

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

December 14-17

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❖ Occupied Regions

1. Lavrov: Russia will not allow aggression against Abkhazia and South Ossetia

“I am sure they will not stick their nose anywhere together with their battalions. They are aware that we have ties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We will not allow the aggressors to attack our allies,” FM Lavrov stated about it while responding to the journalist’s question related to enhancing Georgian-NATO political-military cooperation in Transcaucasia (*Ipn.ge, December 17, 2018*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

2. Russia on NATO, US for supporting Georgia, cites US-built Tbilisi Lugar Lab as dangerous

The Russian Foreign Ministry also reports that concerns regarding the US-built Tbilisi Lugar Lab have not been alleviated and that the “superficial report” made about the lab by “anonymous international experts” means nothing to them.

“The Russian, Abkhaz and South Ossetian delegations [two occupied regions of Georgia] reiterated that the main challenge to regional security are the military activities of the US and NATO on Georgian territory, including the plans of Washington and Tbilisi to modernise the military airfield in Vaziani [near Tbilisi] and conduct the next large-scale multinational military exercises in 2019,” the Russian Foreign Ministry wrote in the wake of the 46th meeting of the Geneva International Discussions on Georgian conflict issues on 11-12 December.

We believe that the recent statements by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in support of Georgia’s membership in NATO are provocative. It was just such irresponsible promises in August 2008 that pushed Tbilisi towards a criminal military adventure,” the Russian Foreign Ministry wrote (*Agenda.ge, December 14, 2018*).

3. Lavrov : Do you suggest us to “choke” Georgia?

ussia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov believes that cutting economic relations with Georgia will not solve the problem related to intensification of Georgia-NATO relations.

“Can you imagine that we have stopped economic relations with Georgia and a military base is built anyway? Do you think we should answer it in order to show our personality? Do you suggest us to “choke” Georgia? Why?” Sergey Lavrov told “Komsomolskaya Pravda” radio while replying to a journalist’s question whether Russia should impose sanctions against Georgia amid the intensified Georgia-NATO relations.

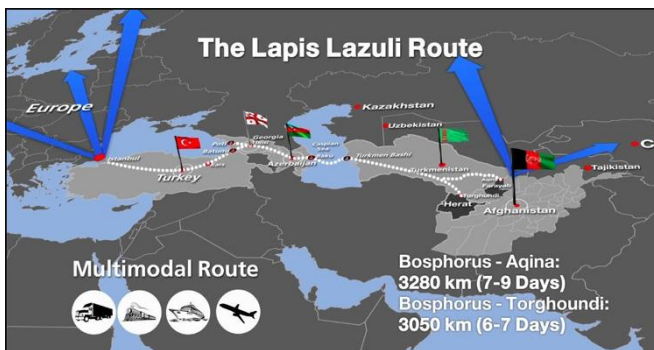
Lavrov said tourism and trade relationships are being developed between Georgia and Russia.

“The planes are full of tourists. If I am not mistaken, Russia is Georgia's first trading partner,” Lavrov added (*Ipn.ge, December 17, 2018*).

4. European court rejects complaints of Russian citizens accusing Georgia of violation of their rights in 2008 war

The European Court of Human Rights has rejected the complaints of several Russian citizens living in the Georgian occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region, who filed against Georgia and claimed that the Georgian Army violated their rights during the Russia-Georgia 2008 war.

The court discussed three cases in which applicants Khadizat Dzhioyeva, Irina Kachmazova, and Alina Kachmazova [first case], Izolda Kudukhova and Nino Kudukhova [second case] and Klara Naniyeva and Umar Bagayev [third case], all Russian citizens, stating that the activities of the Georgian army in August 2008 put their lives at risk, they were subjected to inhuman treatment and discrimination and their properties were damaged (*Agenda.ge, December 14, 2018*).



5. Afghanistan launches Lapis Lazuli transit route to Europe via Georgia

More than 175 tonnes of cotton, dried fruit and sesame are the first export products that Afghanistan will deliver to Europe through the Lapis Lazuli transit route which passes through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Afghanistan opened the new international trade route of Lapis Lazuli today. US Ambassador to the

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan John R. Bass wrote about the launch of new transit route on his official Twitter account (*Agenda.ge, December 14, 2018*).

6. Visa on arrival in Thailand be available to Georgian citizens

Starting in February 2019, Georgian citizens will be able to spend up to 15 days in Thailand after receiving a visa on arrival at the border.

Georgian Ambassador to Thailand Archil Dzuliashvili (residence in New Delhi) met with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand yesterday to discuss the subject (*Agenda.ge, December 14, 2018*).

7. NATO Secretary General praises Georgia's progress

Secretary General of the NATO Jens Stoltenberg has praised Georgia's progress towards NATO membership in his speech at the NATO-Georgia commission meeting held at NATO headquarters.

Georgia is moving forward effectively, applying all the mechanisms on the way towards integration which makes the country closer to the alliance membership," Stoltenberg said at the meeting, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has reported on December 13. Stoltenberg has also characterised 2018 as 'quite dynamic' in terms of NATO-Georgia relations.

The allies have positively assessed Georgia's performance in terms of its national annual programme in 2018 as well as the democratic and defence reforms, the MFA said (*Agenda.ge, December 14, 2018*).

8. NATO Gen-Sec Jens Stoltenberg to visit Georgia next year

Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani has stated that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg will visit Georgia in 2019.

Zalkaliani stated that NATO-Georgia had a very successful 2018 which was crowned with a special format meeting with Georgian and Ukrainian representatives.

“NATO has adopted an unprecedented declaration this year and the last ministerial was also very successful, where we have summarized achievements and set future goals,” Zalkaliani stated. We are waiting for more NATO in Georgia next year. We are waiting for NATO-Georgia large-scale drills, the visit of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and other important events,” Zalkaliani stated (*Agenda.ge, December 14, 2018*).

9. EU, UNDP release findings on media coverage of elections in Georgia

The EU and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Georgia have released findings on media coverage of elections in Georgia over the past three years.

The findings cite “growing polarisation and political bias” as general trends in the Georgian media since 2016.

Televisions and online media outlets have demonstrated significant improvement in reducing hate speech, which, however, remained a challenge for newspapers.

Election coverage on the radio has not changed much in the last three years and stayed relatively balanced but superficial. Election coverage in all media segments lacked the presentation of electoral programmes and issue-oriented debates among competing electoral candidates,” the report reads (*Agenda.ge, December 15, 2018*).

10. President of Armenia is looking forward to cooperating with Georgia’s new president

President of Armenia Armen Sarkissian came to Georgia today to attend the inauguration ceremony of the fifth president of Georgia, Salome Zurbishvili, where he expressed readiness to cooperate with her and her administration.

“I am looking forward to cooperating with the new president of Georgia to further strengthen the bilateral relations between our countries,” he said.

Sarkissian congratulated Salome Zurbishvili on her new position and wished her a successful presidential term (*Agenda.ge, December 16, 2018*).

11. US Congress passes historic bill, sanctioning individuals who violate human rights in Georgian occupied regions

The US House of Representatives has passed a bill which not only condemns the occupation of Georgian lands but also provides sanctions against those who violate human rights in the two Russian-occupied regions of Georgia – Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia).

Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani has stated that the bill upgrades the Georgian-US strategic partnership to a genuinely new level.

He said that the bill prohibits entry into the United States and demands the freezing of assets of all individuals who were charged with violation of fundamental human rights in the Georgian occupied regions and for those who assisted in the offences (*Agenda.ge, December 16, 2018*).

12. Georgia granted extra regional observer status in Central American regional organization

Georgia has been granted extra regional observer status in the Central American Integration System (SICA) – an important regional political and economic organization created in 1991 for regional peace, democracy, political freedom and economic development.

With the status, Georgia will share its experience against corruption and organised crime with the eight member countries of the organisation, as well as give advice about how to develop electronic governance and public services (*Agenda.ge, December 17, 2018*).

❖ Internal Affairs

13. Salome Zurabishvili officially becomes the fifth president of Georgia

After taking the presidential oath in the historic castle of Telavi, Salome Zurabishvili has been sworn in as the fifth and first ever female president of Georgia. She will hold office for a six-year term (*Agenda.ge, December 16, 2018*).

14. Salome Zurabishvili: My goal is to do my best to develop our state and make its European future irreversible

"It should be noted that every president has put his bricks in the process of building independent and democratic Georgia. A century ago, the leaders of the first republic adopted a constitution, which was modern and progressive at that time. Zviad Gamsakhurdia played a major role when he appointed a referendum and adopted an important act of Georgia's independence.

Eduard Shevardnadze was first to open a path towards European and Euro-Atlantic space. Mikheil Saakashvili laid the foundation of many important reforms at the initial stage of his administration. During the presidency of Giorgi Margvelashvili, steps have been taken to strengthen the democratic process and stability.

My goal is to do my best to develop our state, to make its European future irreversible and to prevent any obstacle in this process", said Salome Zurabishvili (*Ipn.ge, December 16, 2018*).

15. Salome Zurabishvili: Georgia faces a big challenge - Abkhazia and South Ossetia are occupied by Russia

"The occupation line gradually moves closer to us and our citizens are being kidnapped. This is unacceptable for a sovereign state. We will not tolerate this!" Salome Zurabishvili said (*Ipn.ge, December 16, 2018*).

16. Clashes occur between protesters and police after inauguration

Another incident took place today after the end of the inauguration. Supporters of the United Opposition blocked Rustaveli Street and restricted traffic for several minutes.

One of the state vehicles was damaged during the protest. There were clashes between protesters and police. According to members of the National Movement, they are not going to go home and call on their activists to arrive in Telavi (*Ipn.ge, December 16, 2018*).

17. 8 police officers hospitalized after clashes with opposition

Several police officers have been injured in clashes with the opposition in the village of Velistsikhe. According to an InterPressNews correspondent, 8 police officers are being treated at Telavi referral hospital.

Clashes between the opposition and police officers took place several times today, after law enforcers blocked a road leading to Telavi. Several demonstrators were injured in the clashes as well (*Ipn.ge, December 16, 2018*).

18. Opposition announces "nonstop protest" from December 18

"The United Opposition categorically demands early parliamentary elections in the shortest possible time, to change the election administration and the elections to be held under a proportional system," Grigol Vashadze said.

According to the opposition leader, they are demanding punishment of those people, who falsified the presidential elections, “we are categorically demanding punishment of those criminals, who attacked peaceful demonstrators yesterday, we are categorically demanding punishment of those policemen, who headed this punitive operation. We are starting nonstop rallies from tomorrow. These rallies will be held peacefully within the Constitution and law,” Grigol Vashadze said (*Ipn.ge, December 16, 2018*).

19. Interior Minister thanks police for showing restraint when dealing with opposition on inauguration day

Opposition members attempted to protest in the town of Telavi and hold a rally there during the inauguration of Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili.

Gakharia also apologised to the police for the insults and injuries they have sustained. He said that 10 policemen were hospitalised after a brawl with opposition members on the Telavi-Gurjaani highway.

Gakharia vowed that “no matter who violated the law and abused the police, everyone will be held accountable.” (*Agenda.ge, December 16, 2018*).

20. Acting US Ambassador : We are very concerned about the images that were seen yesterday

“As for the other events that took place yesterday, the United States obviously supports the rights of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. We support those rights to be carried out in a calm and peaceful manner, and I think we are very concerned about the images that were seen yesterday—what they say to Georgians, what they say to Georgia’s friends around the world about where this country is. We call for calm for Georgia now to move forward in the aftermath of these elections and get to the important work of strengthening this country and strengthening its future,” the acting Ambassador said (*Ipn.ge, December 17, 2018*).

21. New Constitution of Georgia comes into play as the presidential inauguration is over

The key points of the new constitution are as follows:

- Georgia will switch to fully proportional elections in 2024.
- The 2020 parliamentary elections will still be held through the existing mixed proportional and majoritarian system but the election threshold will be lowered to 3 percent from 5 percent for these elections only.
- Members of Parliament who will be nominated by one political party will be able to form one parliamentary faction.
- MP must be 25-year-old at least. [Previously the age was 21].
- The president will be elected by a special council starting in 2024;
- Selling agricultural lands to foreign nationals will be prohibited.
- The opposition rights in parliament will be boosted, permitting them to create investigative commissions and others.
- Kutaisi is not indicated as the location town of parliament. The parliamentary activities are fulling returning to Tbilisi.
- Marriage has been defined as the union of a man and a woman for the purpose to create a family.
- Prosecutor’s Office will perform separately from the Ministry of Justice. Chief Prosecutors will be elected by parliament for six years.

- Public defenders will also be elected for six years and the same person will not be able to re-run to the post.
- Prime Minister is responsible for government activities and appointment and dismissal of ministers. He is accountable before the parliament (*Agenda.ge, December 17, 2018*).

22. Opposition member detained for insulting police on inauguration day

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia has detained a member of the United National Movement opposition, former state official David Kirkitadze for verbally and physically abusing the police and damage of property during the clash between law enforcers and opposition activists on the presidential inauguration day.

If confirmed, the former UNM lawmaker and Tbilisi City Hall official, will have to spend 4-7 years in prison (*Agenda.ge, December 17, 2018*).

23. Lawyer : Davit Kirkitadze pleads not guilty, goes on hunger strike

“He is charged in connection with the assault on a police officer. Davit Kirkitadze goes on a hunger strike. He pleads not guilty. This is the tool of political persecution by the authorities,” the lawyer said (*Ipn.ge, December 17, 2018*).

24. Grigol Vashadze demands Davit Kirkitadze to be released on bail

"Davit Kirkitadze is not your supporter. Once he goes on a hunger strike, he will not stop it. Therefore, I call on you to release this person on bail. Leave our supporters alone and if you have any questions, he will come to the court as many times as needed?"

Bidzina Ivanishvili's accountant, who made money in Russia after Russia carried out military attack against Georgia, is trying to split the Georgian society. They do not have any specific plans on how to save the state, "Grigol Vashadze said (*Ipn.ge, December 17, 2018*).

25. PM : The actions committed by irresponsible and destructive forces cannot endure any criticism

“Any country would be proud of such police. A special thanks to the media representatives who, despite the interference, were able to be unbiased in their coverage of yesterday’s developments. The "National Movement" does not leave its traditions, continues continue violence and create a sense in society as if there are problems in public life. Nobody should the illusion of it,” the PM said adding that the opposition will not be able to cause dissonance in the public life (*Ipn.ge, December 17, 2018*).

26. "European Georgia” summons Interior Minister to Parliament

“We summoned him to the sitting of the faction, he promised to come but did not. Yesterday, the constitutional right to freedom of movement was openly abuse by the Minister and the government. According to the new regulations, we requested the Minister to arrive in the committee,” MP Kapanadze said.

The lawmaker called on the members of the parliamentary majority to ensure Minister Gakharia’s arrival in the parliament (*Ipn.ge, December 17, 2018*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

27. Georgia launches Organic Farming Certificate Programme in 2019

Agriculture Minister Levan Davitashvili says that up until now, assistance to farmers from international donor organisations has only been fragmented.

“This is a base on which we should build a larger scale programme, which is a priority for our country. This implies concrete co-financing for primary or processing producers and tax benefits, as well as certification process. It is important that all interesting parties be involved in designing the process of the project, including associations which have quiet big experience in supporting organic farming”, said Agriculture Minister Levan Davitashvili (*Agenda.ge, December 14, 2018*).

28. 2017 data: electricity consumption up 6.9% in Georgia

Electricity generation was reduced by 0.4% in Georgia in 2017 compared to the previous year and reached 11.53 million kWh, show the latest data published by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

“The increase in electricity consumption is mainly due to the expansion of production volume, as well as due to the increased demand on electricity in the service sector and households”, said Geostat (*Agenda.ge, December 16, 2018*).

29. Georgia-US free trade talks to move into active phase in 2019

“We are going to work very actively on this in 2019. During the working process we will have consultations with the US government as well as business representatives. This process will raise awareness of Georgia among the US business society. When the deal will be signed it will be an important positive message to US investors and business society and also will be a basis for attracting more investments from [the US]”, Kobulia said.

Kobulia said that a free trade deal with US would increase US investments to Georgia by 20-30%.

“We are glad that the US House of Representatives has passed a bill that supports Georgia and also includes the signing of a free trade deal with the US”, said Kobulia (*Agenda.ge, December 17, 2018*).

❖ Sports and Culture

30. 8 Georgian projects nominated for EU Contemporary Architecture Prize

The full list of project nominated from Georgia is below:

- Fabrika Tbilisi by Multiverse Architecture
- Dance Hall For Dance Choreographer Tea Darchia's Studio by David Giorgadze Architects
- Coffee Production Plant by Giorgi Khmaladze Architects
- Pavilion for Chacha Ceremonies by Alexander Brodsky, Wunderwerk
- Tbilisi Park Hotel by SEDUM.ARCHITECTS
- Bazaar Building by David Danelia Architects
- Black Sea Arena by DREI ARCHITEKTEN
- Moxy Hotel Tbilisi by Dephani AD (*Agenda.ge, December 16, 2018*).

Additional Information

December 18, 2018
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.6656 GEL	1 GBP - 3.3613 GEL	100 RUB - 4.0048 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0220 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4953 GEL	100 JPY - 2.3525 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](#)**