

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

January 21-23

Compiled by: *Aleksandre Davitashvili*

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❖ Occupied Regions

1. So-called borders closed for 12 days, Reconciliation Minister urges reopening to avoid humanitarian crisis

Twelve days have passed since the closure of so-called borders by the de facto authorities of two occupied regions of Georgia Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) to avoid the “spread of flu.” Georgian Reconciliation Minister says that the situation may lead to the humanitarian crisis.

Tsikhelashvili states that the closure of so-called borders is not only an illegal, but also an inhuman act as locals have no access to food and items they vitally need on a daily basis.

“We call upon everyone once again to reopen the so-called borders. Especially in the Tskhinvali region, locals are in complete isolation.” – said Tsikhelashvili (*Agenda.ge, January 22, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

2. US military vessel Donald Cook docks in Georgian city of Batumi for joint drills

US military vessel Donald Cook has docked in the Georgian coastal city of Batumi in western Georgia today to participate in joint drills with the staff of the Georgian Coastal Guard Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, commissioned in 1998 and "homeported" in Rota, Spain, entered the Black Sea coastal city port as a show of support for regional security and stability, Government of Georgia's Adjara Autonomous Republic said (*Agenda.ge, January 21, 2019*).

3. Georgian PM: ‘one may say without exaggeration that Lithuania is one of Georgia’s closest friends’

During his trip Bakhtadze laid a wreath at the Memorial of Heroes Fallen for the Independence and Freedom of the Republic of Lithuania and also honored the memory of the Georgian Captain Davit (Datiko) Machavariani, a fighter for Georgia's independence, who is buried in Lithuania.

“Our special relations are proved by the milestones celebrated last year - the 100th anniversary from the establishment of the First Democratic Republic of Georgia and the 100th Anniversary of Regained Statehood of Lietuva. Besides, our nations are now referred to by their authentic names - Sakartvelo and Lietuva,” Bakhtadze said, during a press conference with his Lithuanian counterpart Saulius Skvernelis (*Agenda.ge, January 21, 2019*).

4. PACE hosts debates on Georgian presidential elections

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has hosted debates regarding the Georgian presidential elections yesterday.

Georgian Vice Parliament Speaker Tamar Chugoshvili cited PACE observers saying that the “first round of the presidential election was competitive and professionally administered, candidates were able to campaign freely and voters made their choice without restrictions.”

However, Chugoshvili also touched upon issues of concern such as the use of hate speech, the polarisation of public opinion and other issues, and stated that the country is ready to take all the recommendations of PACE regarding the elections into account (*Agenda.ge, January 22, 2019*).

5. Georgian President meets with EU Commissioner Hahn in Brussels to discuss Georgia’s European goals

Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili has met with the EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn in Brussels today, during her first official trip abroad to speak about Georgia’s European intentions and goals.

“Zurbashvili and Hahn stated that 2019 is an important year in Georgia-EU relations,” Zurbashvili’s press office has reported. The president spoke about the current situation in the two Georgian occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) and the severe humanitarian situation there,” the press office said (*Agenda.ge, January 22, 2019*).

6. Foreign ambassadors to meet with Georgian Interior Minister to discuss ways of ending illegal migration

French, German, Swiss and Swedish ambassadors to Georgia have announced plans to meet with Georgian Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia in the coming days to discuss ways of decreasing the number of Georgian asylum seekers in their countries.

“French ambassador Pascal Meunier says that Georgians are asking for political asylum in France, when “actually they have economic motivations.”

Georgia is on the list of safe countries in France, and nobody who applies for political asylum in France will receive [it]”, Meunier said.

Meunier says that the number of Georgian asylum seekers in France has increased after the enactment of the Georgia-EU visa free deal in March 2017 (*Agenda.ge, January 22, 2019*).

7. European Council President Donald Tusk, Georgian President Zurbashvili agree to intensify cooperation

Donald Tusk welcomed President Zurbashvili in Brussels on her first foreign visit as president and congratulated her on her recent election.

“I value your efforts to bridge social and political divisions in your country,” he said, adding that the EU-Georgia partnership is ‘outstanding and far-reaching’.

“In our meeting today, I reconfirmed the EU’s commitment to intensifying our cooperation in the framework of the Association Agreement. The agreement has brought significant benefits to our citizens and has potential to strengthen further Georgia’s social, economic, political and institutional resilience,” Tusk said, welcoming Georgia’s dedication to reform and added that he agreed with President Zurbashvili on the importance of progress in the rule of law and judicial areas.

He has also re-stated the EU’s unwavering support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and to conflict resolution efforts (*Agenda.ge, January 22, 2019*).

8. European Commission head Juncker to Georgian president: your first visit to Brussels reveals will of Georgians

The European Commission head Jean-Claude Juncker told Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili in Brussels yesterday that her first official visit to EU headquarters was “symbolic,” revealing the will of the Georgian people to be with the EU.

“The visit is a gesture which we greatly welcome. We support Georgia’s European intentions, as we see very well that the country is progressing quickly,” Juncker stated.

Juncker noted that in November 2017, he told the Georgian government that they are the only government of a non-EU member state with whom the European Commission has a meeting format (*Agenda.ge, January 23, 2019*).

9. Georgian president meets EU Commissioner Avramopoulos to discuss migration challenges

Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili met with EU Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs Dimitris Avramopoulos yesterday in Brussels to discuss challenges related to Georgian asylum seekers and the issues of labour migration.

“The EU welcomes steps taken by the Georgian government to decrease the number of Georgian asylum seekers abroad [as the increased number may create threats to the Georgia-EU visa free deal],” Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Vakhtang Makharoblishvili stated after the meeting (*Agenda.ge, January 23, 2019*).

10. Georgian occupied territories in focus of meeting between Georgian President and EU’s Mogherini

A current situation in the two occupied regions of Georgia Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) were in focus of a meeting held between Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini in Brussels today.

“Mogherini stated that Georgia remains on the EU agenda and said that she is glad that the Georgian President visited Brussels on her first official trip abroad,” the President’s press office reported (*Agenda.ge, January 23, 2019*).

11. Stoltenberg says that he will visit Georgia, a ‘unique partner of NATO’, in March

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has stated that he will visit Georgia, which is a “unique partner of NATO”, in March 2019, during the NATO-Georgia joint military drills, in which 17 NATO member states will participate.

Stoltenberg made the statement during a joint press conference with Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili in Brussels today.

“My visit aims to further strengthen the NATO-Georgia relations and demonstrate that NATO remains committed to the decision of the Bucharest summit- that Georgia will become a member of the alliance,” Stoltenberg said (*Agenda.ge, January 23, 2019*).

12. Tamar Chugoshvili elected Vice-chair of Socialist Group in PACE

First Deputy-Chairperson of the Georgian Parliament Tamar Chugoshvili has been elected vice chair of the Socialist Group of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for the second time.

The Socialist Group is the second largest in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and consists of more than 180 deputies from different European countries. I often discuss Georgia’s role in EU and Georgia-European relationship. Our delegation does everything to highlight the country’s position and interests during the plenary sessions”, stated Chugoshvili. Chugoshvili was elected as the Vice-Chairperson of the group in January 2017 for the first time (*Agenda.ge, January 22, 2019*).

13. CoE supports Otkhozoria-Tatunashvili list, providing sections for human rights violations in Georgian occupied regions

The list was the part of the resolution on the Magnitsky list which was supported by the Council of Europe.

“After the European Parliament and the United States, the Council of Europe has also made a resolution to support the list,” a leader of the European Georgia opposition party David Bakradze stated today [the party initiated the creation of the Otkhozoria-Tatunashvili list last year].

Supporting the list automatically prohibits the entry of the 33 individuals who are on the list, on EU territory and allows for the freezing of their assets (*Agenda.ge, January 23, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

14. Georgian Environmental Agency releases report on air pollution in cities

Tests conducted by the National Environmental Agency (NEA) on 21 January show the concentration of four pollutants in the atmosphere in Tbilisi, Batumi, and Kutaisi to be within normal levels, except for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and solid particle (PM₁₀) concentrations.

“The concentration of nitrogen dioxide observed on Tsereteli Avenue in Tbilisi was found to be 1.4 times higher than the annual average. On Abuseridze Street in Batumi, the NO₂ concentration was 1.6 times higher than the annual average”, NEA reports.

Air quality is a continual subject of concern for the residents of Georgia, especially in cities.

“The solid particle (PM₁₀) concentration was observed to be 1.3 times higher than the annual average on Tsereteli Avenue, Tbilisi, 1.1 times the annual average on Kazbegi Avenue, Tbilisi, and 1.1 times the annual average in Batumi”, reports show.

Group of volunteers measured the volume of lead particles in the air in four locations of Tbilisi last week. The samples were sent to the laboratory. The results showed that the concentration of lead in Tbilisi is less than maximum allowable level and is not hazardous to human health (*Agenda.ge, January 21, 2019*).

15. MIA reports intense cooperation with UK law enforcers to identify British convict in Georgia

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia reports it has been involved in intense cooperation with British law enforcers in order to identify an individual named Jack Shepherd in Georgia who faces trial for murdering a woman in the United Kingdom.

“Georgian and English law enforcers have engaged in intense cooperation to identify the aforementioned person in Georgia and conduct relevant legal measures afterwards”, the MIA said in its statement.

The BBC writes that Jack Shepherd, who killed a woman named Charlotte Brown in a speedboat crash on the River Thames in London, has been in Georgia since March.

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

16. Massive school building project begins across Georgia

The Georgian government will spend 68 million GEL to build 27 schools in 22 regions.

The funds will be allocated to and administered by the Municipal Development Fund which supports strengthening the institutional and financial capacity of local government in Georgia

This is just a small part of the infrastructural projects which we have to implement in the educational field starting this year. This year, education projects have doubled”, Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia Maia Tskitishvili said.

In addition to these 27 schools, the Municipal Development Fund of Georgia plans to renovate 31 schools with the financial support of the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) and Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) in 2019-2020 (*Agenda.ge, January 21, 2019*).

17. Davos 2019: Chinese investment group considers investing in Georgia

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has met with the president of the Chinese Minsheng Investment Group Lu Benxian within the World Economic Forum, taking place on 22-25 January in Davos, Switzerland.

Bakhtadze and Benxian talked about Georgia’s preferential investment environment, government plans and the growing relations between the two countries.

The officials praised the positive dynamics of development of Georgia-China relations and Georgia’s participation at the China International Import Expo. More than 53 Georgian companies were showcased at the expo last year (*Agenda.ge, January 22, 2019*).

18. Georgian PM, Azerbaijani president discuss joint strategic projects at Davos

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has met with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on the sidelines of the Davos World Economic Forum to discuss joint strategic projects which carry regional and international importance.

“Georgia and Azerbaijan have a common vision concerning strategic issues. We are involved in joint transport and infrastructural projects which carry geopolitical importance taking the current situation on the world into account,” Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani stated after the meeting.

He said that the prospects for further encouragement of trade-economic ties between the two countries have also been discussed (*Agenda.ge, January 22, 2019*).

19. Davos 2019: Swedish shipping company looks to organise maritime transportation from Georgia to Europe, Asia

One of the largest companies in the field of maritime transportation Stena Rederi is interested in organising maritime transportation from Georgia to Europe and Asia.

The notion was raised at a meeting between Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze and the chief executive director of Stena Rederi, Carl Hagman.

At the meeting, which was held on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum taking place on 22-25 January in Davos, Switzerland, Bakhtadze and Hagman talked about Georgia’s marine potential (*Agenda.ge, January 22, 2019*).

20. PM Bakhtadze, Swiss Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis discuss bilateral relations

Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze and member of the Federal Council of Switzerland, Ignazio Cassis have discussed bilateral relations between the two countries today at Davos.

The parties have emphasised the importance of human capital development which is the major goal of the education reforms planned by the Georgian government (*Agenda.ge, January 22, 2019*).

21. Georgian PM, COSCO Shipping Chairman discuss investment opportunities in Georgia

Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze and the chairman of the board of the COSCO Shipping, Xu Lirong have discussed the partnership and investment opportunities at the meeting in Davos.

China Ocean Shipping Company, known as COSCO or COSCO Group, is a Chinese state-owned shipping and logistics services supplier headquartered in Beijing.

Xu Lirong has expressed readiness for further cooperation with Georgia emphasising the country's significant role in the trade between Europe and Asia, as well as priced Georgian government's efforts to increase the country's transit potential (*Agenda.ge, January 22, 2019*).

22. Davos 2019: Canadian trade minister invites Georgia to international fair in Canada

The Minister of International Trade Diversification of Canada Jim Carr has invited Georgia to an international fair in Canada which will bring together companies in the industry of natural resource exploitation.

The invitation came at a meeting with Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze which was held at the World Economic Forum taking place on 22-25 January in Davos, Switzerland.

Key topics of discussion were the recent success stories of Georgia, including Free Trade Agreements (FTA) and rich hydro resources of the country.

The focus was on trends in international trade, along with the diversification of Canadian trade policy. Bakhtadze noted that the effective integration of Georgia in the global economy is the main goal of the government (*Agenda.ge, January 22, 2019*).

23. Georgian PM to German Deutsche Welle: "We are making Georgia into a regional economic hub"

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze spoke to leading German media outlet 'Deutsche Welle' on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where he talked about the process of turning Georgia into a regional economic hub.

"If you look at a map, Georgia is the natural candidate to become the regional hub. The strategy of my government is to make Georgia a regional hub for business, trade, finance, logistics, tourism and education", said Bakhtadze.

He said that the government is trying to implement 'very creative' reforms to attract more investments in Georgia.

"We consider ourselves a bridge from Asia to Europe as we are the shortest link. We would like to facilitate the growing volume of trade between Asia and Europe. This is the reason why we are investing so much in our infrastructure and I am very happy in Davos that we see there are more and more companies willing to invest in Georgia and participate in these very important programmes and projects", Bakhtadze said (*Agenda.ge, January 23, 2019*).

24. Davos 2019: Georgian PM, PwC Executive Director discuss development of artificial intelligence in Georgia

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze and PwC Executive Director Anand Rao have discussed the prospects of developing artificial intelligence in Georgia.

The meeting was held at the World Economic Forum, taking place on 22-25 January in Davos, Switzerland.

Bakhtadze and Rao talked about the importance of artificial intelligence development in the world and the importance of introducing the innovations. Also, they discussed what would be Georgia's role in this sphere (*Agenda.ge, January 23, 2019*).

25. Davos 2019: leading Chinese carmaker to open office in Georgia this year

Leading Chinese carmaker Guangzhou Automobile Group will open a representative office in Georgia before the end of 2019, announces the Government of Georgia.

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze met with the chairman of Chinese company Zeng Qinghong today at the World Economic Forum, taking place from 22-25 January in Davos, Switzerland.

After opening an office, the company will further study Georgia's environment to make decisions on investing and building sites in the country.

At the meeting Bakhtadze described Georgia's favourable investment environment and the government's initiative to offer considerable tax cuts to companies with regional offices in Georgia (*Agenda.ge, January 23, 2019*).

26. Davos 2019: Georgian PM in 'Strategic Outlook - Eurasia' discussion

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has participated in a discussion held at the 49th World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

During the World Economic Forum, Georgian PM together with the vice-chairman of SUN Group, dean and professor at School of International Relations, Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Integration and president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), participated in the 'Eurasia in a New Global Context' discussion (*Agenda.ge, January 23, 2019*).

27. International Fund for Agricultural Development to send delegation to Georgia

The Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) will send a delegation to Georgia aiming to elaborate special initiatives for the country.

President of the IFAD Gilbert F. Hounbo and the Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze agreed on future plans today at the Davos meeting. The parties have emphasised the importance of the agriculture in terms of inclusive growth (*Agenda.ge, January 23, 2019*).

28. PM Bakhtadze, Turkish Koç Holding CEO discuss potential investment projects

Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze and the CEO of the Turkish industrial group Koç Holding Levent Cakiroglu have met today at Davos to discuss potential investment projects in Georgia.

PM Bakhtadze has presented the initiatives of the Georgian government's business friendly initiatives to the CEO of the Turkish industrial group as well as provided information about the country's leading positions in the global ratings (*Agenda.ge, January 23, 2019*).

❖ Sports and Culture

29. Georgian-language section opens in NYC library

A Georgian-language section opened in Queens Library of New York City on 22 January. Hundreds of Georgian publications, films and audio records are already ready for borrowing in the library (*Agenda.ge, January 22, 2019*).

30. Georgian Wrestling Federation President detained

Police have detained Gega Gegeshidze, President of the Georgian Wrestling Federation. As the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia told InterPressNews Gegeshidze was detained on violence charges.

“An investigation has established that Tamaz Gegeshidze physically assaulted sportsman Zurab Datunashvili during a confrontation in the Sports Palace on January 11,” the MIA said.

The Ministry said an investigation is in progress under Article 126 and Article 239 of the Criminal Code of Georgia.

The incident took place during the national championship of Georgia in wrestling. During the final match Datunashvili was leading according to the decisions of two referees, while main referee addressed them to change the decision in favour of the opponent of Datunashvili. This caused tensions between Datunashvili and referees. Gegeshidze had been involved in this tensions and he had assaulted the wrestler. Datunashvili’s personal coach (who is his brother as well) had been assaulted during the incident.






Part of the wrestlers opposes the decision of the prosecutor’s office. Olympic Champion, Khinchegashvili had supported the president of the federation.

According to the rumors, former minister of Internal Affairs, Lexo Tchikaidze will replace Gegeshidze (*Ipn.ge, Rezonansi, January 23, 2019*).

Additional Information

January 24, 2019
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.6599 GEL	1 GBP - 3.4533 GEL	100 RUB - 4.0200 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0211 GEL	1 TRY - 0.5003 GEL	100 JPY - 2.4254 GEL

Thursday 24 January	Friday 25 January	Saturday 26 January	Sunday 27 January	Monday 28 January
				
-1° 8°	0° 12°	1° 11°	2° 12°	3° 13°

- **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](#)**