

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

December 18-19

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❖ Occupied Regions

1. **Leaderships of occupied regions protest Georgian gov't sanction list at humanitarian meeting**

Representatives of the de facto governments of Georgian occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) continue to raise objections to the Otkhozoria-Tatunashvili list, which sanctions individuals for the violation of human rights in the regions, at the local Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meetings, representative of the State Security Service of Georgia Irakli Antadze has stated.

Irakli Antadze says that the discussions regarding the list which was approved by the Georgian parliament this year is not in the format of the IPRM meetings, as the meetings are for settling everyday problems for the local population (*Agenda.ge, December 18, 2018*).

2. **Russian-occupied Tskhinvali says 'borderisation' of Georgia will continue**

A statement made by representative of de-facto Tskhinvali Yegor Kochiev for 'South Ossetian' news agency Res clearly shows that the Russian-occupied region plans to continue the borderisation process to "simplify the lives of people" in the unrecognised region.

The head of de-facto Tskhinvali delegation left the the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meeting held in Ergneti yesterday without any comment for Georgian media.

However he later spoke to Res, and said:

"As at the previous meetings, the Georgian party referred to the fact that this was a political issue. We have tried to point out that this issue is of purely practical importance to facilitate the life of people who will know where the territory of South Ossetia and the territory of Georgia is. And there will not be all the related sanctions for the detention of violators, fines, court proceedings," Kochiev said (*Agenda.ge, December 19, 2018*).

3. **De-facto minister of culture : Ossetians see dreams in Russian**

"Ossetia has already chosen Russia and we will not will never turn off this way. In 2008, Russian soldiers stood beside my child and other children. They protected my people and my homeland. We see dreams in Russian. We speak Russian in our family. I am proud of our people, "the de facto minister of culture said (*Ipn.ge, December 19, 2018*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

4. **Georgia, Turkey to collaborate in responding to extradition, kidnaping cases**

Georgian and Turkish Justice Ministers have agreed to create a group to timely respond to extradition, children kidnaping, prisoner handover and prisoners' rights protection issues.

Georgian Justice Minister Thea Tsulukiani and her Turkish counterpart Abdulhamit Gul also agreed to share experience in the justice field.

The meeting took place in Ankara, Turkey earlier today. Tsulukiani stated that the idea to meet emerged during the Copenhagen Ministerial in April 2018 (*Agenda.ge, December 19, 2018*).

5. US President Donald J. Trump congratulates President Zurabishvili on victory

“The United States fully supports Georgia’s territorial integrity, prosperity and democratic development, as well as Georgia's further interaction with the West,” reads the letter from President Trump (*Agenda.ge, December 19, 2018*).

6. Ambassador of Georgia to Germany says number of asylum seekers has decreased

"Some steps have been made recently in this direction. According to the latest statistics, the number of asylum seekers has significantly decreased compared with the beginning of the year", the Ambassador said (*Ipn.ge, December 18, 2018*).

7. MFA – Georgia is working with a number of countries on the agreement regarding circular migration and residence permit

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Georgian side is working with a number of countries on the agreement regarding circular migration and residence permit for qualified specialists.

The Ministry said in a statement released on December 19 that the negotiations are underway with Germany, Israel, Portugal, Greece and Bulgaria (*Ipn.ge, December 18, 2018*).

8. Gregory Karasin – We are still waiting for explanations from Washington and Tbilisi regarding Lugar Laboratory

"We are still looking forward to explanations from Washington and Tbilisi regarding the true character of this biological laboratory. Do not forget that this lab is located near our border," Karasin said.

According to him, the assessment visit of the foreign observers in the laboratory of Lugar on 14-15 November did not make the situation clear (*Ipn.ge, December 19, 2018*).

9. Russia plans to develop two resorts located near its border with Georgia

“People visit Georgia, million people cross the border with Georgia. This is large amounts of money. They ski in the mountain resorts, eat, live and so on. Now we will develop two resorts near the border with Georgia. We have good natural conditions for the development of a tourism sector," said the Vice-Premier of Russia (*Ipn.ge, December 19, 2018*).

10. European Commission : Georgia meets visa liberalisation requirements but it need to take immediate actions in specific areas

Georgia meets visa liberalisation requirements but it need to take immediate action in order to ensure continued progress in specific areas,- the European Commission said in its report on the fulfilment of the visa liberalisation benchmarks by the Western Balkan countries.

The report's conclusions highlight the countries where particular and urgent actions are needed. The conclusions underline the fact that Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine each need to take immediate action in order to ensure continued progress in specific area (*Ipn.ge, December 19, 2018*).

❖ Internal Affairs

11. Lasha Zhvania appointed as head of presidential administration, Dimitri Gabunia as president’s parliamentary secretary

President Salome Zourabichvili has appointed Lasha Zhvania as head of the presidential administration and Dimitri Gabunia as president's parliamentary secretary. Salome Zourabichvili has made the respective announcement at the press conference in the Atoneli Palace (*Ipn.ge, December 18, 2018*).

12. Giorgi Vashadze requests explanations from Paata Burchuladze

"I am very sorry for this fact and I can directly say that this is unacceptable to me - political activity on the one hand and singing at the event attended by Putin on the other hand. I'm very sorry and I am requesting explanations from Paata Burchuladze", Vashadze said (*Ipn.ge, December 18, 2018*).

13. Elene Khoshtaria: Any person singing or dancing for Putin in Moscow is harming our state

"There are no double standards. Apart from being a singer, Burchuladze he was quite a serious political figure. He has special responsibilities and such behavior is unacceptable. It is harmful to our country when Russia creates an illusion that people feel wonderful when communicating with them and culture is a separated space. Burchuladze was a politician. He is one of the faces of Georgia, including in the field of culture. Therefore, his behavior was a very heavy blow for our state," Khoshtaria said (*Ipn.ge, December 18, 2018*).

14. 5-year trials end, court sentences five former officials in high-profile murder case

bilisi City Court has delivered a guilty verdict against five former police officials of the United National Movement government for the high profile murder case of 19-year-old Amiran (Buta) Robakidze in 2004.

Four former officials, who do not admit to the crime, have been sent to prison for several years for exceeding of official powers, while one, the former head of the Criminal Police, Zaza Bakradze, who admitted to the crime this year, was offered a plea bargain and was sentenced to four years and six months of parole and a 5,000 GEL fine.

The former police officials who have been sent to prison for five years and three months are Guram Donadze, Irakli Pirtskhalava, David Iashvili and Zura Mikadze.

Buta Robakidze's mother Ia Metreveli stated that the "restoration of justice is launching in Georgia from today."

She applauded the verdict and stated that the judge sentenced the individuals with maximal prison terms for exceeding of official powers. However, as certain articles were amnestied in 2013, the offenders will have to spend a bit more than five years in prison (*Agenda.ge, December 18, 2018*).

15. Announcement of verdict in Buta Robakidze case causes commotion in court

As an InterPressNews correspondent informs, one of the persons in the hall threw a lighter at prosecutor Davit Meparidze. At this time a doctor is assisting the prosecutor.

Besides, one of the defendants, Zaza Bakradze, who was found guilty, but was sentenced only to probationary sentence under plea bargain, was confronted by family members of other detainees (*Ipn.ge, December 18, 2018*).

16. Soso Robakidze thanks court for objective verdict

"These villains should go to jail and be in prison. I am grateful to the prosecutors and the judge who delivered an objective verdict," said Soso Robakidze (*Ipn.ge, December 18, 2018*).

17. Guram Donadze releases statement from penitentiary establishment

Former head of the Press Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Guram Donadze, who is currently in penitentiary establishment No 9, has released a statement about the verdict delivered against him.

"On December 18, 2018, Tbilisi City Court Judge Davit Mgeliashvili delivered another illegal and unjustified verdict in his personal interests. Mgeliashvili put his personal interests above the law and fulfilled a political order without assessing any evidence. By doing so, he guaranteed a lifetime term of office. As for criminal Zaza Bakradze, he obtained freedom based on the false testimony according to the preliminary deal with the Prosecutor's Office and turned absolutely innocent people – a journalist and former senior police officers - into political prisoners," reads the statement (*Ipn.ge, December 19, 2018*).

18. Venice Commission releases recommendations for Georgian justice reforms

The recommendations of the Venice Commission regarding the Prosecutorial Council, a 15-member independent body composed of prosecutors and investigators who are taking part in the selection and dismissal process of a chief prosecutor:

- The current composition of the Prosecutorial Council, which consists of a majority of prosecutors elected by their peers, achieves professional representation and expertise, but does not enhance public credibility of its independence. An enhanced representation from civil society could achieve this purpose;
- When assessing the independence of the Prosecutor's Office, it is important to ensure that not only the external independence of the Prosecutor's Office is ensured in relation to the legislative or executive powers, but also that of the internal independence of the prosecutors.
- To achieve a balance between the hierarchical control over and the independence of prosecutors, shared competences of the Prosecutor General and Prosecutorial Council should be provided regarding the careers of prosecutors (e.g. proposal for promotion by the Prosecutorial Council).
- In order to strengthen the Prosecutorial Council in view of its new specific role, it is suggested that the career management, ethics and incentives council headed by the Prosecutor General – be subordinated to the Prosecutorial Council.
- For the Prosecutorial Council to guarantee the transparency of the Prosecutor's Office the bill needs to expressly indicate how this task is to be fulfilled. The replies of the Prosecutorial Council to the report by the Prosecutor General should become an integral part of the report of the Prosecutor General to Parliament (*Agenda.ge, December 18, 2018*).

19. Interior Ministry says 26 charged with election-related offences

The Georgian Interior Ministry has stated that 26 people in total have been charged with election-related offences, which took place on the 28 November presidential election day and afterwards.

Investigations were launched in 25 incidents. However, the investigation was later suspended in 13 cases due to an absence of evidence," the ministry says.

The Interior Ministry reports that the individuals who have been charged are both supporters of the ruling Georgian Dream party and the opposition (*Agenda.ge, December 19, 2018*).

20. Interior Minister to report to Parliament

Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia will deliver an annual report to the Parliament. Reportedly, Minister Gakharia will attend the extraordinary plenary meeting on December 21.

The Minister of Internal Affairs will arrive in the Parliament under Article 154 of new regulations, according to which, a member of the Government asks the Parliament to hold a hearing on own initiative and the Parliament agrees him/her (*Ipn.ge, December 19, 2018*).

21. United Opposition rallying outside Gurjaani District Court

“So-called government must realize that we will not allow them to oppress any of our friends or supporters. Davit Kirkitadze will be free as he protected his constitutional right,- Grigol Vashadze, one of the leaders of the United Opposition, told rally outside Gurjuaani District Court, where Davit Kirkitadze’s trial will be held (*Ipn.ge, December 19, 2018*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

22. Turkish Airlines to launch Ankara-Tbilisi-Ankara flights in 2019

A new destination is being added to Tbilisi International Airport, announces TAV Georgia, the sole operator of Tbilisi and Batumi International Airports.

From January 18, 2019 Turkish Airlines will start performing regular direct flights on the route Ankara-Tbilisi-Ankara.

Flights between the Turkish and Georgian capitals will be carried out twice a week - on Mondays and Fridays, by Boeing 737-800 type aircraft through Ankara Esenboga airport (*Agenda.ge, December 18, 2018*).

23. Georgia may sign free trade deal with the UK

A free trade deal might be signed between Georgia and the United Kingdom (UK), announces the Ambassador of Georgia to the UK Tamar Beruchashvili.

Beruchashvili said that Georgia and the UK are having consultations on signing a strategic and comprehensive agreement of which one of components is a free trade deal.

[This agreement] includes the component of a free trade deal and establishing cooperation in different fields...Several rounds of consultations have already been held”, Beruchashvili said (*Agenda.ge, December 18, 2018*).

24. Georgian PM: VAT return reform to bring 520 mln GEL to Georgia’s private sector

As a result of the implementation of VAT return reform launched in 2018, about 520 million GEL will be returned to Georgia’s private sector, said Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze while answering the question of a citizen last night on a Facebook live address.

“This means more investment resources for our companies. They will become able to create more job places, to more actively replace import, export [more products] and become more competitive among the global competition. This is a very successful reform and I suppose those digital decisions that will be introduced in Georgia’s Ministry of Finance and the Revenue Service will make this process more active”, Bakhtadze said.

While talking about taxes Bakhtadze said that the government has the desire to further reduce tax rates in Georgia (*Agenda.ge, December 18, 2018*).

25. €10 mln project to boost rural development in Georgia’s Adjara region in 2018-2020

A €10 million project will be launched in Georgia's Black Sea region of Adjara to promote rural development and small and medium-sized businesses in the region.

This is the EU-funded project 'ENPARD-3: Improving Rural Development in Georgia' which will be implemented with the financial contribution of the government of Adjara.

The agreement was signed today between the parties which implies that the government of Adjara will contribute €230,000 to enhance the implementation of regional components of a €10 million EU-funded project.

Under the agreement, in the period of 2018-2022, the EU, in cooperation with UNDP, will assist in developing economic alternatives outside agriculture for families in Adjara's rural areas and support the region's government to develop and implement effective rural development policies (*Agenda.ge, December 18, 2018*).

26. What were Georgia's main exports and imports in Jan-Nov 2018?

More specifically, between January and November of 2018, Georgia exported:

- Copper ores and concentrates - worth \$461.4 million, or 15.2% of total exports
- Motor cars - worth \$356.6 million, or 11.8% of total exports
- Ferro-alloys - worth \$318.8 million, or 10.5% of total exports

In the same period of this year Georgia's top imported commodities were:

- Petroleum and petroleum oils (worth \$794.4 million, or 9.6% of total imports)
- Motor cars (worth \$533.1 million or 6.4% of total imports)
- Copper ores and concentrates (worth \$378.7 million, or 4.6% of total imports) (*Agenda.ge, December 19, 2018*).

27. France to allow Georgian specialists to find legal employment in country

The French president has signed an agreement ratified by the country's legislative body which will allow a certain category of Georgian citizens to receive temporary residency permits and work legally in the country. The agreement covers both the employment of Georgians in France and French citizens in Georgia.

Young Georgian specialists, as well as graduates of French educational institutions and their branches will be able to stay in the country for working experience and then return to Georgia.

France will allocate 150 permits for young specialists annually, and an additional 500 permits for others.

The Georgian Foreign Ministry says that the agreement regulates terms for residency permits and quotas for jobs (*Agenda.ge, December 19, 2018*).

28. Georgia posts 3.7% growth in Q3 of 2018

The nominal gross domestic product (GDP) amounted to 10.58 billion GEL in the third quarter of 2018, announces the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

The real growth rate of GDP equalled 3.7% year-on-year, while the GDP deflator increased by 3.4%. Real GDP growth amounted to 4.8% for the Q1-Q3 2018 year-over-year (*Agenda.ge, December 19, 2018*).

29. Georgia's national bank implements "Business intelligence" platform

In order to improve communication with customers, the National Bank of Georgia has introduced a platform called "Business intelligence".

Business Intelligence is a technology-driven process for analysing data and presenting actionable information to help executives, managers and other corporate end-users make informed business decisions (*Agenda.ge, December 19, 2018*).

30. Central Bank purchases USD 15 million

The National Bank of Georgia purchased USD 15 000 000 on its Foreign Exchange Auction on December 19, 2018. As the National Bank informs, the weighted average exchange rate was 2.6648 (*Ipn.ge, December 19, 2018*).

❖ Culture, Science and Sports

31. Georgian scientific ship to conduct acoustic research on Black Sea coastal

For the first time in the history of Georgia a scientific research ship will launch an acoustic investigation into fish resources on Georgia's Black Sea coast.

The ship is staffed by both foreign scientists and specialists from the National Environment Agency of Georgia.

The purpose of the scientific study is to look into the potential of the Black Sea coastal resources, which will help further develop fisheries in Georgia. In 1995-2001 acoustic research in Georgia was implemented with a Ukrainian scientific ship (*Agenda.ge, December 19, 2018*).

Additional Information

September 18, 2018
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.6647 GEL	1 GBP - 3.3695 GEL	100 RUB - 3.9642 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0380 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4983 GEL	100 JPY - 2.3718 GEL

Thursday 20 December	Friday 21 December	Saturday 22 December	Sunday 23 December	Monday 24 December
				
1° 6°	3° 10°	2° 7°	2° 9°	1° 9°

- [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](#)