

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

December 11-13

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## ❖ Occupied Regions

### **1. Moscow claims statements of Stoltenberg, Pompeo, supporting Georgia's NATO membership, are provocative**

The statements of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, supporting Georgia's NATO membership, are provocative, - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia said in a statement released after the 46 th round of Geneva International Discussions.

"The situation on the Georgian- Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian borders was assessed as stable by all participants of the discussions (except of Georgian representatives). The border crossing statistics show that there is no serious problem related to free movement," the statement reads (*Ipn.ge, December 13, 2018*).

### **2. MFA – Issue of IDPs return was failed to be discussed at Geneva Talks due to Russia's destructive attitude**

The 46<sup>th</sup> round of Geneva International Discussions was held on December 12. Within the frameworks of the meeting a special emphasis was made on solving the humanitarian problems of the conflict affected population, - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia said in a statement.

The Georgian delegation spoke about the severe results of the illegal occupation and factual annexation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions by the Russian Federation. The focus was made on the process of militarization of occupied territories of Georgia by Russia, frequent military exercises and the facts of violations of Georgian airspace.

The Georgian participants talked about strengthening the occupation line with barbed wire fences and condemned the illegal process of setting artificial barriers near village Atotsi (*Ipn.ge, December 13, 2018*).

## ❖ Foreign Affairs

### **3. Georgia dismisses foreign media reports that Georgian gov't rejected Bridget Brink as US Ambassador**

The Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs says that a Foreign Policy report stating that the Georgian government has rejected the candidacy of US foreign service officer Bridget Brink as the next ambassador is "far from reality".

Foreign Policy wrote yesterday that Brink, who was slated to be named the new ambassador to Georgia, was allegedly rebuffed because of fears that she looks too favorably upon former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili.

Current and former officials in Washington told Foreign Policy that Georgia has indicated it will not sign a diplomatic agreement... accepting the nomination of Bridget Brink, because of her alleged [positive] predisposition towards former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili,” FP reported.

Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Khatuna Totladze says that the information is false, and that the repetition of incorrect information is harmful.

We are speaking about the US, which is a strategic partner of Georgia. The information is far from reality and its repetition, even from the media, is harmful,” Totladze says (*Agenda.ge, December 11, 2018*).

#### **4. US State Secretary Pompeo calls Georgian President-elect Zurabishvili to congratulate on her victory**

“Secretary Michael Pompeo called Georgian President-elect Salome Zourabichvili yesterday to congratulate her on her November 28, 2018 election victory.

They discussed U.S.-Georgian cooperation on common global security priorities, the United States’ unwavering support for Georgia’s sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, and the importance of electoral and judicial reforms for Georgia’s democratic development and Western integration,” the statement reads (*Agenda.ge, December 12, 2018*).

#### **5. NATO’s Appathurai speaks about ‘more NATO in Georgia’ next year**

Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy and NATO Secretary General’s Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia James Appathurai has stated in Tbilisi that the Georgian people will see “more NATO in Georgia” next year. He stated after the meeting that the aim of his arrival is the preservation of the positive political dynamic between Georgia and the EU and to summarise the recent NATO ministerial, where the Georgian foreign minister made “clear messages and calls” regarding Georgia’s NATO membership (*Agenda.ge, December 12, 2018*).

#### **6. NATO’s Appathurai meets with Georgian PM, announces plans for many high-level visits from NATO**

Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy and NATO Secretary General’s Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia James Appathurai have told Georgian PM Mamuka Bakhtadze that the alliance will further boost its support for Georgia next year and the assistance will also be revealed in many high-level visits from Brussels.

He stated that 2018 was particularly successful in NATO-Georgian relations and said that the alliance is well aware of its responsibilities to the country (*Agenda.ge, December 12, 2018*).

#### **7. Appathurai to runner-up in Georgian presidential race: it’s time all political parties respect one another**

Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy and NATO Secretary General’s Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia James Appathurai says that when the elections are over it is time for all political parties to respect one another.

Appathurai made the statement before his meeting with the former opposition presidential candidate Grigol Vashadze, who stated today that the opposition will protest the 28 November presidential election results on the inauguration day on 16 December (*Agenda.ge, December 12, 2018*).

#### **8. Georgian officials say they are shocked and saddened by shooting at Strasbourg Christmas market**

Georgian top officials have tweeted that they are shocked and saddened by yesterday's attack on the Strasbourg Christmas market in France, when a gunman killed three and wounded 13.

The foreign media reports that the French police hunt a man who was radicalized in prison. BBC says that the suspect, who is 29 years old, is injured. France has issued a maximum level of alert (*Agenda.ge, December 12, 2018*).

#### **9. Georgian visa centres launch in ten Indian cities**

Georgian Ambassador to India Archil Dzuliashvili and Regional Head of South Asia of VFS Global Alok Singhal have signed the agreement between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia and the VFS Global Services Private Limited (*Agenda.ge, December 12, 2018*).

### **❖ Internal Affairs**

#### **10. Police investigates rally held against temporal removal of ban on sale of lands to foreigners**

The Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs is investigating a rally and its consequences which is underway at the Tbilisi Justice House triggered by the 7 December verdict of the Georgian Constitutional Court which temporarily removed the ban on the sale of agricultural lands to foreign nationals.

Protesters, which include opposition members, nationalist groups and a lawmaker from the Alliance of Patriots opposition, are not allowing people that do not look like Georgians to enter the Justice House.

They say that the individuals might be foreigners who wish to register lands in Georgia.

The Interior Ministry is investigating the incident as a criminal case of ethnic discrimination, which is punishable by fines or imprisonment (*Agenda.ge, December 11, 2018*).

#### **11. 84 companies inspected for safety, violations reported in almost all of them**

The Georgian Health and Labour Ministry has inspected 84 companies since August this year and revealed safety-related and other types of violations in 81 of them. Information received from the remaining three companies is being processed. The 81 companies have been warned and given recommendations to improve shortcomings regarding:

- risk identification and risk management.
- primary medical care.
- identification of alcohol, drugs or psychotropic substances at work.
- individual safety devices.
- influence of the company's work on the environment.
- trainings and instructions for staff.
- safety control mechanisms.
- emergency situation plans and others.

All the companies which have been inspected carry out dangerous or risk-laden work activities (*Agenda.ge, December 11, 2018*).

#### **12. 7 Iranians detained for illegal entrepreneurship in Georgia**

The Georgian State Security Service (SSS) has detained seven citizens of Iran for illegal entrepreneurship in Georgia, receiving more than 2 million GEL as an unlawful income in one year.

The SSS reported that the individuals were using the so-called Hawala method, making money transfers from Georgia to the banking system of Iran without permit and license, bypassing the banking system of Georgia.

Their income received in one year, as a result of illegal entrepreneurship is estimated at 2, 097, 000 GEL,” the SSS stated (*Agenda.ge, December 12, 2018*).

### **13. Opposition will hold rally on the inauguration day**

Former opposition presidential candidate Grigol Vashadze has stated that the opposition will hold a “peaceful rally” in Telavi on 16 December, where the presidential inauguration ceremony will be held on the day.

Vashadze stated that “no elections” were conducted in Georgia and that the government ignored the demands of the opposition.

There were no elections held in Georgia, it looked like a special operation more than the elections. We have offered a political dialogue to the government, but they rejected our offer that is why we will hold a peaceful rally in Telavi,” Vashadze said (*Agenda.ge, December 12, 2018*).

### **14. Commotion occurs between MPs in parliament**

Verbal and physical confrontation has occurred between MPs in the parliament. The confrontation started after Nika Melia, a member of the National Movement, responded to MP Irma Inashvili's remarks.

Irma Inashvili stopped her speech and came up to Melia, which was followed by a physical confrontation, which also involved MP Zaza Papuashvili (*Ipn.ge, December 12, 2018*).

### **15. Irma Inashvili: It would probably be better to beat these criminals once and for all**

"Calm down and take care of yourself. You are the same as Saakashvili. Time will come and you all will be judged. Shut up and be quiet. You come to the Parliament only once in a quarter and you should at least be quiet," - said Inashvili told Nika Melia (*Ipn.ge, December 12, 2018*).

### **16. Nika Melia: I see several criminals in the Parliament Hall, including Irakli Kobakhidze**

"I will tell you directly. I see several criminals in this hall. One of them is Mr. Kobakhidze and another is Mr. Emzar Mkoyan.

You are to be blamed for at least one murder in this election process. I mean the death of a school principal in Zugdidi.

Another case is brutal attack on Grigol Vashadze's headquarters in Akhalkalaki, during which four people were abused and all this was led by Emzar Mkoyan.

One of the citizens of our country is struggling against death in Oni. These were bloody elections. It was unprecedented violence and you, Mr Kobakhidze, are covering the criminals”, Nika Melia said at the plenary session (*Ipn.ge, December 12, 2018*).

### **17. Public Defender calls on Parliament not to adopt Law that Changes legal status of employees of Presidential Administration**

According to the Public Defender of Georgia, the legislative initiative that changes the legal status of professional public servants employed in the Presidential Administration violates the labour rights of the employees, including the constitutional right of Georgian citizens to be protected from unjustified dismissal.

The Public Defender calls on the Parliament of Georgia to consider the labour rights of professional public servants employed in the Presidential Administration, the right of Georgian citizens to be

employed in the public service, as well as the values and principles of the new system of public service, and not to adopt the unconstitutional law (*Ipn.ge, December 12, 2018*).

### **18. Parliament fails to vote for 2019 budget due to lack of quorum**

The Parliament has failed to pass the 2019 budget at yesterday's plenary session, as there was not a sufficient number of lawmakers.

"Due to the irresponsibility of the colleagues, the vote could not be held," - said the Speaker of Parliament, Irakli Kobakhidze.

Only 67 MPs were present in the parliament from the Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia ruling party, while the budget requires 76 votes (*Ipn.ge, December 13, 2018*).

## **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

### **19. Georgia announces mountain development strategy for 2019-2023**

A total of 66 million GEL (about \$24.84m/€21.90m) will be spent on developing mountainous regions in Georgia, to improve infrastructure and conditions for those living there.

The money is allocated by the National Council for Mountain Development and the Fund for the Development of the Highlands of Georgia will be spent on projects that are included to Georgia's new mountain development strategy.

The Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze presented today the 'Development of High Mountain Regions of Georgia 2019-2023', which addresses the challenges faced by the highland population of Georgia and promotes local economic development in the mountainous regions (*Agenda.ge, December 11, 2018*).

### **20. PM Bakhtadze explains the effect of the debt cancellation programme**

Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze went live on Facebook on December 11 to answer the questions of the Facebook users regarding different topics including the debt cancellation programme. PM Bakhtadze said the Government initiative will give a chance to 600,000 Georgian citizens to become 'economically and socially active' again. He has also added that, while being blacklisted by the financiers many people might feel uncomfortable to receive salary through their bank account what would encourage the shadow economy in the country.

"Georgia has two enemies - Russian occupation and poverty. One of the major reasons for the poverty is a high level of indebtedness and without addressing it we will find hard to overcome poverty," Bakhtadze said adding that the high level of indebtedness has been caused by 'irresponsible system of lending'.

A website - *Vali.ge* - has been created to help Georgian citizens having a non performing loans with up to 2000 GEL principal apply for cancelation of their debt (*Agenda.ge, December 12, 2018*).

### **21. New digital trade platform Vendoo to launch in Georgia in 2019**

TBC Bank is initiating a new digital trade platform – Vendoo – which is planned to be launched in Georgia in February 2019.

The CEO of TBC Bank Vakhtang Butskhrikidze presented the project yesterday and said that TBC Bank is aiming to develop E-commerce in Georgia and supply clients with high-quality products.

Vendoo will offer a wide variety of products, rapid delivery and a flexible return policy. The delivery service will cover every corner of Georgia, including high mountainous places.

On the other hand Vendoo will provide a platform to small and medium entrepreneurs in Georgia as they will be able to distribute their products to Georgian customers online.

Georgia's new Vendoo app will be based on the already existing company Swoop, which TBC Bank has recently purchased (*Agenda.ge, December 12, 2018*).

#### **22. EU, Sweden and Austria provide €6.8 mln to develop Georgian mountain tourism and organic agriculture**

Representatives of the EU, Sweden and Austrian signed a contract on International Mountain Day to start the 'Green Economy: Sustainable Mountain Tourism and Organic Agriculture (GRETA)' project in Georgia. The four year project will start in 2019 and will be funded by:

- The European Commission - €3 million
- Sweden - €2.8 million
- The Austrian Development Cooperation - €1 million (*Agenda.ge, December 12, 2018*).

#### **23. EU and EIB offer €6.13 mln for new, safer roads in Georgia**

The European Union (EU) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) are starting a new project with a total budget of €6,136,000 to contribute to Georgia's road infrastructure development.

The project activities are expected to start in January 2019. The Technical Assistance for Georgia Transport Connectivity (GTC) is a seven year programme funded by the EU.

In particular, this project will:

- Prepare the necessary technical studies necessary for new investments in the Georgian road network;
- Provide capacity-building and training to the staff of the Roads Department to support the implementation of Georgia's national road programme;
- Conduct feasibility and design studies necessary to eliminate accident-prone road sections (*Agenda.ge, December 12, 2018*).

#### **24. Next export markets for Georgian wine: Japan and Korea**

Japan and South Korea will be the next export markets for Georgian wine, Georgian Agricultural Minister Levan Davitashvili announced today.

Georgia should concentrate more on markets of neighboring countries, where Georgian wine is already well-known. Despite the fact that Georgian wine is not as popular in Eastern Europe as in the South Caucasus, the loyalty rate is quite high and interest in our wine is rising every year. It is worth mentioning the US segment, which is the world's greatest importer", stated Davitashvili (*Agenda.ge, December 12, 2018*).

## **❖ Sports and Culture**

#### **25. Designer Demna Gvasalia named Fashion Awards winner, unveils collection themed on Georgia**

Georgian-born creative designer Demna Gvasalia was named the Accessories Designer of the Year at the 2018 Fashion Awards in London on Monday, as his brand Vetements revealed its collection themed on contemporary history of Georgia.

The award-winning Creative Designer of Balenciaga was unveiled among the winners of the annual event at the Royal Albert Hall.

The prize was presented by model Edie Campbell and actor Riz Ahmed and collected by fashion editor Carine Roitfeld on behalf of Gvasalia, who vied for the award with his counterparts Alessandro Michele of Gucci, Miuccia Prada Prada, Maria Grazia Chiuri of Dior and Jonathan Anderson of Loewe (*Agenda.ge, December 11, 2018*).

### 26. Stories of artists under Soviet repressions opens at Tbilisi museum

History and art enthusiasts can now visit Tbilisi's Museum of Georgia to discover the story of the country's artists under Soviet repressions through works by painters, sculptors and designers that became victims of the regime.


The Red Terror and Georgian Artists opened at the venue on Tuesday to present artwork created in the totalitarian realm of the 1920s and 1930s by the likes of painter Dimitri Shevardnadze, illustrator Henryk Hryniewski and theatre designer Petre Otskheli. The show, set to receive visitors through March 1, tells stories of the creatives targeted during the purges of the 1930s, arrested on trumped-up charges and executed, forced into exile or otherwise persecuted (*Agenda.ge, December 12, 2018*).

## Additional Information

**December 13, 2018**  
**OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD - 2.6594 GEL	1 GBP - 3.3346 GEL	100 RUB - 4.0028 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0144 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4940 GEL	100 JPY - 2.3443 GEL

Thursday 13 December	Friday 14 December	Saturday 15 December	Sunday 16 December	Monday 17 December
				
-1° 8°	-1° 6°	-1° 8°	0° 7°	1° 6°

- **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](#)**