

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

November 1-4

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. How are the rights of Georgian children violated in Gali district of occupied Abkhazia? [VIDEO]

Georgian Minister of Reconciliation and Civil Equality Ketevan Tsikhelashvili has informed Georgian lawmakers about the grave violations of ethnic Georgian children and citizens in the country's occupied Abkhazia region.

Tsikhelashvili says that ethnic discrimination, abuse and deprivation of receiving education in one's native language are very common in Gali district, where 98 per cent of schoolchildren and 90 per cent of teachers are ethnic Georgians.

She says that ethnic Georgian children are forced to participate in war-related performances, which aim to display Georgia as an enemy state. The [video](#) of war propaganda in Abkhazia was published on social media network youtube.com (*Agenda.ge, November 2, 2018*).

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

2. De facto Tskhinvali to increase fines for 'illegally crossing the border'

The de facto parliament of Georgia's eastern occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region is about to increase fines for 'illegally crossing the border' with Georgia.

The changes have already been confirmed by the de facto government of Tskhinvali, initiating the increase of the fine from 30 USD to 300 USD.

The press release of the de facto parliament of Tskhinvali says that the "bill" was pushed forward as the existing amount of the fine turned out to be ineffective (*Agenda.ge, November 2, 2018*).

3. De facto parliament of "South Ossetia" to ratify "agreement on friendship and cooperation" with Syria

The de facto parliament of the occupied region of South Ossetia will ratify the so-called agreement on friendship and cooperation with Syria.

The document was signed between the occupied region of South Ossetia and the Syrian regime within the framework of de-facto president Anatoly Bibilov's visit to Damascus on July 23.

The "agreement" envisages cooperation between the Syrian regime and occupied "South Ossetia" in the fields of foreign policy and economy. It also specifically states that "the South Ossetian authorities will promote the creation of economic, financial and legal conditions for the investment and economic activities" (*IPN.ge, November 2, 2018*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

4. Reconciliation Minister: NATO is not only a choice for Georgia, it has no alternative

The Georgian Minister of Reconciliation and Civil Equality Ketevan Tsikhelashvili has stated at the international Georgian Defence and Security Conference that NATO is not only a choice for Georgia, but that the country has no alternative.

"There is no alternative to NATO in a situation when we are facing severe problems of occupation," Tsikhelashvili said.

She stated that over the course of the past 70 years NATO has played the role of security umbrella for many European countries (*Agenda.ge, November 2, 2018*).

5. Georgia's Batumi port hosts five NATO vessels

The Batumi port in western Adjara region of Georgia has hosted five vessels of NATO. The vessels sailing under the flags of Germany, Turkey, Spain, Bulgaria and Romania and are targeted to participate in trainings together with the Georgian coast guard department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia. The vessels will stay in Georgia until November 5 (*Agenda.ge, November 2, 2018*).

6. Acting Armenian PM does not rule out shutting down state borders with Iran, Georgia

Acting Armenian Prime Minister Nikola Pashinian says the border with Iran and Georgia might be closed because of geopolitical issues, - Sputnik Армения quoted Pashinian as saying during his speech in the Parliament.

He said that at the meeting with one of the most experienced diplomats he described the situation in Armenia when two borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan are closed and two other borders - are opened halfway.

"The Armenia-Iran border, for example, could de-facto shut down because of the relations between Iran and the United States and the difficult geopolitical situation. The border with Georgia can also be closed due to bad weather or geopolitical situation. What's going to be that Armenia is an island without sea and what can we do in this case?" said Nikola Pashinian (*Agenda.ge, November 2, 2018*).

7. Georgian government to create anti-propaganda communication departments within all ministries

Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze has announced the creation of communications departments within all Georgian ministries to raise public awareness regarding the country's foreign policy and priorities.

Bakhtadze said that the creation of the departments will be a part of a US-supported project aimed at informing the public of the benefits of Georgia's integration into western political structures.

The US Department of State has allocated \$500,000 for the project, which is named "Increasing Awareness and Involvement in the Georgian regions about the country's western integration process." (*Agenda.ge, November 2, 2018*).

8. PM Bakhtadze attends President Xi's welcome banquet for leaders attending China import expo

Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze has attended a welcome banquet held by Chinese President Xi Jinping for leaders attending the China International Import Expo (CIIE).

The CIIE opens on November 5 at the National Exhibition and Convention Center of Shanghai.

The expo, announced by Xi Jinping in May 2017 at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, consists of two sections - trade in goods and services (*Agenda.ge, November 4, 2018*).

❖ Internal Affairs

9. State security service detains former Zugdidi Mayor and Vice Mayor

Former Zugdidi Mayor Lasha Gogia and Vice Mayor Gia Gulordava have been detained on charges of financial crimes, the Georgian State Security Service confirms.

An investigation has been ongoing for one month, and has shown that Lasha Gogia and Gia Gulordava took large bribes.

The news was announced at a briefing of the State Security Service earlier today.

“In the first half of 2018, Gogia and Gulordava took 21,500\$ as a bribe from a citizen, promising to auction a land plot of Gulua Garden and railway station. In accordance with the agreement, USD 11,500 was intended for Gulua Garden on lease, while USD 10,000 was for letting the area of the railway station on lease. In May the same citizen gave Gia Gulordava USD 10,000 and in June transferred USD 11,500 to the bank account of Kh.B. as a bank transfer, following Gia Gulordava’s instruction”, the State Security Service said at a briefing today (*Agenda.ge, November 1, 2018*).

10. Freedom House: Internet access and usage continues to grow in Georgia

The number of internet and mobile phone subscriptions in Georgia continues to grow, but high prices for services, inadequate infrastructure, and slow internet speeds remain obstacles, says Freedom House, a US-based independent watchdog that conducts research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom, and human rights.

Internet access continued to grow during the reporting period, with approximately 60.49% of Georgians accessing the internet in 2017. According to a countrywide survey conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC), 42% of the population accessed the internet on a daily basis in 2017 and the most active internet users were located in the capital”, reads the research.

Only two per cent of people living in Georgia are unfamiliar with the internet altogether, reveals the research (*Agenda.ge, November 1, 2018*).

11. Gov’t decides to withdraw marijuana export bill from parliament

The government of Georgia will withdraw its marijuana export bill from parliament, which would have allowed marijuana cultivation for the export of medical and cosmetic cannabis products.

The government decision was announced today by Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia after his and Parliament Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze’s meeting with Patriarch Ilia II. Gakharia told the media that the reason behind the decision was public turmoil over the proposal (*Agenda.ge, November 2, 2018*).

12. Leaders of Republican Party meeting with Grigol Vashadze

Leaders of the Republican Party have arrived at the United Opposition's office. At this moment, Khatuna Samnidze, Tamar Kordzaia and Levan Berdzenishvili are meeting with presidential candidate Grigol Vashadze.

The Republican Party expresses support to Vashadze in the second round of presidential elections. In turn, the United Opposition says their door is open to all pro-Western parties.

On this occasion former Defence Minister and member of Republican Party Tina Khidasheli said that the decision of Republican Party to cooperate with the UNM was the illustration of the reason why she and her husband (Usuapashvili) left the party two years ago (*IPN.ge, November 2, 2018*).

13. Davit Usupashvili: Those who ruin get more votes in the Georgian elections

"I might have been the best president of Georgia, but it turned out that I do not have a lot of necessary skills for election battles, such as thirst for power and readiness for doing anything for it. Being in power would be a burden for me. Voters feel it and many of them saved me by not voting for me... I cannot dig new abysses on the political scene, I try to build bridges on the existing abysses. However, those who ruin get more votes in the Georgian elections... I treat citizens like my partners and talk with them. However, it turned out that in the Georgian elections, politicians should talk with voters in the "electorate language" and sneak their votes... I failed to attract businessmen as well and spent record low finances. It turns out that apart from the thirst for power, I do not have other skills necessary for the Georgian politics either: if necessary, I should have stolen, lied and cheat... however, if I had these traits, I would not be who I am", Davit Usupashvili says (*IPN.ge, November 2, 2018*).

14. PM: We received a message from the Georgian society that we need changes

"As for challenges, I would also like to remind you that we started and will continue to reform our regional management system. We have a very important and tangible inefficiency in this system that impedes us to deliver the benefits of our initiatives to people in the shortest possible time.

If you look at the statistics and the budget, you'll see that very important progress has been made in the direction of social policy and infrastructure development at the local and central system level. The main thing is efficiency and timely delivery of particular benefits to our citizens.

As for changes, naturally, we had been going to carry out changes and this message has further proved that that we need very important changes," Bakhtadze said (*IPN.ge, November 2, 2018*).

15. Georgian opposition candidate for president vows to call snap election if he wins

Grigol Vashadze from the National Movement also promised to release everyone from prison who is serving time for use or possession of soft drugs and to call a snap parliamentary election.

"The first thing we should do is ensuring snap parliamentary elections according to the Constitution and Georgian legislation. Apart from a few exceptions, none of the people who are in the parliament and the government today deserve to be there," Vashadze said on Sunday at a meeting with supporters in Kutaisi. Many smaller political parties have thrown their support behind Vashadze, the presidential candidate for the United National Movement. Results published by Central Election Commission show that he received 37.74% of votes in the October 28 election, just 0.9% below Salome Zurbisvili, the candidate supported by Georgian Dream (*DFWatch.net, November 5, 2018*).

16. GD set to make governmental changes

While speaking with journalists Healthcare Minister, Sergeenko didn't rule out further changes in the government. On this occasion Rezonansi newspaper addressed political scientists and experts regarding possible reshuffle of the executive team.

Soso Tsiskaridze, Ramaz Sakvarelidze and Nika Chitadze think that main challenges for the government are connected to the economic and social aspects; hence, they expect changes in the management of the relevant ministries. It is also rumored that Ivanishvili plans to change Bakhtadze and the main reason for this is Prime Ministers passive attitude towards new initiatives and lack of charisma. Reportedly this post will be taken by Giorgi Gakharia, Minister of Interior of Georgia. Gakharia previously had chance to become the Prime Minister of Georgia, but as Akhali Taoba's source says one group in Georgian Dream is

against Gakharia's promotion and several months ago they have managed to move his candidacy for the Prime Minister to Bakhtadze. But now Ivanishvili had made strong decision over this issue.

It is worth to mention that several months ago, when Kvirikashvili resigned the main reason for leaving the office was economic and social problems in the country. Former finance Minister Bakhtadze replaced him, who on his side changed economic team of Kvirikashvili. According to the rumors, Ivanishvili is not satisfied with the pace of economic development in the country and plans other changes. It is also alleged that at some point Ivanishvili might take back the post of Prime Minister as the situation in the Georgian Dream is sour and Ivanishvili cannot control the team anymore (*Rezonansi & Akhali Taoba, November 5, 2018*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

17. Doing Business 2019: Georgia ranks 6th among 190 countries

Georgia's reputation as a business friendly country is growing after becoming the 6th best country in the world in terms of economic development and easy of doing business.

Georgia has moved up again in the Doing Business Ranking of the World Bank to 6th place from 9th place last year.

This means that Georgia is the most credible economy of Europe and Central Asia. It has maintained its strong position in "Top 10 Economies", said the Regional Director of the World Bank, Mercy Tembon yesterday at the press conference where together with the Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze, she announced the results of the new report (*Agenda.ge, November 1, 2018*).

18. US congressman urges US trade representative to consider Georgia-US free trade deal

United States Congressman Ted Poe has sent a letter to the United States Trade Representative Ambassador Robert Lighthizer urging him to consider a free trade agreement between the US and Georgia.

In the letter Poe says that Georgia is "a critical, strategic partner" of the US which has made "remarkable progress" over the past two decades in enacting political and economic reforms.

In close cooperation with the United States, Georgia plays a key role in ensuring stability in the Caucasus region and supporting American security interests around the world. Lowering trade barriers between our two nations would go a long way towards further strengthening our partnership," Poe says (*Agenda.ge, November 1, 2018*).

19. OECD Eurasia Week to be held in Georgia in 2019

Georgia is launching two projects with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) - one will focus on Georgia's investment environment while the second will discuss the holding of the forum in Georgia.

Georgia's Economy Minister Giorgi Kobulia and the OECD Regional Director William Tompson discussed these two issues at yesterday's meeting (*Agenda.ge, November 1, 2018*).

20. Japan hosts Georgian wine degustation in Matsuyama

A Georgian wine degustation was held in Matsuyama, Japan. The degustation was attended by numerous wine importers, masters, representatives of the media, restaurants and hotels chains.

During the event master of wine Kenichi Ohashi offered guests Georgian wine while introducing them to its history and culture, as well as to certain aspects of the modern Georgian wine industry.

Georgia is known as the homeland of wine and there are 525 different grape varieties. Like Japanese cuisine, UNESCO also added the ancient traditional Georgian winemaking method using the qvevri to its Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists. We are planning to continue marketing activities next year”, stated Ohashi during the degustation (*Agenda.ge, November 1, 2018*).

21. October inflation: prices for clothing and footwear increase by 6.3% in Georgia

Overall, in October 2018 the consumer price index increased by 0.3% compared to the previous month, while the annual inflation rate amounted to 2.3%, said Geostat.

The prices in the group of clothing and footwear increased by 6.3% last month. The prices increased for:

- Footwear (12.6%)
- Clothing (3.6%)

Prices for transport also increased by 0.6%. The prices increased for operation of personal transport equipment (1.1%).

Last month prices increased by 0.7% for the group of alcoholic beverages and tobacco. Specifically, tobacco prices increased by 1.5% (*Agenda.ge, November 2, 2018*).

22. PM says socially vulnerable children under 16 will receive five times more allowance

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has stated that children who come from socially vulnerable families and are under 16 will receive five times more monthly financial support, which amounts to 50 GEL instead of current 10 GEL. Bakhtadze stated that 140,000 children will benefit from the change. The PM said that the decision is not related to the election period (*Agenda.ge, November 2, 2018*).

23. PM Bakhtadze, Bank of China chairman discuss cooperation opportunities

Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze has started his visit to China and has held his first meeting with the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Bank of China, Siqing Chen in Shanghai today.

Bakhtadze and Chen discussed bilateral trade and economic ties between Georgia and China emphasising the importance of the free trade deal which has come into play on 1 January 2018, making Georgia the first country in the region to have such a deal with China.

During his visit to China PM Bakhtadze will attend the first China International Import Expo where the Georgian pavillion will be represented with 53 producers (*Agenda.ge, November 4, 2018*).

Additional Information

November 5, 2018

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.7251 GEL

1 GBP - 3.5505 GEL

100 RUB -4.1504 GEL

1 EUR - 3.1194 GEL

1 TRY - 0.4983 GEL

100 JPY - 2. 4146 GEL

Monday 5 November	Tuesday 6 November	Wednesday 7 November	Thursday 8 November	Friday 9 November
				
4° 16°	7° 14°	5° 11°	3° 13°	3° 15°

- **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](#)**