over the release of the man.

The same day the occupants detained a Georgian cleric Ioane Okhanashvili with the same charge near Dvani village of Kareli municipality, but he was released on the same evening (*Agenda.ge, June 6, 2018*).

## **5. President Margvelashvili - The murder of Archil Tatumashvili should be properly responded**

The murder of Archil Tatumashvili should be properly responded, - President of Georgia Giorgi Margvelashvili said at the meeting with Günther Bächler, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the South Caucasus.

As the press office of the President's Administration informs, Giorgi Margvelashvili talked about the necessity of raising the issue of Archil Tatumashvili's murder within Geneva and other international formats and noted that this murder should be answered suitably (*IPN.GE, June 8, 2018*).

## **6. Ketevan Tsikhelashvili urges for more responsibility while disseminating information about citizens living in occupied regions**

"Patients' hospitalization from the occupied territories is carried out every day. Including through the Red Cross in the particularly heavy cases, it is necessary to take more responsibility in order certain speculations not be harmful to citizens living in the occupied territories," the State Minister said.

According to the information, disseminated in the social network, Aslan Jioev, chief bodyguard of Akhalkalaki so-called governor Philip Khachirov, has been hospitalized from occupied Tskhinvali region to Tbilisi Ghudushauri hospital. Reportedly, Khachirov is one of the main figures in Archil Tatumashvili murder case.

Marina Gelantia, First Deputy Director General at Ghudushauri Clinic, says the clinic has no right to identify the patient's name and surname.

## **❖ Foreign Affairs**

### **7. EU human rights envoy: Georgia's penitentiary reform exemplary for other countries**

tavros Lambrinidis, European Union's Special Representative for Human Rights believes that Georgia could be a good example for other countries with regard of penitentiary system reform.

As Lambardinis has said at a meeting with Georgian Minister of Corrections Kakha Kakhishvili held in Brussels yesterday, Georgia could successfully export the reform to other countries (*Agenda.ge, June 6, 2018*).

## **❖ Internal Affairs**

### **8. Tbilisi without subway, day 2 - Train drivers continue protest**

The drivers of Tbilisi subway trains continue their protest, demanding increased salaries.

On the other hand Tbilisi City Hall says this year there is no financial resources to increase salaries for subway drivers and promises to start discussions on the issue in 2019.

Drivers say that if an agreement is signed which envisages a salary increase starting from January 1, 2019, they will continue to work from 8 am instead of 6 am which is the official time of the subway opening (*Agenda.ge, May 5, 2018*).

### **9. Metro drivers stop strike as agreement reached with gov't**

Tbilisi metro drivers have stopped their strike on the third day as a verbal agreement has been reached with Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze over a gradual increase of salaries.

Drivers returned to their jobs at 2 pm today and said that their salaries will rise step by step from January 2019, until the hike reaches 45 percent.

The announcement was a relief for around 16 percent of Tbilisi residents, for 400,000 people, who use metro transport daily.

Before the 240 metro drivers returned to their jobs, the Tbilisi City Hall had made public buses free of charge. However, the strike created serious problems for residents and on the roads.

The strikers, who receive 7 GEL (\$2.8) for per hour, have demanded an increase in their pay to 10 GEL (\$4) (*Agenda.ge, June 6, 2018*).

#### **10. Opposition MP will chair parliament commission on teenage murder case**

The parliament of Georgia has confirmed one of the leaders of the European Georgia opposition party Sergi Kapanadze as the head of a parliamentary fact-finding commission on a high-profile murder case of two teenage boys in central Tbilisi last year.

The commission, which is composed of 10 opposition members out of a total of 17 members, is tasked to clarify alleged offences committed by law enforcers or other authorities.

Nine members of the commission represent the European Georgia opposition, six are from the Georgian Dream ruling party, one from the Alliance of Patriots opposition and one is an independent lawmaker Salome Zourabichvili (*Agenda.ge, June 6, 2018*).

#### **11. MIA arrests former Prosecutor's Office official in high profile adolescent murder case**

Former high ranking official of the Prosecutor's Office Mirza Subeliani was arrested today by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and charged with failing to inform the authorities of a murder.

"Mirza Subeliani pleads guilty. Investigation proceedings are continuing around this case," MIA said in a statement released after several hours of summoning of Mirza Subeliani who faces a prison sentence of two to four years (*Agenda.ge, June 9, 2018*).

#### **12. President believes demand on Justice Minister's resignation is logical**

President of Georgia Giorgi Margvelashvili says the demand of the non-governmental organizations on Justice Minister's resignation is logical, -President stated about it in his interview with TV Pirveli.

"The NGOs have expressed their clear position regarding the Minister of Justice that if the selection of a new prosecutor needs legitimization of the society, in this regard they are the part of the legitimacy resulting from the competence. First of all I was glad that they had set certain conditions. They said that they would not sit with the person, who had made so many mistakes. Talking with the government with moral criteria is right," President Margvelashvili said (*IPN.GE, June 9, 2018*).

#### **13. President Margvelashvili says he does not support the Prime Minister's resignation**

"I do not have the feeling that the Prime Minister should resign, but it's up to the society to raise or not to raise this demand. I, as the President and as a citizen do not support the Prime Minister's resignation but everything depends on the adequacy of the process, because politicians should talk with the people, they should not have the illusion that the "Facebook Fake" drives a political process. Politicians should not shelter behind domestic machine of the propaganda it's disastrous" Margvelashvili said (*IPN.GE, June 9, 2018*).

#### **14. Zviad Kuprava and three others detained rally yesterday**

Zviad Kuprava, one of the organizers of the protests on Rustavveli Avenue, and three others have been detained for administrative offense. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 4 persons are detained for administrative violations, namely for disobeying the lawful order and petty hooliganism (*IPN.GE, June 11, 2018*).

## **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

#### **15. Annual inflation rate in May 2018 amounts to 2.5%**

Georgia's annual inflation rate amounted to 2.5 percent in May 2018 , while compared to the previous month the Consumer Price Index (annual inflation) remained unchanged, reports the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

Last month prices for food and non-alcoholic beverages decreased by 0.7 percent and contributed -0.22 percentage points to the overall Consumer Price Index change (*Agenda.ge, June 4, 2018*).

#### **16. Georgia's businesses employ 637,000 people in Q1 2018**

Georgian businesses employed about 637,000 people in the first quarter (Q1) of 2018, of which 40.6 percent were women and 59.4 percent were men.

The number of people employed in the Georgian business sector increased by 5.3 percent compared to the same quarter of 2017, shows the latest data by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

The majority of people employed in the business sector worked in Georgia's capital of Tbilisi, which is regarded as the country's economic hub.

Geostat revealed the number of employees by region:

- Tbilisi – 65 percent
- Adjara – 9.5 percent
- Imereti – 6.9 percent
- Kvemo Kartli – 5.5 percent
- Samegrelo-Zemo-Svaneti – 4 percent (*Agenda.ge, June 4, 2018*).

#### **17. Large business delegation from UK visits Georgia**

A UK trade delegation has visited Georgia to share its experience and knowledge with local businesses and familiarise themselves with the Georgian business environment.

This is the first large British business delegation to Georgia since 2012, with businesses representing a variety of sectors ranging from financial services to renewable energy and infrastructure development.

The UK business delegation led by UK Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to Georgia and Armenia Mark Pritchard MP met Georgia's Economy Minister Dimitri Kumsishvili yesterday (*Agenda.ge, June 5, 2018*).

#### **18. Jan-May 2018: Georgian wine export up 27 percent**

Georgia exported 31.5 million bottles of wine to 46 countries in the first five months of 2018, announces the Georgian National Wine Agency.

In January-May of 2018 Georgia generated about \$75.3 million from the sale of wine abroad.

Revenue increased by 36 percent from January-May 2017, while the volume of exports increased by 27 percent, said the Georgian National Wine Agency.

Export growth was notable in the following countries:

- Japan – 186 percent increase (97,668 bottles)
- Great Britain – 109 percent increase (45,210 bottles)
- The Czech Republic– 87 percent (24,408 bottles)
- South Korea – 76 percent increase (31,380 bottles)
- Germany –51 percent increase (252,982 bottles) (*Agenda.ge, June 5, 2018*).

#### **19. ADB forecasts 4.7% economic growth in Georgia in 2019**

The growth of Georgia's economy is projected to reach 4.7 percent in 2019, following a dip to 4.5 percent in 2018, on strong investment and exports, says the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

On the supply side, industry is forecast to expand by 5.4 percent in 2018 and 5.8 percent in 2019, with strong growth in construction and a rebound in utilities. Services are projected to grow by 4.5 percent in 2018 and 4.8 percent in 2019 on further gains in tourism and finance. With continued help from government programs, agriculture is expected to expand by 2.1 percent in 2018 and 3.7 percent in 2019, says the ADB (*Agenda.ge, June 6, 2018*).

#### **20. Georgia and Hong Kong to sign free trade deal in June**

Georgia and Hong Kong are signing a free trade agreement by the end of this month, Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili has announced.

This agreement is very important for exporting our products and of course once again demonstrates that Georgia's open economy is open for trade, for investments", said Kvirikashvili.

I am sure this will give an additional stimulus to our country's economic development", he added.

So far Georgia has free trade deals with China, Turkey, European Union (EU), European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries - Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein - and with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Georgia has also started free trade talks with India, with the United States and the Gulf countries (*Agenda.ge, June 8, 2018*).

#### **21. Georgia seeks to reduce public administration costs using blockchain technology**

The Georgian Finance Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze believes blockchain technology could help Georgia in reducing administrative costs and increasing citizens access to public service.

Speaking at the Constituency Meeting organised by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in Croatia, Mamuka Bakhtadze presented his views on existing possibilities and challenging with regards to financial technologies.

"Georgia has been one of the first countries which has introduced blockchain in the public sector but I think we could be even more ambitious in this direction," Mamuka Bakhtadze said (*Agenda.ge, June 10, 2018*).

## **❖ Culture and Sport**

#### **22. Sumo champion Tochinoshin awarded Knight of Sports state prize**

Sumo champion Tochinoshin has been awarded the top state title of the Knight of Sports of Georgia following his recent achievements in the Japanese competition.

The athlete, born Levan Gorgadze, was bestowed the highest Georgian award in the field of sports at a reception hosted at the Parliament of Georgia on Tuesday.

It was handed to the 2018 Tokyo Grand Sumo Tournament champion by the Minister of Culture and Sports of Georgia Mikheil Giorgadze to mark both the title and his recent promotion to the rank of Ozeki (*Agenda.ge, June 6, 2018*).