

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

September 10-12

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❖ Foreign Affairs

1. Chairman of Adjara government meets ADB Director General for Central and West Asia

Chairman of the government of Adjara Autonomic Republic Tornike Rizhivadze has met with Werner Liepach, Director General for Central and West Asia Department of the Asian Development Bank, - the government of Adjara Autonomic Republic told InterPressNews on Monday.

At the introductory meeting, the parties discussed the current and future projects, which are supported by the Asian Development Bank in the region. In terms of cooperation with Georgia, the priority directions of the bank are the infrastructure and services of roads, energy sector, water supply and sewerage systems, public sector management, private sector development, financial sector development, governance, gender equality and the solutions based on the knowledge (*IPN.GE, September 10, 2018*).

2. PM Bakhtadze meets with Armenian President

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze held a meeting with President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian within the frameworks of his official visit to the Republic of Armenia.

As the Prime Minister's press office informs, at the meeting the sides discussed the two countries' friendly relations and cooperation in different fields.

Special emphasis was made on the potential for developing trade and economic ties. According to the sides, the planning of concrete steps in this direction will be fostered by the Intergovernmental Economic Commission which plans to hold its next meeting before the end of this year (*IPN.GE, September 10, 2018*).

3. PM - We want NATO members to realize that Georgia deserves the status of a full membership

"We are moving to NATO and there are many challenges on this path, but I would like to say that we are quite successful. Everyone understands that this road is full of challenges, but NATO declares that it has an open door policy and it also says that Georgia has all practical tools to become NATO's full member. Of course, we understand that our decision to join NATO is under geopolitical pressure, but we are optimistic and do everything for that... You know that Georgia is among the nations that spend more than two percent on these values. This is a big share if we take into consideration that we are the country of a small economy. We want NATO members to realize that Georgia deserves the status of a full membership," PM Bakhtadze said (*IPN.GE, September 11, 2018*).

4. Speaker - There are pro-Russian forces, including more or less influential, but their influence is declining

"The authorities of the "National Movement" robbed business, tortured people and said they were pro-Western. That's why some people became disappointed about the West and the Russian sentiments

became stronger. After 2012, after the pro-European "Georgian Dream" came to power, these influences have been reduced," said Irakli Kobakhidze (*IPN.GE, September 11, 2018*).

5. Parliament's Speaker - We support Salome Zurbashvili because she is a pro-Western politician

"We support Salome Zurbashvili because she is a pro-Western politician and she has the experience of the Western diplomacy. She will support our integration into the European Union and NATO," Irakli Kobakhidze said the international conference - "The World in 2018 – Upside Down" in Tbilisi (*IPN.GE, September 11, 2018*).

6. PM – Russia is doing everything to stop our peace initiatives

"Occupation is the biggest and most painful challenge we are facing today. 20% of Georgian territories are occupied by Russia and what is happening in these territories is a humanitarian catastrophe. I would like to remind you that the number of population in Tskhinvali region was 120,000 before the war. Now, there are just 20,000 locals, including 7 000 Russian troops. Up to 550,000 people lived in Abkhazia before the Georgia-Russia war, but now there are 20,000. We're trying to react to this humanitarian catastrophe. In this regard we have a very important new initiative - "Step for a Better Future". The idea of this initiative is access to healthcare and education for people living on the occupied territories, but Russia is doing everything to stop our peace initiatives" –said Bakhtadze (*IPN.GE, September 11, 2018*).

7. Resolution condemning recognition of Georgia's occupied regions by Syria submitted to US Congress

"The House of Representatives recognizes Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and reaffirms that the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, currently occupied by the Russian Federation, are territories of Georgia and condemns the decision by the Syrian Arab Republic, which is a client state of the Russian Federation, to recognize the independence of the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia," the Resolution reads (*IPN.GE, September 12, 2018*).

8. FM assumes US might impose sanctions on persons included in "Otkhazia- Tatumashvili" list

Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani assumes that the United States may impose sanctions on the persons included in so-called "Otkhazia- Tatumashvili" list. As Zalkaliani told reporters, it is said in the act supporting Georgia, which has already been initiated (*IPN.GE, September 12, 2018*).

9. Wess Mitchell : It's a pity that we have not woken up even after the 2008 Russia-Georgia war

"Earlier, they used to say that Russia is not threat. Now, they have woken up in the West and realized that Russia is a threat. It's a pity that we have not woken up even after the Russia-Georgia war and this fact became the precondition for starting the war in Ukraine. The West woke up and they already know that Russia is seriously playing. We must say goodbye to the argument that Russia is weak, we must say goodbye to the idea that economic stagnation in Russia is weakening Russia. Putin is a threat and he is carrying out aggression," said Wess Mitchell (*IPN.GE, September 12, 2018*).

10. Wess Mitchell : Russia's influence is indirectly coming from the Orthodox Church

"Russian misinformation and propaganda are strong. We know Russian tools, but we are ready to fight. We work and Georgia has paid a great attention to social media, but there is a great force, the Orthodox Church and the Russian influence is indirectly coming from there. So we have to reach to

those layers of the society who do not have the Internet, for example, if we want to win this competition," Wess Mitchell said (*IPN.GE, September 12, 2018*).

11. FM Zalkaliani – We always clearly say that in 2008 Russia carry out aggression and occupation against Georgia

"In 2008, aggression and occupation was carried out against Georgia and it started much earlier. It should be noted that we always clearly declare that it was occupation and aggression that continues today. Furthermore, the unlawful act that Russia implements on the occupied territories is a step towards actual annexation. This is our unambiguous official position," said FM Zalkaliani (*IPN.GE, September 12, 2018*).

12. Estonian President - You said that the West had woken up, but I do not think that we, from Europe, will agree with your assessment

"We have to do business with Russia. Besides, let's see what the populist parties say - they do not care about our liberal-democratic values, which is good for the Russians. So what has been done since Georgia's war is not enough. We said let's try to bring private business in Georgia, it took 3 months to do it, but I'm not saying that nothing is done," said Kersti Kaljulaid (*IPN.GE, September 12, 2018*).

13. Bishop of Bodbe Jakob speaks about threat of Russia's invasion

"When 20 % of the country is seized by a foreign country and there are its large bases there, it can invade, saying that drugs are brought from us. People will lose from it," Bishop of Bodbe Jakob said (*IPN.GE, September 12, 2018*).

14. PM's press office – Estonian President praises Georgian government's strategy on EU and NATO

Georgia is the Eastern Partnership's torchbearer, and Estonia will continue support the country in bilateral and multilateral formats, Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid stated during her meeting with Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze.

As InterPressNews was informed by the PM's press office, the President of Estonia commended the Georgian government's Strategy of the EU and NATO. Georgia's progress in European and Euro-Atlantic integration was singled out. As the Prime Minister emphasized, Georgia's European integration is the Georgian people's civilizational choice. He also discussed the development of the roadmap for EU membership. According to Mamuka Bakhtadze, the Government of Georgia appreciates Estonia's firm support in this process (*IPN.GE, September 12, 2018*).

❖ Internal Affairs

15. Speaker says Salome Zurbishvili's August war remarks correspond to ruling team's position

"Salome Zurbishvili noted that in 2008 the aggressor, and therefore the one who initiated the war, was the Russian Federation; the processes in August 2008 followed the Russian scenario, but an essential prerequisite for this scenario was the actions that unfortunately were carried out by Saakashvili's authorities. If not his high-risk approach, if not his silliness, the Russian Federation would not be able to implement its scenario; this was what Zurbishvili clarified, and this, of course, entirely corresponds to our position," Kobakhidze said (*IPN.GE, September 10, 2018*).

16. Salome Zurbishvili - I am very happy... My expectations are met

“My expectations are met. This is a very positive decision for me, I think it is also a right and a democratic decision for the ruling party,” Salome Zurabishvili noted (*IPN.GE, September 10, 2018*).

17. MP Sesiashvili - We will use the human or other available resources to ensure Zurabishvili's victory

“At today's meeting of the parliamentary majority will mull over the forms of our involvement in these elections. The political council declared its support to Salome Zurabishvili and we will discuss this issue. We will endorse Salome Zurabishvili within the legislation. We will use the human or other available resources to ensure Salome Zurabishvili's victory in the elections,” said Sesiashvili noted (*IPN.GE, September 10, 2018*).

18. Bakradze calls on opposition to use all resources to defeat Salome Zurabishvili in presidential election

“I would like to call on other opposition candidates: following the decision of the “Georgian Dream”, the opposition is obliged to win the election. All of us are obliged not to let Georgia to have a president who damages our national and state interests. Let's stop attacking and insulting each other, let's move to the "non-aggression regime" and provide all our resources to prevent Salome Zurabishvili's presidency, " Bakradze said (*IPN.GE, September 10, 2018*).

19. Finance Minister about recent developments around Iberia TV

"The Georgian government has never been such friendly with the business and the media has never been such free, as it is under our government. So I want to say with full responsibility that it is shameful, when some businesses, which are sheltering behind media, use the media as the weapon for blackmailing and try to avoid paying taxes. No one can speak to the state with the language of blackmailing," Ivane Machavariani said adding that people's money should be spent to the state budget.

“We have made various offers to them. Several times we have offered the schedule, as they requested, but they have never fulfilled. Consequently, it has nothing to do with media, it is a full speculation ", Minister Machavariani said.

Iberia TV has been working in a special mode for several days. The TV channel owners accuse the government of imposing pressure and blocking the main financial source. The TV company says the government aims to close the TV station (*IPN.GE, September 10, 2018*).

20. Sergi Kapanadze - Conclusion on Khorava street murder case will not be changed

"Everyone shares the major findings that are outlined in the fact-finding commission's report. They agree with our recommendations and specific opinions. At this stage, our task is to force the authorities to meet the recommendations included in the conclusion. Our goal is to make progress in two directions – to launch criminal persecution against a particular person... and to punish the people who are responsible for the failure of the investigation. The conclusion of the Commission has been adopted, it will no longer be changed and does not require further legitimacy from the Parliament, "said Sergi Kapanadze (*IPN.GE, September 10, 2018*).

21. Two senior officials and two deputy ministers of education ministry dismissed

Maia Miminoshvili, Director of the National Assessment and Examinations Centre (NAEC), and Tamar Sanikidze, Director of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, have been dismissed from their positions.

Temur Murghulia and Lia Gigauri, deputy ministers of education and science of Georgia, have also been dismissed upon the decision of education minister (*IPN.GE, September 11, 2018*).

22. Murdered teenager's father goes on a hunger strike

I am demanding resignation of the government, early parliamentary elections and the establishment of a temporary government, - Zaza Saralidze, father of Davit Saralidze, who was killed on Khorava Street, said at the protest rally outside the parliament's building on Monday.

He said that he was going to a hunger strike and would not leave the territory until his demands are met. According to Saralidze, the authorities cover up the murderers, as the authorities are the murderer (*IPN.GE, September 11, 2018*).

23. Malkhaz Machalikashvili : We must replace this government

The protest rally will not end, - Malkhaz Machalikashvili, father of Tamirlan Machalikashvili who was killed in a special operation in the Pankisi Gorge, said on Tuesday. Machalikashvili claims that he will continue the protest together with Zaza Saralidze, father of the teenager murdered on Khorava Street in Tbilisi, until the establishment of the truth (*IPN.GE, September 11, 2018*).

24. Number of Georgian troops to remain unchanged in 2019

"The number of personnel in the armed forces remains unchanged at 37 000. We discussed the ongoing reforms in the armed forces, including in the direction of education, reserve system development. The Defense Minister also presented a long-term view on procurement and talked about the total defense concept," Davit Rakviashvili said (*IPN.GE, September 11, 2018*).

25. Georgian government to allow the production of marijuana for export

The government of Georgia has prepared a legislation to permit the production and export of Marijuana for pharmaceutical and cosmetic purposes. At the meeting of the ruling party "Georgian Dream" yesterday, on the 10th of September, the representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs have introduced the draft legislation to the members of the party.

According to the legislation, the production of the cannabis will be allowed for export. International tender is scheduled to be launched in order to reveal the producer company. The number and territory for the cultivation of the cannabis are yet to be defined (*GeorgianJournal.ge, September 11, 2018*).

26. Bokeria - If marijuana cultivation is legalized, it should be legal for everyone

"Legalization is a better way to fight against organized crime or criminal. I agree the legalization, because when it is not legalized, it leads to an expansion of organized crime and creation of a lot of problems. If there is money and this money is illegal, somebody tries to control it. Legalization of marijuana is absolutely logical. If they think that the government should have an exclusive right on selling it and they will arrest others this is at least incontrovertible approach. If it is legalized, it should be legal for everyone ", Bokeria said (*IPN.GE, September 11, 2018*).

27. Archbishop Davit Isakadze says decision on marijuana production is Ivanishvili's initiative

"They plan to grow plantations in Georgia, export these products for medical purposes. This is strewing embers into people's eyes. Actually, in fact drug-selling program is launching in Georgia. Naturally, we, church, the healthy part of the society, are against it. In fact, Georgia is starting to resemble Colombia. The whole community should be active, because drug addiction have catastrophic consequences for all families, "said Father David (*IPN.GE, September 12, 2018*).

28. A person will be restricted to work in public services in case of the consumption of marijuana at public places

A person will be restricted to work in public services in case of the consumption of marijuana at public places,- Parliament's Vice Speaker Gia Volsky said at the conference organized by the Patriarchate of Georgia on the issue of drug abuse (*IPN.GE, September 12, 2018*).

29. Specialized agency to be set up for licensing marijuana cultivation

"A specialized agency is to be set up, which will identify the specific licensing conditions and issue licenses for various activities, including production, growing, processing, etc. This will be a strictly regulated activity, which will have its own regulator where the toughest and effective control mechanisms are open. The agency will determine the license fee, the competition types, etc., "said Minister Gakharia (*IPN.GE, September 12, 2018*).

30. Parliament's Speaker - The draft on marijuana consumption does not leave any space for speculation

According to Kobakhidze, following the decision of the Constitutional Court, the processes have been directed to legalization of marijuana, but the ruling team "found an optimal solution to this situation." (*IPN.GE, September 12, 2018*).

31. Single-use plastic bags to be gradually banned from October 1

"As you know, in the last few years, the whole world has been waging war on using disposable plastics for wrapping. Plastics, especially the widespread plastic bags, are the worst pollutants that damage environment most. The Government of Georgia, as part of its green economy and environmental policy, has adopted regulations that will come in force on October 1, 2018 to ensure the maximal gradual removal of disposable plastics," Mamuka Bakhtadze said (*IPN.GE, September 12, 2018*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs






32. Loans up to 200 000 GEL to be available only in national currency

"The proposed bill involves amendments to the regulation, envisaging increase the 100,000 GEL limit to 200,000 GEL. In addition, the policy will also apply to legal entities and organizations defined by Georgian legislation as non-legal entities - I mean so-called partnerships. This will enable us to protect from the risks identified in 2016-2017. Larization is an important part of creating a stable macroeconomic policy and ensuring development. We believe that this initiative will further firm up our macroeconomic positions. Our task is to minimize Georgia's vulnerability to external risks, and this step is a very principle decision on this path," the Prime Minister said (*IPN.GE, September 12, 2018*).

Additional Information

September 13, 2018
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

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|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1 USD - 2.6158 GEL | 1 GBP - 3.4029 GEL | 100 RUB - 3.7664 GEL |
| 1 EUR - 3.0309 GEL | 1 TRY - 0.4104 GEL | 100 JPY - 2.3460 GEL |

| Thursday 13 September | Friday 14 September | Saturday 15 September | Sunday 16 September | Monday 17 September |
|---|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| 17° 28° | 18° 29° | 17° 31° | 17° 29° | 17° 28° |

- **Movie Events - English Sessions - [Tickets](#)**
- **Friends of Museum (Membership to access Georgian National Museums For free of charge after one payment) - [Membership](#)**
- **Marjanishvili Theatre – [Events and Tickets](#)**
- **Rustaveli Theatre - [Events and Tickets](#)**
- **Opera and Ballet – [Events and Tickets](#)**
- **Concerts – [Events and Tickets](#)**
- **Sports – [Events and Tickets](#)**