

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

November 15-19

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❖ Occupied Regions

1. EU concerned about continuous deterioration of the human rights situation in Georgia's occupied regions

The EU has expressed its deep concern about the the continuous deterioration of the human rights situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in a statement on the Secretary General's 18th consolidated report which touched on the conflict in Georgia.

The European Union Delegation to the Council of Europe has issued the local statement in agreement with the EU Heads of mission to the Council of Europe.

"The EU remains particularly concerned about: obstacles to the freedom of movement, arbitrary detentions, a continued discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, a deepening of the documentation gap for ethnic Georgians in the Gali district of Abkhazia, restrictions on access to education in one's native language in both entities, and a violation of property rights," reads the report (*Agenda.ge, November 16, 2018*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

2. International experts explore the activities of Lugar Center

International experts from 17 countries are exploring how the US-built, Tbilisi-based Lugar Center works amid Russian allegations and reports about supposed illegal experiments conducted at the center.

The experts started working yesterday and will release a report after they finish investigating the situation at the center.

Commander of the Radiological, Chemical and Biological Defence Troops of Russia Igor Kirilov said at a special briefing last month that illegal experiments have been performed on humans in the lab and led to the death of more than 73 people in 2015 and 2016.

However, Head of the National Centre of Disease Control (NCDC) of Georgia Amiran Gamkrelidze said that the allegations were "unimaginable falsehoods and slander." (*Agenda.ge, November 15, 2018*).

3. International experts say US founded Lugar Lab in Tbilisi works transparently and safely

Head of the Disease Control Centre of the Ministry of Health of Georgia David Gamkrelidze has stated today that 23 international experts have drafted a report regarding the US-founded Lugar lab in Tbilisi, in the wake of Russian accusations about illegal experiments being conducted at the site.

"The report will be uploaded on our webpage in the coming hours. The report is very positive which reads that the lab activities are transparent and safe and only aim to prevent illnesses. The experts have checked each corner of the lab and each document," Gamkrelidze said(*Agenda.ge, November 17, 2018*).

4. Georgian-French-German format of political consultations created

A trilateral format of political consultations has been created between Georgian, French and German deputy foreign ministers to further enhance relations between the three countries. The first meeting of the deputy foreign ministers of the three countries was held in Paris yesterday.

A wide range of issues which are aimed at further enhancing ties were discussed during the meeting," the Georgian Foreign Ministry stated (*Agenda.ge, November 15, 2018*).

5. Georgia is as safe as Germany, the Spiegel says

The Spiegel has published a story examining safety across the world using the data of different research organisations and ultimately assesses Georgia "as safe as Germany".

The risk of terrorism, violence, danger on the road and potential health problems were taken into consideration by the author to assess different countries.

"The world has become safer this year," Frédéric Balme, General Manager of International SOS told the Spiegel.

International SOS rates the safety risks as "low" in Georgia instead of "moderate" as safety conditions are stable in the country (*Agenda.ge, November 17, 2018*).

6. US provides laser technology for Georgian police to prevent traffic accidents

The Bureau of Intl Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) of the US Department of State has provided LiDAR laser technology to the Georgian Patrol Police in order to prevent traffic accidents in the country.

INL is pleased to provide [this] laser technology to help the Patrol Police save lives and reduce accidents by enforcing the speed limit," the US Embassy in Georgia reported.

The laser devices are designed to automate the entire process of speed detection, driver and vehicle identification, and evidentiary documentation (*Agenda.ge, November 19, 2018*).

❖ Internal Affairs

7. Femicide cases decreased by 58 per cent, Interior Ministry says

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia has stated that due to the steps taken by them femicide cases has been decreased by 58 per cent in 2018.

None of the murder case of a woman by husband or ex-husband has been reported in 10 months of the year, while 10 such crimes took place last year," the ministry says.

Statistics of femicide:

- 2016- 32 women were murdered. 14 of the women were killed by a family member, while 18 were assassinated by other individuals.
- 2017- 26 women were killed. 14 of the women were murdered by a family member, while 12 others were killed by other individuals.

2018- 11 women have been killed. Five of the women were murdered by a family member [however, the family member was not husband] and remaining six by other individuals (*Agenda.ge, November 15, 2018*).

8. New military hospital opens in western Georgian city of Kutaisi

A new military hospital has opened in Georgia's western city of Kutaisi for servicemen and their families, announces the government of Georgia.

A very important medical site has been added to our system today with the opening of a military hospital in Kutaisi to provide our service member with full outpatient services”, said Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze at the opening ceremony of the hospital.

The total cost of the project was four million GEL, of which 1.70 million was spent on purchasing medical equipment(*Agenda.ge, November 15, 2018*).

9. Gov’t allocates 10 million GEL for the runoff

The government of Georgia will allocate 10,583,022 GEL [4 million USD] for the November 28 presidential election runoff.

The money will be spent for preparing the elections and trainings for the election staff. The government allocated 42 million GEL for the first round of elections, which was held on 28 October (*Agenda.ge, November 16, 2018*).

10. Ruling party says UNM opposition spreading "absurd" rumors about military

The Georgian Dream ruling party says that the United National Movement has decided to “give a blow” to the Georgian armed forces and its unity through spreading “false and absurd information” as if Georgian soldiers who fought in the Russia-Georgia 2008 war have been abandoned by the government and that they will have to protect their own interests at the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The presidential candidate of the United National Movement Grigol Vashadze has demanded the dismissal of the ministers of justice and foreign affairs as Georgian soldiers participating in the war have been declared "physical entities" who will have to individually defend themselves from the “fake accusations put forward by Russia.”

He also claimed that the Georgian government has stopped providing the court with evidence which would have portrayed Russia’s illegal actions in Georgia in 2008.

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze has stated that the statements are “absurd” and aim to mislead the Georgian soldiers and people.

“We bow before our veterans, our heroes. The only thing they can expect from the government and the Georgian people is high respect and glory. The lie has been invented by those who have committed a crime, those who are trying to shift their crimes onto others with the advice of Russian political technologists,” Kaladze said (*Agenda.ge, November 16, 2018*).

11. Drug, pharmaceutical quality control agency to open in Georgia in 2019

A drug and pharmaceutical quality control agency will be launched in Georgia in 2019, announces Minister of Health Davit Sergeenko. The main function of the agency will be to increase the quality and control of drugs.

“We have an international obligation as well as a need to create [such an institution]. [It would] examine the local pharmaceutical industry and grant licenses and certificates. The staff is already trained. It will be an independent unit whose main task will be to control the quality of produced drugs”, Sergeenko said (*Agenda.ge, November 17, 2018*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

12. Georgia receives \$137m in remittances in October 2018

Russia (\$39.66 million), Italy (\$16.67 million) and Greece (\$15.34 million) were the largest remittance senders in October 2018.

Overall, the vast majority (93.4%) of all money transfers from abroad came from 17 countries (*Agenda.ge, November 15, 2018*).

13. Tbilisi 2019 budget to increase by 10 mln GEL

The 2019 budget for Tbilisi City Hall is 871,600,000 GEL – 10 million GEL more than was planned for initially, announces Irakli Zarkua of Tbilisi City Assembly (Sakrebulo) (*Agenda.ge, November 16, 2018*).

14. United Airports of Georgia: 73% of passengers in Georgia are tourists

73% of passengers who took regular or charter flights in January-October of 2018 in Georgia's three international airports were tourists, says United Airports of Georgia.

All three international airports of the country - Tbilisi Shota Rustaveli International Airport, Batumi International Airport and Kutaisi David Aghmashenebeli International Airport – served 1,573,189 international travellers.

More specifically:

- Tbilisi International Airport served 1,221,067 international travellers – a 23% increase y/y
- Kutaisi International Airport served 129,426 tourists – a 24% increase
- Batumi International Airport served 222,696 international travellers – a 22% increase (*Agenda.ge, November 16, 2018*).

15. January-October 2018: Georgia's external trade with EU up 18.6%, with CIS up 27.4%

In January-October 2018, trade turnover with EU countries increased by 18.6% (amounted to \$2.76 billion) and with CIS countries by 27.4% year-on-year (y/y) (amounted to \$3.51 billion), says the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

In the reporting period export from Georgia to the EU countries amounted to \$599.7 million, while imports amounted to \$2.16 billion.

In January-October 2018 export to the CIS countries stood at \$1.31 billion, while imports equalled \$2.19 billion.

Overall, Georgia's top 10 trade partners in January-October 2018 made for 65.9% of the country's total trade turnover, with Turkey (\$1.42 billion), Russia (\$1.12 billion) and China (\$903.4 million) filling the top three spots (*Agenda.ge, November 16, 2018*).

16. PM Bakhtadze: debts of 600,000 'blacklisted' citizens to be annulled

The bank debt of over 600,000 Georgian citizens, including those on a so-called 'Black List' will be written-off, announced the Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze this morning.

The process of annulment of the loans will start on December 15 and continue until December 31. In this period a total of 1.5 billion GEL will be written-off.

"Almost 95% of debts of the "blacklisted" citizens come from loans, whose principal payments do not exceed 2,000 GEL. This is a financial liability of more than 600,000 people towards banks, online organisations or various financial institutions, which totals 1.5 billion GEL. In accordance with today's decision, these loans will be written off. This category includes almost 150,000 socially vulnerable citizens and tens of thousands of our disabled citizens.

Our approach is to overcome the problem of excessive debt, as a risk and a heavy-burden...Elimination of the excessive debt is a precondition for defeating poverty. Today's decision will allow hundreds of

thousands of our fellow citizens to get involved in the economic and social life of the country, which will make our economy more sustainable and the banking sector healthier”, Bakhtadze said (*Agenda.ge, November 19, 2018*).

17. 5-star Marriott hotel to open in Abastumani, Georgia’s closest place to the stars

The five-star Autograph Collection Hotel, by Marriott International Brand, will be built in the historic resort of Abastumani, a small town in Georgia’s Samtskhe-Javakheti region that is famous for its hot sulphur baths and clear skies.

The total investment into the project is \$30 million. The hotel will be opened in 2020. 300 people will be employed during the construction stage of the project, and 250 new jobs will be created upon the launch of the hotel (*Agenda.ge, November 19, 2018*).

18. Abastumani – Resort without oil engine vehicles

Reportedly, Abastumani will be first resort in Georgia fully equipped with electric cars. As TV Pirveli reports and TV Imedi reports, the initiative comes from Bidzina Ivanishvili and he is planning to change all vehicles working on petrol, gas or diesel to electric vehicles. Finances for this project will be provided by Cartu fund (*TV Imedi & TV Piroveli, February 19, 2018*).

19. Q3 of 2018: Unemployment rate up 1.9%

The annual unemployment rate in Georgia increased by 0.1 percentage points and equalled 12.2% in Q3 of 2018, says the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

In the reporting period, the economically active population constituted 64.3% of the working population (population of 15 years and older).

The employment level has been reduced by 0.3 percentage points in Georgia’s urban areas, while in rural areas it has increased by 0.9 percentage points. The share of self-employed people was 48.8% in the total employment data, said Geostat.

The unemployment rate is higher in men (by 1.7 percentage points) than in women. The unemployment rate in women increased by 0.9 percentage points and in men reduced by 0.7 percentage points (*Agenda.ge, November 19, 2018*).

20. 79 eco migrant families to be provided with homes

79 eco migrant families living in Tsalka have received accommodations from the government.

The deputy minister of IDPs from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia Grigol Giorgadze and the Deputy Governor of Kvemo Kartli Kakha Kobakhidze visited the families of eco migrants in Tsalka and gave them property certificates.

In between 2004-2009, the government purchased housing facilities for people who had to leave their homes for ecological or political reasons, but the process of assigning properties only really began in 2015.

Approximately, 500 eco migrant families have already been provided with accommodations, and Government plans to increase the number even mores (*Agenda.ge, November 19, 2018*).

❖ Sports and Culture

21. Georgian brothers become world champions in freestyle wrestling

On the second day of the world championships of freestyle wrestling in Bucharest, Georgian brothers Avtandil and Nikoloz Kenchadze have become the world champions in the under-23 category.

Nikoloz Kenchadze, competing in the 79 kg category, gained the title yesterday while his brother Avtandil received a gold medal today in the 74 kg category.

Avtandil Kenchadze defeated his Romanian opponent in the final round, while Nikoloz Kenchadze won his match against a member of the Russian team (*Agenda.ge, November 19, 2018*).

Additional Information

November 20, 2018
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.6593 GEL	1 GBP - 3.4199 GEL	100 RUB - 4.0356 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0369 GEL	1 TRY - 0.5008 GEL	100 JPY - 2.3590 GEL

Tuesday 18 September	Wednesday 19 September	Thursday 20 September	Friday 21 September	Saturday 22 September
				
15° 26°	15° 25°	16° 25°	16° 25°	17° 25°

- **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](#)**