

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

December 3-10

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Tskhinvali Region

1. Occupants arrest one man near Khurvaleti village

Russian occupants have arrested Otar Samniashvili near Khurvaleti village for ‘illegally crossing the border’. The State Security Service is investigating the case.

The EU Monitoring mission has been informed and the hot line enacted to gather information about the location of the illegally detained individual.

Kidnapping is a common crime in the Russian occupied region of Tskhinvali (South Ossetia).

De-facto Tskhinvali calls the occupation line between the region and the rest of Georgia "the state border" and treats any cases of line crossing by locals as cases of "illegal border crossings", even though the line is not well demarcated in some areas (*Agenda.ge, December 23, 2018*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

2. Council of Europe anti-corruption body: Georgia achieved “limited results” in implementing recommendations on transparency of party funding

In the previous report published in February 2016, GRECO concluded that no tangible progress had been achieved by Georgia in the implementation of the recommendations on political party funding, and the pending seven recommendations remained only partly implemented.

Recommendations on revising the existing legislation in the area of political finance, establishing a standardised format for the annual financial declarations to be submitted by political parties, taking further measures to prevent the misuse of all types of administrative resources in election campaigns and increasing the limitation period for administrative violations of party and campaign funding regulations remain partly implemented (*Agenda.ge, December 20, 2018*).

3. European Commission report: Georgia fulfills its visa-free obligations, asylum seekers remain a problem

The European Commission has released its report on the fulfilment of visa-free obligations by Georgia, other Eastern Partnership countries and the Balkan states.

The report reads that Georgia is fulfilling its obligations taken on with the EU: however, it also says that irregular migration still remains an issue of concern.

“Irregular migration from Ukraine, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to the EU remains high, while the increasing number of unfounded asylum applications in the EU from Moldovan and Georgian citizens is a source of concern,” the statement reads.

The EU Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris Avramopoulos said that visa-free travel with the Western Balkan and Eastern European partners is a great achievement which brings benefits for both sides (*Agenda.ge, December 20, 2018*).

4. International Court of Arbitration to resolve commercial disputes in Georgia

Georgia's capital of Tbilisi will be the second city in Europe after Paris where the International Court of Arbitration will resolve commercial disputes.

A memorandum establishing the International Court of Arbitration in Georgia was signed today in Paris, France, obliging Georgia to adapt its legislation to international arbitration (*Agenda.ge, December 21, 2018*).

5. EU launches new, large-scale project to support Georgian Interior Ministry

The European Union will launch a project that will help the Interior Ministry upgrade its capabilities against organised crime, develop its analytical capabilities, refine legislation and community-oriented policing and enhance international contacts.

A European Union representative stated today that it will be a "large-scale project" covering 2,5 years and eight priority directions.

Mezvrishvili said that in 2018:

- Four criminal bosses and 52 members of criminal groups were detained, which is 47 per cent more compared to 2017.
- 42 individuals were detained for trafficking in 2018, which is 66 per cent more compared to 2017.
- This year 40 individuals have been detained for cybercrimes.
- 117 individuals have been detained for drug trafficking. The figure is two times more compared to 2017.
- Georgia has conducted 19 raids with French, Greece, Spanish and Polish law enforcers in the EU member states, resulting in the detention of 137 Georgian citizens, 13 were criminal bosses (*Agenda.ge, December 21, 2018*).

6. Ministers of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova charged with territorial issues visit occupation line in Georgia

The State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia Ketevan Tsikhelashvili, Minister of Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons of Ukraine Vadym Chernysh and Deputy Prime – Minister of Moldova for Reintegration Christina Lesnik have visited the Georgian village of Odzisi in eastern Georgia, where they protested the Russian occupation in Georgia by standing in front of the barbed-wire fences.

Tsikhelashvili said that Russia-controlled so-called border guards illegally detain more people who are trying to cross the artificial boundaries to the rest of Georgia, than the reverse.

"This means that the people living in the occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region vitally need contact with the rest of Georgia," Tsikhaleshvili said (*Agenda.ge, December 21, 2018*).

7. Denmark says number of Georgian asylum seekers decreased in the country

The Danish Ministry for Immigration, Integration and Housing says that the number of Georgian asylum seekers has decreased in the country due to the efforts of the Georgian Dream government.

The Georgian Foreign Ministry says that they have received a letter from Danish Minister for Immigration, Integration and Housing Inger Stojberg, which reads that the Georgian government has

taken active steps to meet the challenges created after the signing of the EU-Georgia visa free deal in 2017 (*Agenda.ge, December 21, 2018*).

8. Georgian captain awarded Portuguese state medal for EU mission

A Georgian captain has been recognised for his contributions to an European Union peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic with a state award from Portugal, marking his successful work alongside fellow service members from European countries.

Captain Asatiani of the National Guard of Georgia received the St George's Cross from Admiral António Silva Ribeiro, Chief of General Staff of the Portuguese Armed Forces.

The platoon commander was distinguished for “high competence and unique skills” in Bangui, capital of the African state, earlier this month (*Agenda.ge, December 21, 2018*).

9. Germany approves continued funding for Substantial NATO-Georgia Package

Germany will continue to support the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package, designed to develop Georgia’s defence capability and interoperability with the Alliance, into 2019, the country’s representation at the international organisation announced on Friday.

The SNGP initiative, initiated at the 2014 Wales Summit of the Alliance, will receive a funding of 500,000 EUR (about 570,500 USD) from the German state for next year, the German delegation to NATO revealed.

A tweet from the delegation said the funding would support the Package it referred to as a “key instrument to help Georgia develop closer security cooperation” with North Atlantic organisation (*Agenda.ge, December 21, 2018*).

❖ Internal Affairs

10. Georgian PM hails 2018 achievements, vows for an even better year in 2019

The PM also spoke about the government’s future intentions in these directions.

Bakhtadze stated that:

- Georgia has adopted a new constitution which has made the country a fully parliamentary republic, which is the “best model” for Georgia to achieve its Euro-Atlantic goals and return to its European family.
- Georgia has elected its first female president, who will hard in the direction of the country’s European goal.
- Georgia has initiated projects which aim to settle conflicts peacefully and help the Georgian people living in and near the occupied regions.

Further details of the report of the PM are provided in the following [article](#) (*Agenda.ge, December 20, 2018*).

11. Policewomen cordon during trial of opposition member stirs discussions on gender

A cordon made by policewomen during a noisy trial of opposition member David Kirkitadze in the Gurjaani court in eastern Georgia has stirred more controversies than the trial itself.

Leaders of several NGOs protecting women’s rights stated that the cordon was deliberately made by female law enforcers to avoid tension and that the step was “sexist” on the part of the Interior Ministry.

Feminist activists Ana Kamladze and Baia Patariaia have also criticised opposition leader Zaal Udumashvili who called upon the police to “dress children in police uniforms” during the trial (*Agenda.ge, December 20, 2018*).

12. Current head of Central Election Commission may be re-elected to the post

Current Head of the Central Election Commission of Georgia (CEC) Tamar Zhvania may be re-elected to the position, as she was among the four candidates proposed to the Georgian President by NGOs.

One of the four nominees has refused to participate in the race.

The four candidates nominated by the NGOs were:

- Tamar Zhvania - current chairperson of the CEC.
- Lado Bozhadze - head of the Civil Society and Democratic Development Centre.
- Giorgi Javakhishvili - secretary of the CEC.
- Mariam Shelegia - an employee of the Administration of the Government of Georgia (*Agenda.ge, December 21, 2018*).

13. ‘I came to answer to your pressing questions’ – Interior Minister addresses opposition in parliament

Georgian Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia appeared in parliament today to answer the “pressing questions” of the opposition.

Most of the questions asked during the session concerned the high-profile murder case of two teenage boys last year, election-related incidents, crime statistics, the detention of Ukrainian citizens and juvenile convicts.

Speaking about the murder case of teenagers in a school brawl in December of 2017, Gakharia stated that the investigation is in progress and that the parliamentary investigative commission chaired by the opposition has failed to fulfill its major role in this regard.

The commission failed to answer the main question: whether the absence of necessary investigative procedures after the crime was deliberate or not. The commission failed to say whether certain public servants committed a crime or not and opposition members used the tragedy for political speculation,” Gakharia said (*Agenda.ge, December 21, 2018*).

14. Georgian ex-President Saakashvili admits his supporters ran pages spreading fake news against President Zurabishvili and ruling party

Georgian Former President Mikheil Saakashvili stated in a live video that his supporters, former head of the Interior Ministry press office Guram Donadze and the United National Movement-affiliated Free Zone organisation activist Parnaoz Chkadua, ran Facebook pages which released fake news about the ruling party endorsed presidential candidate Salome Zurabishvili and the ruling party founder Bidzina Ivanishvili during the pre-election period, Netgazeti reports.

Saakashvili was speaking about Donadze, who has been sent to prison for the high-profile murder case of Buta Robakidze, when he said that the real reason for Donadze’s arrest was the page “Resident Salome” and not his role in the murder case.

He also said that Chkadua has been charged with abusing police and hooliganism supposedly committed in 2014 (*Agenda.ge, December 21, 2018*).

15. MIA burns more than one tonne of drugs seized during investigations

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has burn more than one tonne of drugs seized as part of investigation process.

The narcotic substances which have been seized during 750 cases as evidence included more than two kilograms of heroin, 60 kilograms of amphetamine, 2061 pills of subutex, 816 pills of MDMA and 189 pills of methadone (*Agenda.ge, December 21, 2018*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

16. 1 tax document instead of 5: New tax initiative to reduce bureaucracy in Georgia

From January 1, 2019 Georgia will be the first country in which entrepreneurs will be required to present only one tax document, instead of five tax documents, Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze announced today while delivering the annual government report. Bakhtadze said that this is an “innovative reform” and it will help to reduce bureaucracy.

Bakhtadze also announced the new tax code that will come into force in Georgia in January 2020. He said that foreign as well as Georgian experts are currently working on the document.

“So we have initiated the implementation of the VAT Return reform in 2018, we could make the impossible possible. One year ago no one could imagine that we would be able to return over half a billion GEL to our entrepreneurs. This year, by December 31, our entrepreneurs will be returned over half a billion GEL from our budget. In 2018-2020 we plan to return 1.5 billion GEL to our entrepreneurs”, said Bakhtadze.

Bakhtadze highlighted the government’s efforts to make Georgia a regional financial centre and named the new initiative of introducing the electronic residency as an example. This initiative allows citizens of 34 countries to electronically register their companies and open bank accounts in Georgia without visiting the country (*Agenda.ge, December 20, 2018*).

17. IMF review: ‘Georgia’s economic performance remains strong’

“Georgia’s economic performance remains strong, but downside risks to the outlook have increased. Inflation has stayed below the 3% inflation target in 2018, and the external position has strengthened. Higher revenues and lower investment resulted in a fiscal surplus through September 2018. Against the background of high credit growth, the authorities introduced regulations to limit household over-indebtedness.

The banking sector remains well capitalised, liquid, and profitable, but dollarization remains high. Despite the positive outturns, the authorities need to remain vigilant to a deteriorating external outlook and to sustain reform efforts to promote more inclusive growth.

The inflation-targeting framework, combined with the floating exchange rate regime, continues to serve Georgia well. The current monetary policy stance remains appropriate.

Efforts to build international reserves need to be stepped up given heightened external uncertainty and Georgia’s vulnerability to external shocks. Regulations to increase financial resilience are welcome but its impact on credit growth needs to be closely monitored”, read the review (*Agenda.ge, December 20, 2018*).

18. Forbes: Georgia moves up 8 positions in Best Countries for Business rating

Georgia has improved its rating in Forbes magazine’s ‘Best Countries for Business 2019’ ranking, where Georgia ranks 44th among 161 countries.

Georgia improved its rating by eight positions and is ahead of countries such as Qatar, Thailand, China, Croatia, Bulgaria, Mexico, Turkey, Uruguay, South Africa, Brazil and India.

In the ranking, Russia (55th place), Turkey (57th place), Kazakhstan (65th place), Azerbaijan (70th place), Ukraine (77th place) and Armenia (81st place) lag far behind Georgia.

Georgia's ranking is as following:

- Trade freedom – 4th in the world's 161 countries
- Monetary freedom – 70th place
- Innovation – 83rd place
- Technology – 45th place
- Investor protection – 2nd place
- Corruption – 43rd place
- Personal freedom – 66th place
- Tax burden – 16th place (*Agenda.ge, December 21, 2018*).

19. EU rejects 7 shipments of Georgian hazelnuts for alleged toxins

The European Union (EU) has refused to import seven shipments of Georgian hazelnuts in 2018 due to the discovery of large amounts of the toxin aflatoxin..

Head of the Food Safety Department of the Georgian National Food Agency Giorgi Mikadze explained that hazelnuts are inspected before exporting but during the transportation process they become contaminated and accordingly cannot enter the EU market.

We have strong control mechanisms. If the hazelnuts are inspected and contaminants are revealed, of course, they will not be exported”, said Mikadze.

He said that in previous years there were other incidents in which Georgian hazelnut shipments were rejected – nine in 2016 and nine in 2017 (*Agenda.ge, December 21, 2018*).

❖ Sports and Culture

20. Georgian weightlifter Lasha Talakhadze named best athlete of 2018

The National Olympic committee of Georgia has summarised the year of 2018 activities and announced the best athletes of the year.

Lasha Talakhadze, Georgian weightlifter who won the Europe and world championship, has been named the best athlete of the year.

“This has been an exceptional year for sport, one of the most successful and fruitful in Georgia's history. However, we can achieve even more and sport will be among the government's top priorities next year as well,” Minister of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport Mikheil Batiashvili said while congratulating athletes on their awards (*Agenda.ge, December 22, 2018*).

Additional Information

December 24, 2018
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.6627 GEL	1 GBP - 3.3720 GEL	100 RUB - 3.8939 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0405 GEL	1 TRY - 0.5023 GEL	100 JPY - 2.3943 GEL

Monday 24 December	Tuesday 25 December	Wednesday 26 December	Thursday 27 December	Friday 28 December
				
-1° 9°	2° 8°	2° 8°	1° 4°	-2° 4°

- **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](#)**