

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

January 28-31

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❖ Occupied Regions

1. Venezuela likely to revoke recognition of Georgian occupied regions if interim gov't preserves power

Reliable sources say that the interim government of Venezuela under leader Juan Guaido will revoke Venezuela's recognition of the two occupied regions of Georgia Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) if they manage to stay in power.

Venezuela, which recognised the Georgian occupied regions as independent states under Hugo Chavez in 2009, is one of only five to do so since the Russia-Georgia 2008 war.

Georgia has stood with the United States to recognise the interim government of Venezuela and its opposition leader Juan Guaido from the Popular Will party, opposing the policy and re-election of Nicolas Maduro (*Agenda.ge, January 31, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

2. Georgian defence forces to lead NATO-Georgia joint exercise planning and execution process for the first time

For the first time Georgia will take full responsibility for the planning and the execution of the NATO-Georgia joint military exercise which will be held in March near Tbilisi with the participation of 22 NATO member states and allies, Georgian Defence Minister Levan Izoria told journalists today. "Georgia-NATO relations are upgrading to a new level this year and we will see more NATO in Georgia. For the first time this year Georgia will take full responsibility for the planning and the execution of the drills," Izoria said. In previous years the responsibility was shared with NATO (*Agenda.ge, January 28, 2019*).

3. Georgian FM thanks Spanish legislators for their support in international formats

Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani has held meetings in the Spanish parliament today and thanked the country's lawmakers for their support in international parliamentary formats.

Meetings were held with Maria Soraya Rodriguez Ramos, a chair of the Joint Commission for the European Union of Congress of Deputies of Spain and MPs from the foreign affairs and defence committees.

"The Spanish lawmakers highly praise Georgia's successful steps and reforms for European integration and stated that Georgia is a distinguished country in the region in this regard," the Georgian Foreign Ministry says (*Agenda.ge, January 28, 2019*).

4. Spanish FM says Georgia is an attractive county for Spanish companies

Spanish Foreign Minister Josep Borrell Fontelles has told his Georgian counterpart David Zalkaliani in Madrid today that the interest of Spanish companies in Georgia is increasing. He says that Georgia is particularly attractive because of its geopolitical location and transit capacity.

We have excellent relations with Georgia. May be there are minor problems regarding the visa policy, but in terms of economic cooperation, situation is really promising. Georgia is an interesting country for our companies,” Fontelles said (*Agenda.ge, January 29, 2019*).

5. Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Avoid visiting Libya

Taking into account the current situation in Libya, the ministry recommends to avoid air, sea or land transportation to the territory of Libya, where a civil war is currently being waged for control of the country and its resources. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia does not have the ability to help Georgian citizens in Libya.

The conflict began in 2014 among two rival blocs – the country’s House of Representatives and the General National Congress.

As a result of ongoing civil war, more than 25,000 people have been displaced and at least 100 people killed. On 16-17 January, 10 people were killed and 41 wounded as a result of clashes in Tripoli, the capital of Libya. Women and children are among the victims, Libya’s health ministry has reported (*Agenda.ge, January 28, 2019*).

6. Georgian president asks for meeting with Trump before he meets with Putin

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili has told journalists that her administration has already sent a note to Washington requesting a meeting with US President Donald Trump ahead of his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin allegedly due in spring. The exact date of a Trump-Putin meeting remains unknown.

“Trump and Putin may meet. We do not know anything about the agenda of the meeting. It is most important for me to meet with the US president before he meets with Putin. The meeting will give me the possibility to share our views with Trump about the most painful issues for [our] country,” Zurbishvili said, adding she does not know whether Trump will have the time for such a meeting or now (*Agenda.ge, January 29, 2019*).

7. US National Security Adviser Bolton thanks Georgia for recognising Guaido as interim president of Venezuela

“Yesterday I spoke with Prime Minister Bahktadze to express appreciation for Georgia’s recognition of interim President of Venezuela Juan Guaido. We discussed other important bilateral issues, including pushing forward to enhance our security cooperation.” – wrote Bolton on his official twitter account (*TWITTER, January 29, 2019*).

8. First EU-Georgia High Level Transport Dialogue: EU offers to establish a Road Safety Regional Center in Georgia

The first EU-Georgia High Level Transport Dialogue was held in Georgia's capital of Tbilisi on 29 January in order to further develop and expand the cooperation between the EU and Georgia.

Georgian Economy Minister Giorgi Kobulia stated that dialogue with the EU will assist the government in developing new initiatives, and in 2019 and 2020 “we will see a significant result of logistical and transport systems development”.

The European Union finds Georgia to be one of the key regional partners in terms of road safety. To this end, the EU offered to establish a Road Safety Regional Center in Georgia, which will manage the road safety projects in other countries of the region from Georgia”, Kobulia said.

The European Commission's Mobility and Transport department shared this news via its official Twitter account (*Agenda.ge, January 29, 2019*).

9. Defence Committee of Canadian parliament adopts resolution against Russian aggression in Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova

The Defence Committee of the Canadian Parliament has adopted a resolution in response to Russian aggression against Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in the Black Sea region.

“The resolution reads that Russia’s war in Georgia, as well as its illegal occupation of the two Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) since 2008, its illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, its involvement in the conflict in eastern Ukraine since 2014 and its continued military activities along NATO’s eastern flank “have given rise to concerns about its intentions in Central and Eastern Europe, but also elsewhere around the world.” (*Agenda.ge, January 29, 2019*).

10. Georgian Vice Speaker of the Parliament: US Congress’s support to Georgia is likely to increase

Georgian Vice Speaker of the Parliament says that it is very likely that US support for Georgia will increase in the future.

Chugoshvili made his statement in the wake of the meeting of the Georgian parliamentary delegation with the American congress members in Washington late yesterday (*Agenda.ge, January 30, 2019*).

11. ECHR: Russia must pay Georgia €10,000,000 for arrest, expulsion of Georgians in ‘06-’07

The Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has announced its judgment today in the case of Georgia v. Russia, regarding the arrest, detention and collective expulsion of Georgian nationals from Russia in the autumn of 2006.

“The European Court of Human Rights held by sixteen votes to one that Russia has to pay Georgia 10,000,000 euros for non-pecuniary damage suffered by a group of at least 1,500 Georgian nationals,” the court’s press office says.

The judgement reads Georgian nationals who were the victims of collective expulsion will receive EUR 2,000, and EUR 10,000 to EUR 15,000 will go to the victims of unlawful deprivation of liberty and inhuman and degrading conditions of detention (*Agenda.ge, January 31, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

12. NDI Poll: EU, NATO support at a 5-year high in Georgia

Surveys released today by the US National Democratic Institute (NDI) reads that more Georgians support the country’s membership into NATO and the EU, with NATO at 78%, its highest approval since 2013, and the EU at 83% (*Agenda.ge, January 28, 2019*).

13. NDI poll: majority of Georgians see western-style democracy as the best model for Georgia

The survey released today by the US National Democratic Institute (NDI) branch in Georgia says that 92 percent of Georgians believe that living in a democratic country is important, and that a majority believe a western-style democracy is best for the country. However, the poll reads that only 43% believe Georgia is currently democratic, whereas 46% do not (*Agenda.ge, January 28, 2019*).

14. Georgian national examination system reforms to come into force in 2020

The Ministry of Education and National Assessment and Examination Centre (NAEC) has presented new reforms regarding the Unified National Examinations today.

Exams will be conducted in three compulsory subjects instead of four from 2020. Georgian language and literature and foreign language exams will be mandatory for all entrants.

The third compulsory subject will be determined according to the programmes of higher educational institutions, the ministry reports. Students studying Science will take maths, while humanities students will take history.

Entrants will still be able to choose both technical and humanitarian programmes. Passing the general skills exam will no longer be compulsory. Universities have the right to add a selective examination relevant to the program, including a general skills exam.

Moreover, from 2020 universities have the privilege to determine the minimum passing grades themselves (*Agenda.ge, January 28, 2019*).

15. Two officials sent to pre-trial detention for bribery, related crime

Head of the Tskaltubo City Assembly Grigol Ivaneishvili and Deputy Governor of Tbilisi Vake district Teimuraz Chochua have been sent to pre-trial detention today for taking a large bribe and for assisting in the process of the transfer of the money respectively. Neither of the detainees admit to the crime and say that “the affair will be sorted out”.

The Anti-Corruption Department of the Georgian State Security Service (SSS) detained Ivaneishvili last week.

The agency said that Ivaneishvili took a bribe worth 250,000 GEL (\$93,000) from a foreign businessman who wanted to buy a former building of the Tskaltubo City Assembly and its adjoining plot of land.

The SSS stated later that Chochua served as a middle-man (mediator) between Ivaneishvili and the businessman.

16. Georgia's defence priorities for 2019 unveiled by minister Izoria

Increased salaries and new apartments for service members, improved combat capability and new focus on cybersecurity will be the focus of the Georgian armed forces in 2019 and beyond, the country's Minister of Defence Levan Izoria revealed on Monday.

As part of this year's defence projects and reforms, over 7,500 service members will benefit from a pay increase, the minister told the media in a briefing in Tbilisi.

The change will affect personnel of the Georgia Defence Readiness Programme (GDRP) and those serving in “other units”, the head of the defence institution [noted](#) (*Agenda.ge, January 28, 2019*).

17. Ruling party MP Beselia says she faces 'blackmail' as footage of her personal life goes viral

Georgia Dream ruling party member Eka Beselia, who left the post of the head of the Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee at the end of December, says that she is facing a moral terror as footage of her personal life has gone viral.

She has called upon law enforcement agencies to immediately identify the people who stand behind the “dirty campaign”.

Beselia has connected the leak of the footage, which she says was recorded under the United National Movement leadership, to her critical attitude towards a list of ten judges presented for seats on the Supreme Court of Georgia.

Beselia stated on 26 December that she quit the post in the parliamentary committee as several judges on the list were unacceptable to her because of their past and “biased judiciary,” and added that Parliament Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze had lobbied for the judges, which was strongly dismissed by the latter.

In an open letter published on Facebook late yesterday, Beselia said that a number of individuals linked with United National Movement [former president Mikheil Saakashvili’s party] “criminal activities” had managed to get into the Georgian Dream party and now were trying to land ‘lifetime appointments to the judiciary’ (*Agenda.ge, January 28, 2019*).

18. Seven die as a result of carbon monoxide leak in Tbilisi

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze arrived at the incident scene shortly ago. He offered his condolences to the families of the dead adding that sometimes incidents occur due to the carelessness of companies but that civilians must also be careful.

Kaladze also said that regulations must be made stricter when it comes to gas and electricity infrastructure in buildings.

“It is hard to me to say who is responsible. It is obvious we have problems in this respect,” he has declared, adding it is strictly prohibited to instal outdoor burning heaters in closed areas (*Agenda.ge, January 31, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

19. Corruption Perceptions Index 2018: Georgia is best among East European, Central Asian countries

Global anti-corruption organisation, Transparency International (TI) has today released its annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) and Georgia has cemented itself as among the best of Eastern European and Central Asian countries. This year Georgia ranked 41th out of 168 foreign nations.

The report studied different countries’ perceived corruption levels in the public sector. Georgia gained an overall score of 58 out of 100.

In the ranking, 100 points indicate the lowest level of perceived corruption while 0 – its highest level. Georgia’s score has improved by two points compared with the last year’s edition of the CPI.

However a two-point change is considered statistically insignificant. Notably, Georgia does not appear on the list of the countries whose CPI score has changed significantly (either for better or for worse) since 2012.

TI’s methodology in the CPI report noted an increase or decrease of more than four points indicated a “significant change” in a country’s corruption level (*Agenda.ge, January 29, 2019*).

20. Russia, Ukraine, Armenia – top importers of Georgian tangerines

Georgia has exported 29,723 tonnes of tangerines as of 29 January 2019, announces the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture.

The export of tangerines grew by 29.36% compared to the 2017-2018 season.

Georgian tangerines were mainly exported to:

- Russia - 19,836 tonnes
- Ukraine – 6,424 tonnes
- Armenia - 2,767 tonnes

- Uzbekistan – 261 tonnes
- Kazakhstan – 138 tonnes
- Belarus - 120 tonnes
- Kyrgyzstan – 60 tonnes
- Latvia – 40 tonnes

The price of tangerines varies from 0.40 GEL to 0.70 GEL (*Agenda.ge, January 29, 2019*).

21. Georgian villages decide: Locals to choose how to spend the budget

A government programme aimed at supporting rural development across Georgia has resumed after a two-year pause.

By 1 March, the rural communities of 3,700 villages all over the country will decide with the government what projects are most important for their particular area.

“We see a very important platform being created. Direct communication will take place between the central and local governments and the local population,” Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure Maia Tskitishvili says.

The meetings with the local and government authorities and discussions have been held already in 800 villages. Some communities have decided to spend money on:

- Repairing drinking water infrastructure
- Irrigation and drainage systems
- Coastal work
- Road and bridge renovation
- Street lighting
- Sporting grounds
- Cultural facilities

The support programme includes financing for small infrastructural projects of approximately 5,000 – 10,000 GEL value. In total it will entail 20,000,000 GEL (about \$7.52/€6.59 million) in total across the country allocated by the government (*Agenda.ge, January 29, 2019*).

22. Georgian company becomes official supplier of H&M

Made in Georgia” will be printed on labels on the inside of the clothing of Swedish fashion retailer H&M.

Georgian company MGMtex, which was created by Georgian-Romanian investment and which opened clothing manufacturing enterprise in Georgia’s western city of Kutaisi last year, has become the official supplier of H&M.

The enterprise was opened with the support of the state agency ‘Produce in Georgia’. State support allowed the company to purchase the sewing machines, the latest in that line of technology.

Enterprise Georgia announced that MGMtex had successfully passed the technical and social audit of H&M. This means that H&M stores in Europe will sell clothing with labels that read “Made in Georgia” (*Agenda.ge, January 30, 2019*).

23. New data: Georgia among top 30 wine exporting countries in 2017

Georgia takes the 19th place among the world’s top 30 wine exporting countries in 2017, says the American Association of Wine Economists (AAWE), an educational organisation dedicated to encouraging economic research and analyses and exchanging ideas in wine economics (*Agenda.ge, January 30, 2019*).

24. Georgia's central bank: refinancing rate drops 25 basis points to 6.75%

NBG explains that changes to the monetary policy rate rely on the current and expected developments in the economy and financial markets. While formulating the monetary policy the MPC takes into account the projected inflation rate.

“If projected inflation is above the target inflation rate, the NBG will tighten monetary policy by raising the policy rate to combat a future surge in the general price level... when the current forecasts of inflation are below the target, the NBG will pursue an expansionary monetary policy by lowering the refinancing rate”, explained the NBG (*Agenda.ge, January 30, 2019*).

25. Georgian chamber of commerce opens in Guangzhou

A Georgian chamber of commerce has opened in Guangzhou, China as part of the One Belt, One Road initiative of the Chinese President Xi Jinping aiming to enhance regional connectivity.

With the support of the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Trade up to 20 Georgian producers will represent their wine, chacha, canned products, mineral water, honey, olives, lemonade, tea and traditional Georgian delights.

Ambassador of Georgia to the Republic of China Archil Kalandia and local government officials have participated in the opening ceremony of the chamber of commerce (*Agenda.ge, January 30, 2019*).

26. Global Finance: Georgia ranks 49th among world's safest countries

In the newest safety ranking of Global Finance magazine, Georgia takes 49th place among 128 countries with a safety index score of 9.68. With this result Georgia is the safest country in the region.

In 2017, Georgia ranked 57th, scoring 14.41 among 131 countries.

The safety score aggregates indices from three factors: war and peace, personal security and natural disaster risk.

Iceland is the safest country in the ranking. 16 of the top 20 safest countries are located in Europe. Only Qatar, Singapore, New Zealand, and Canada rank in the top 20 without being in Europe (*Agenda.ge, January 31, 2019*).

27. Georgia's economy grows 5.6% in December 2018

Georgia's economy is growing steadily, show the latest data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

The estimated real gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate in December 2018 equaled 5.6% year-on-year (y/y), while the real GDP average growth amounted 4.8% for 2018 y/y.






Last month the estimated real growth, compared to the same period of the previous year, was posted in the following activities:

- Manufacturing
- Construction
- Hotels and restaurants
- Real estate, renting and business activities (*Agenda.ge, January 31, 2019*).

Additional Information

February 1, 2019
OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.6547 GEL	1 GBP - 3.4869 GEL	100 RUB - 4.0666 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0457 GEL	1 TRY - 0.5101 GEL	100 JPY - 2.4440 GEL

Friday 1 February	Saturday 2 February	Sunday 3 February	Monday 4 February	Tuesday 5 February
				
3° 10°	2° 9°	0° 11°	0° 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](#)**