

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

November 22-25

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Tskhinvali Region

1. **Washington Post: Russia uses Georgian occupied Tskhinvali region like an ‘offshore company’ to support rebels in Ukraine**

An investigative story of the Washington Post [reads](#) that the Georgian occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region has become a hidden financial crossroads for Russia’s shadow empire around the Black Sea.

“Separatist officials and business figures in eastern Ukraine — one of the main Moscow-backed breakaway territories in the region — transfer money to South Ossetia. The funds are wired to Russia, officials familiar with the arrangement told The Post. The money then pays for goods such as fuel and building materials, which are shipped from Russia directly to eastern Ukraine, interviews and records show,” the article reads.

The Washington Post says that the arrangement also works in reverse, allowing exports from the separatist territories to be sold in Russia.

“This year alone, more than \$150 million in payments has been funneled through South Ossetia, according to an estimate by the territory’s tax office,” reads the story, adding that Russia traded roughly more than \$150 million in goods with rebel-held territory in Ukraine in the first half of this year using South Ossetia as the payment center, according to officials and tax records (*Agenda.ge, November 22, 2018*).

2. **Vladislav Surkov says Russia's relations with “South Ossetia” will always have strategic importance**

Russian president's assistant Vladislav Surkov said that Russia's relations with “South Ossetia” will always have strategic importance.

Surkov congratulated the de facto president of "South Ossetia" on the Day of Courage and National Unity.

"On this day 29 years ago, the devoted citizens of South Ossetia stopped Georgian nationalists at Tskhinvali and thus started fighting for the independence of South Ossetia," reads the letter of congratulations.

He said "the relations with South Ossetia are important for Russia and development of allied relations will always have a strategic importance." (*Agenda.ge, November 24, 2018*).

❖ Abkhazia Region

3. **Abkhazia expresses concern about agreement on building military airfield in Vaziani**

Abkhazia is concerned with signing of an agreement by Georgia and the US defense agency on building a military airfield at the Vaziani military base, - the de facto foreign minister of occupied Abkhazia, Daur Kove, said at the meeting with the co-chairs of the Geneva talks.

"The main purpose of the Geneva talks is to sign an agreement on non-use of force between Georgia and South Ossetia, Georgia and Abkhazia. In this context, we are concerned about the steps Georgia is taking in the direction of NATO membership. In this case, I mean the recent agreement signed by the Georgia and the US defense agency. We believe that such actions do not contribute to the strengthening of stability and security in the region," Daur Kove said.

According to him, the international formats where the Georgian side has the opportunity to talk about the problems related to Abkhazia should be available to the Abkhaz side as well (*Ipn.ge, November 22, 2018*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

4. Georgian, Azerbaijani and Turkish military officials meet in Baku to discuss regional issues

Minister of Defense of Azerbaijan Zakir Hasanov, Chief of the General Staff of Turkey Yasar Guler, and Chief of the General Staff of the Georgian Armed Forces Vladimer Chachibaia have held a trilateral meeting in Baku to discuss the prospects of further military cooperation and regional security challenges. Chachibaia spoke about the joint activities to cope with regional security challenges.

"We achieved a level of strategic partnership in the region. Our military cooperation is very important within the strategic partnership. We successfully continue our cooperation to ensure security of the ongoing regional projects," Azertag quoted Chachibaia by saying (*Agenda.ge, November 22, 2018*).

5. Mamuka Bakhtadze: Who said that Georgia may lose visa liberalization? This is far from reality

"This is far from reality. Who said that Georgia may lose visa liberalization? This issue has not been discussed in the European Parliament. This is not right information. We are obliged to tell truth to the population. As for the general statements, various political forces are in the European Parliament, including those who cooperate with our opponents. We should talk about specific facts. The fact is that the European Parliament has approved a report for which the EU chose a special format for Georgia. The election standards in Georgia will be the highest and we proved it in all previous elections," Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze said when asked about the discussion held in the European Parliament (*Ipn.ge, November 24, 2018*).

❖ Internal Affairs

6. Prosecutor's Office: NGOs failed to provide evidence, name a source for their allegations about fake IDs

The Georgian Chief Prosecutor's Office has stated that three Georgian NGOs failed to provide evidence or name a source who informed them about possible printing of fake identification documents by a state agency to engineer the elections in favor of the Georgian Dream-endorsed presidential candidate Salome Zurbishvili.

The Prosecutor's Office says that the heads and executives of the Transparency International Georgia, the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association and the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy were summoned for questioning on Wednesday and they were unable to provide any evidence in support of their allegations and refused to name the source who provided them with the information.

The NGOs stated that they will not name the source as this may create threats to his/her life, despite the fact we have offered them that the individual would be included in the witness protection state program. The attitude of the NGOs hinders the investigation process. Herewith, based on the Georgian law, heads of NGOs are not in the list of the individuals who have a right not to cooperate with the law enforcement," the Prosecutor's Office says (*Agenda.ge, November 22, 2018*).

7. Court says photographers accused of spy by the previous gov't were innocent

Tbilisi Court of Appeals delivered a verdict today which says that four photographers convicted in 2011 under the United National Movement leadership for spying for Russia were innocent and the real reason of the arrest were the photos taken by them depicting the peaceful rally dispersal by the UNM authorities in central Tbilisi on 26 May 2011.

Today the court justified the photographers and stated that they were innocent and the testimonies written by them that time were made after torture.

The Georgian Chief Prosecutor's Office under the Georgian Dream government reopened the case after the defeat of the nine-year rule of UNM in Georgia in 2012.

In 2016 two former officials were charged for the case. One, former deputy head of the counterintelligence service David Devnozashvili is serving his sentence, while another, former head of the #8 prison Aleksandre Mukhadze is wanted (*Agenda.ge, November 22, 2018*).

8. Acquitted photographer says opposition presidential candidate wants to pardon his torturers

Photographer Giorgi Abdaladze, who was found innocent by Tbilisi Court of Appeals yesterday for a case which took place under the previous United National Movement (UNM) government, says that the UNM presidential candidate, former Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze, intends to pardon those who tortured him back in 2011.

Abdaladze also says that Vashadze is lying when he says that he does not know the photographers, as in 2011 when four photographers were detained for spying for Russia, Vashadze served as foreign minister.

We were found guilty of stealing classified information from the Foreign Ministry. Vashadze was even responsible to know about our case," Abdaladze said (*Agenda.ge, November 23, 2018*).

9. Education Minister announces plans for new campus for 3,000 students in Tbilisi

Georgian Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport Mikheil Batiashvili has announced plans for a new campus in Tbilisi, on the territory of the Tbilisi Ivane Javakhishvili State University in the Saburtalo district.

The minister stated that the campus will have common and individual rooms, central and common kitchens, recreation and social spaces, libraries, swimming pools and multi-profile outer pitches.

The students of the Tbilisi State University as well as the students of other universities will be able to use the services provided by the campus," Batiashvili said (*Agenda.ge, November 22, 2018*).

10. Head of Anti-Terrorist Center accuses previous government of cooperation with Akhmed Chataev

he current government released Akhmed Chataev because he was detained under a wrong article, - said the Head of the Anti-Terrorist Center, Irakli Chimakadze, who accuses the previous government of cooperation with Chataev.

According to him, the previous government brought Akhmed Chataev into the country through fraud in 2010. He said that Chataev illegally crossed the border of Georgia.

"The previous government cooperated with Akhmed Chataev. This government released Chataev because he was detained under a wrong article. Who brought him to the country? Did not the previous government do it? The previous government brought Chataev to the country through fraud in 2010. He illegally crossed the green line. This has been proven, the court has already discussed this. We presented all evidence, including testimonies of witnesses participating in his transportation. Akhmed Chataev spent only 20 days in Georgia," said Irakli Chimakadze (*Ipn.ge, November 22, 2018*).

11. Patriarch calls presidential candidates to worthily meet victory or failure

Georgian Patriarch Ilia II has handed icons to the two presidential candidates and appealed to them to accept victory or failure in a worthy manner in the upcoming elections.

"I am happy that I see ministers, presidential candidates in the cathedral on Saint George's day. I am sure that you [presidential candidates] will meet both victory and failure similarly. The one who will win should not think that he/she is better than others. I am sure that you will stand together and help each other," Ilia II stated and handed the icons of Saint George to the candidates (*Agenda.ge, November 23, 2018*).

12. Saakashvili about "Rose Revolution" - 15 years ago Georgian people made a real miracle

"Everybody thought that Shevardnadze was undefeated, that the system was constant and the country had no prospect of success and progress. The "Rose Revolution" returned Georgia to the world map. Georgia was the world's first reformer, Georgia started to move forward, Georgians started to return to the country... New towns were built...Now, we are still facing a big challenge. Georgia is still occupied by a monster. I believe in the Georgian people, our combat capability and strength, our survival instincts, our inspiration to success. We will do everything! God save us, "Mikheil Saakashvili said (*Ipn.ge, November 23, 2018*).

13. Former president of NATO Parliamentary Assembly terms presidential elections as a step backward

"There is no doubt that in terms of democracy and reforms, Georgia is a leader in the region. On the other hand, we have many reasons for concern. The elections were peaceful, but temperature was quite high during the election campaign. We saw that the use of administrative resource was very disproportionate in favour of one candidate. This is not useful for democracy. In addition, some media outlets were also used in favour of one candidate. If we compare the presidential elections to the 2012 elections, we will see no big step forward, but a step backward. During the press conference I talked about the use of administrative resources. This is not useful for Georgia's future. I'm sure, this will not affect Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspiration, but I see signs that concern me," former president of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Rasa Juknevičienė, told the Georgian bureau of Voice of America. (*Ipn.ge, November 23, 2018*).

14. Rasa Juknevičienė: Government's promise to pay off debts for population of Georgia is bribery of voters

"I heard about it. Last week I met with Georgian MPs in Halifax and they explained what this step meant. Of course, this is bribery. It's impossible to see it differently and it's unacceptable," Rasa Juknevičienė told the Georgian bureau of Voice of America (*Ipn.ge, November 23, 2018*).

15. PM promises presidential run off will be of 'highest standards'

PM Bakhtadze says that the second round of the presidential elections will be held in accordance with the 'highest standards'.

Bakhtadze's response followed the assessment of the former President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly Rasa Juknevičienė who told the Georgian service of Voice of America that Georgia has made not a step forward but a step back since the 2012 elections.

She said that despite Georgia being a regional leader in terms of democratic reforms, the pre-election period revealed several shortcomings including the inappropriate waste and use of administrative resources.

"The high standard elections has become the major goal for our political team since 2012 what has ensured Georgia's faster pace of Euro-Atlantic integration," PM Bakhtadze said (*Agenda.ge, November 24, 2018*).

16. CEC spokesperson: Another ungrounded information has been spread by media regarding formation of special registers

Another ungrounded information has been spread by media regarding formation of special registers, - Central Election Commission spokesperson Ana Mikeladze said at a briefing today.

According to her, in accordance with the law, the list of persons who will not be able to be at places of their registration on the election day due to their duties are being specified and provided to the relevant agencies.

"The election administration is obliged to ensure the constitutional right of the mentioned persons. That is why, according to Article 32 of the Election Code, these persons are put on a special list no later than three days before the elections, i.e. November 25." – said Mikeladze (*Ipn.ge, November 25, 2018*).

17. Interior Minister takes responsibility to ensure peaceful elections throughout the country

Minister of Internal Affairs Giorgi Gakharia guarantees that the runoff elections will be held in a peaceful environment.

"I take responsibility for the elections being held in a peaceful environment. Our daily life has become overwhelmed with concern over elections. We should not live only from one election to the next. We should have big, bright goals," Gakharia said (*Agenda.ge, November 25, 2018*).

18. Saakashvili vows to protect votes

Nobody will falsify and if they do, I will personally be involved in protecting these votes,- said former president of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili. He answered the questions of Facebook users. "They will not falsify the elections and if they do, war will be started...We have very good commission members. They will not allow anybody to falsify anything. I am convinced that we are winning these elections. Nobody will falsify and if they do, I will personally be involved in protecting these votes," Saakashvili said (*Ipn.ge, November 25, 2018*).

19. Coordinator of United Opposition released after several-hour questioning

Police have released Zurab Shamatava, coordinator of the United Opposition and former chief of IV Infantry Brigade of Georgian Armed Forces, have been released after several-hour questioning.

InterPressNews was informed by the Interior Ministry that Shamatava was detained in Khobi based on information, according to which he was carrying a firearm illegally.

Shamatava's lawyer Davit Akhalaia claims that today's incident is related to his political activities. "There was not detention, they conducted the search and have not seized anything illegal. It is unambiguously connected with his political activities," the lawyer said (*Ipn.ge, November 25, 2018*).

20. Demonstration - "No to Nazism" held in Tbilisi

The rally under the slogan - "No to Nazism" has been held at the Liberty Square in Tbilisi today. "Alliance of Patriots" was the organizer of the rally.

The organizers of the rally called on citizens to support "Georgian Dream"- backed presidential candidate Salome Zurbashvili and to say no to opposition candidate Grigo in the second round run-off. The rally organizers claim that about 98.000 people arrived at today's protest rally.

Ministry of Internal Affairs said that the rally was attended no more than 40 000 people, while OSCE/ODHIR observation mission counted around 30 000 (*Ipn.ge, November 25, 2018*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

21. Solar panels installed in Georgia's IDP settlement of Prezeti

In order to improve the living conditions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in the eastern Georgian village of Prezeti, the government of Lithuania has financed a renewable energy project and introduced energy-saving solutions in Prezeti.

Within the project a 11,6 kW solar photovoltaic system was installed in Prezeti which already powers two public buildings and a kindergarten.

"Photovoltaic systems, so called solar panels convert sunlight directly into electricity and delivers electricity free of charge to the kindergarten and other public objects. The project has two advantages – generating green energy and delivering it for free", said Deputy Economy Minister Natia Turnava who participated in the project launch ceremony with Environment Minister of Lithuania Kestutis Navickas.

Currently, 1000 people lives in Prezeti and during the winter period they consume about 200 kWh electricity, while 74 buildings have no electricity at all (*Agenda.ge, November 22, 2018*).

❖ Sports and Culture

22. Ajika sauce granted status of Intangible Cultural Heritage






The traditional Megrelian and Abkhazian technology of Georgian spicy sauce, ajika, have received the status of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Georgia.

The National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation granted the technology the status in the framework of the project Georgian Taste Heritage. Ajika originates in the Western parts of Georgia, in the Samegrelo and Abkhazia regions (*Agenda.ge, November 22, 2018*).

Additional Information

September 18, 2018
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.6585 GEL	1 GBP - 3.4287 GEL	100 RUB - 4.0568 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0347 GEL	1 TRY - 0.5025 GEL	100 JPY - 2.3535 GEL

Monday 26 November	Tuesday 27 November	Wednesday 28 November	Thursday 29 November	Friday 30 November
				
1° 11°	4° 11°	5° 15°	7° 16°	2° 8°

- **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](#)**