

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

February 4-6

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## ❖ Occupied Regions

### 1. Updated: Georgian cleric detained by occupation forces near Tskhinvali released

Georgian Cleric Father David Durglishvili, detained near the village of Nikozi, next to the occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region by occupying forces yesterday has been released, the State Security Service confirmed.

De-facto Tskhinvali officials handed over the detained cleric to Georgian law enforcers in Ergneti village today.

Occupying forces have detained a cleric, Father David Durglishvili, near the village of Nikozi, next to the occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region of Georgia.

The illegal detention took place yesterday evening, when occupying forces claim the cleric “illegally crossed the [so-called] border”.

Durglishvili was on his own agricultural farm land on territory under the control of the central Georgian government, witnesses say (*Agenda.ge, February 5, 2019*).

### 2. Switzerland Says ‘Conditions for Implementation of Russian-Georgian Customs Agreement in Place’

The Swiss-mediated agreement between Tbilisi and Moscow signed on November 9, 2011, envisages deployment of complex systems for tracking and auditing of “all trade in goods that enters or exits predefined corridors”. Two of these “corridors” run through Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, while the third one is situated alongside the Zemo Larsi-Kazbegi border crossing, on the undisputed section of Georgia-Russia border.

As part of the agreement, Georgia and Russia sealed deals in 2017 and 2018, respectively, with Geneva-based testing and inspection company, SGS to carry out cargo monitoring through the three “trade corridors”.

In its yesterday’s statement, the FDFA also noted that Switzerland “will continue to play an active role in this new phase,” by chairing a Joint Committee supervising the implementation of the agreement. It also informed that the first meeting of the Joint Committee, gathering Georgian, Russian and Swiss representatives, is scheduled in Geneva on February 6 (*Civil.ge, February 6, 2019*).

### 3. Georgian FM dismisses information about opening customs checkpoints on occupied territories

Information about opening customs check points on the territories of two occupied regions of Georgia Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) is false, states Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Davit Zalkaliani.

This is disinformation that is spread by Russian media and is supported by our opponents, opposition parties and former president of Georgia. Such discussion is categorically unacceptable, as it has nothing to do with reality”, said Zalkaliani.

Zalkaliani explained that Georgia and Russia signed the agreement "on the basic principles for a mechanism of customs administration and monitoring of trade in goods" on 9 November 2011 (*Agenda.ge, February 6, 2019*).

#### **4. Occupied Abkhazia reopens so-called border after 26 days, Tskhinvali still closed**

The Georgian occupied region of Abkhazia has re-opened the so-called border with the rest of Georgia yesterday, which was closed on 11 January by the de facto leadership of the region “to avoid the spread of swine flu.”

Erik Hoeg, the European Union Monitoring mission (EUMM) head to Georgia, tweeted the news yesterday.

The occupied Tskhinvali region closed the so-called border on the same day for the same reason; the border remains closed

The central Georgian government has many times condemned the closure, which has created “severe humanitarian problems” for the locals of the regions (*Agenda.ge, February 6, 2019*).

## **❖ Foreign Affairs**

#### **5. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) informs on Black Sea security**

The series of publications includes two policy papers; one on nuclear security in the Black Sea Region and a second on rebuilding collective security. Special attention has been paid to frozen conflicts in the region with an insights paper focused on protracted armed conflicts such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The series also contains six background papers mapping the military developments in each of the Black Sea littoral states (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine). Each of these states have intensified their efforts to build up their military potential after Russia’s takeover of Crimea and the start of the internationalized civil war in eastern Ukraine in 2014 (*SIPRI.ORG, January 14, 2019*).

#### **6. Georgian PM sure democratic forces will win in Venezuela**

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has stated that Georgia firmly supports the interim government of Venezuela under the leadership of Juan Guaido and says that he is sure that the political force will win its fight against Nicolas Maduro.

“We stated even in 2018 that Maduro was not elected lawfully. The issue of Venezuela has become a very popular political topic these days, while Georgia took up a very principal position regarding the issue last year,” Bakhtadze said (*Agenda.ge, February 4, 2019*).

#### **7. Georgian, NATO partner troops training in mountain rescue, navigation**

Georgian service members are training on slopes of winter resort Gudauri along with their counterparts from the South Caucasus and eastern Europe to develop survival and rescue skills in the mountains.

Involving a group of over a dozen troops, the Winter Intermediate Mountain Course is designed to train personnel in overcoming obstacles on snow landscape and skiing in group.

The group is also learning how to search for and rescue people trapped following an avalanche, set up shelters in snow and spend the night in the conditions (*Agenda.ge, February 4, 2019*).

#### **8. Justice Ministry: Georgia achieved all key goals as member of OGP global initiative**

The ministry stated that:

The Georgian reforms for access to public information were named among the seven most successful reforms at the OGP London Summit in 2013.

In 2014 Georgia was elected as a member of the OGP Steering Committee.

Georgia was given the OGP Champions Award for successful cooperation with the civil sector at the Mexico Global Summit in 2015.

The same year Georgia became the first country in Eastern Europe to host the OGP regional conference.

Georgia was elected a co-chair country of OGP in 2016.

In 2017 Georgia took over the chairmanship of OGP from France. This was the first time when Georgia became the chair of the organisation uniting more than 75 foreign states.

In 2018 Georgia hosted the OGP global summit and was highly praised for its “skillful hosting of such an important event.” (*Agenda.ge, February 5, 2019*).

#### **9. Georgian FM meets with US legislators, top officials, says support for Georgia will increase**

Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani has met with US legislators in Washington and Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Aaron Wess Mitchell. It has been stated during the meetings that the US support for Georgia will increase.

US Senators Ron Johnson and James Risch and Congressman Bill Flores have praised Gregorian reforms and stated that the relations between Georgia and the US Congress are at an all-time high (*Agenda.ge, February 6, 2019*).

### **❖ Internal Affairs**

#### **10. New bill to make sexual harassment punishable offence in Georgia**

Ruling Georgian Dream party MPs have drafted a bill which makes sexual harassment a punishable offence.

Using words of a sexual nature, showing of one’s genitals, any type of verbal or non-verbal actions of a sexual nature will be considered sexual harassment.

Creating an abusive or hostile environment at work to force someone into a sexual relationship will also be punishable as sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment will be punished by a 300 GEL (\$112) fine and 500 GEL (\$187) if repeated. The offence will also be punishable with up to one-month community work.

Deliberate sexual harassment of a minor, a pregnant woman or someone in a critical condition or in the presence of a minor will be punished by 500-800 GEL (\$187-\$299), and if repeated by 800-1,000 GEL (\$299-\$374) fine or 10-day imprisonment (*Agenda.ge, February 4, 2019*).

#### **11. Car owners in Georgia will soon have to get mandatory insurance**

Civil liability insurance will become mandatory for owners of registered vehicles in Georgia. In accordance with a new bill, vehicle owners will have to insure their liability for causing harm to life, health and property of other persons while using a vehicle.

The draft law determines the minimum and maximum amount of annual insurance premiums according to the category of vehicles (*Agenda.ge, February 4, 2019*).

### **12. Code on the Rights of the Child drafted for higher protection of Georgian children**

Head of Parliament's Human Rights Committee Sophio Kiladze said that the code ensures the welfare and protection of the children in the country.

"The state will take the responsibility for the welfare and development of a child if a family fails to do so. Working on the code took two years in which the UNICEF head to Georgia, Ghassan Khalil contributed much," Kiladze said (*Agenda.ge, February 4, 2019*).

### **13. 1 Georgian, 4 Ukrainians detained in Tbilisi for possession of arms released on bail**

One Georgian and four Ukrainian citizens who were among seven people detained in Tbilisi on 2 December 2018 for the illegal purchase and possession of weapons and ammunition, were released on bail by a Tbilisi city court yesterday.

The individuals were released on 2,000 GEL bail each. Their trial will take place on 12 March 2019. The case of two other Ukrainian nationals were separated and their trial has been postponed to agree on the conditions of a plea bargain, the court said (*Agenda.ge, February 5, 2019*).

### **14. Ruling party says Georgian court is being deliberately discredited**

The political council of the Georgian Dream ruling party has released a statement in which it says that the Georgian court system is "deliberately discredited" and that the United National Movement opposition party stands behind the "politically motivated" process.

The party says that until 2012, under the leadership of the United National Movement, "it was impossible to find justice" in the country and the court was used by the previous state leadership to threaten people.

The ruling party says that after coming to power, they refused to dismiss judges and instead launched fundamental reforms.

The party says that the "genuine transformation" of the Georgian court system was acknowledged by influential international organisations.

Leading US research organisation Heritage Foundation listed Georgia in 2017 and 2018 among the top 20 European countries in terms of the effectiveness of the court system. Georgia takes the first place among the Eastern European countries in this regard," the party says.

The party states that Georgia was listed among the top 20 European countries for rule of law by the World Justice Project organization (*Agenda.ge, February 5, 2019*).

### **15. Freedom House: Georgia Remains 'Partly Free'**

Georgia still remains among "partly free" countries, according to an [annual report](#) by the U.S.-based rights watchdog Freedom House.

With its score, Georgia ranks 63rd out of 100, which is higher than other "partly free" Eastern Partnership countries, like Ukraine (60), or Moldova (58) or its only "partly free" neighbor, Armenia (51). Georgia's score is on par with Montenegro (65) and a step below from Serbia (67). Georgia's largest neighbors are "not free" – Russia scores 20 out of 100, and Turkey – 31 (*Civil.ge, February 5, 2019*).

### **16. Spring parliamentary session opens for first time in Tbilisi in 6 years**

Parliamentary activities have returned to the historic parliament building in Tbilisi after six years with the spring session opening taking place in the capital today.

The parliament building in Kutaisi, which opened in 2012, will be handed over to the Interior Ministry.

Georgian Parliament Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze said that parliament adopted 705 laws in 2018 and 294 of them were initiated by parliament.

However, today it does not really matter who were the initiators of the bills. The most important thing is that the laws have been developed based on the interests of and for the welfare of our people,” he said.

He stated that according to the new constitution of Georgia, which came into play in December 2018, the parliament’s supervisory power will be significantly increased (*Agenda.ge, February 5, 2019*).

#### **17. New Chair of Legal Affairs Committee Elected**

MP Anri Okhanashvili of the ruling Georgian Dream Democratic Georgia (GDDG) was elected to head the Legal Affairs committee with 98 votes against 4 on February 5.

The ruling party nominated Okhanashvili during the meeting of the parliamentary majority on February 2.

The Legal Committee has been the locus of GDDG internal dispute, since its Chair, MP Eka Beselia, resigned in late December, in protest against Supreme Court nominees. Her First Deputy Vano Zardiashvili also quit his position (*Civil.ge, February 5, 2019*).

#### **18. Criminal Police Chief Promoted to Deputy Interior Minister**

Lieutenant Colonel Vladimer Bortsvadze was appointed as a new Deputy Minister of Interior. Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze already signed the relevant order.

The Ministry told Civil.ge that Lt. Col. Bortsvadze has been appointed to a vacant position, so all other deputies continue to fulfill their duties (*Civil.ge, February 6, 2019*).

## **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

#### **19. Georgian PM on rural support programme: “This is one of my favourite projects”**

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has praised the government’s rural support programme, aimed at supporting rural development across Georgia and said this is “one of his favourite programmes”.

The programme resumed after a two-year pause and by 1 March, the rural communities of 3,700 villages all over Georgia will decide with the government what projects are most important for their particular area. Bakhtadze said that the programme has “a very good format”.

Within the programme we have received much good advice and recommendations about how can we improve our regional management policy”, said Bakhtadze (*Agenda.ge, February 4, 2019*).

#### **20. New port, terminal coming to Poti, bringing \$50mln to Georgia’s Black Sea town**

A new port and terminal will be built in Georgia’s Black Sea port town of Poti, announces Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze.

The US Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) will invest \$50 million in a new port and terminal, while the project will be implemented by the PEI Group.

Bakhtadze said that the project will play an important role in the government’s mission of turning Georgia into a regional centre.

He said that OPIC has made a great contribution to the economy of Georgia as it was one of the first international organisations that started financing projects in Georgia. So far OPIC has invested almost \$600 million in 60 projects (*Agenda.ge, February 4, 2019*).

#### **21. January 2019: Georgia earns \$15 mln by exporting 6.25 mln bottles of wine**

*The top five countries that imported the most bottles of Georgian wine in January 2019 were:*

- Russia – 4,602,218 bottles
- Ukraine – 553,164 bottles
- China – 281,229 bottles
- Poland – 268,724 bottles
- Kazakhstan – 156,120 bottles

*To European countries:*

- Germany – 235% increase (63,210 bottles)
- Sweden – 100% increase (9,000 bottles)
- Bulgaria – 6% increase (4,500 bottles)

*To traditional export markets and Asia:*

- Azerbaijan - 100% increase (5,790 bottles)
- Belarus - 100% increase (43,272 bottles)
- Mongolia - 100% increase (66,012 bottles)
- Russia - 30% increase (4,602,218 bottles)
- To strategic export markets:
- United States – 1,639% increase (62,609 bottles)
- Great Britain - 110% increase (7,800 bottles)
- Poland - 52% increase (268,724 bottles)
- China - 12% increase (281,229 bottles) (*Agenda.ge, February 5, 2019*).

#### **22. EBRD official: bank increasingly trusts Georgian gov't and its economic policy**

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) increasingly trusts the government of Georgia and its economic policy, says new Managing Director for Eastern Europe and the Caucasus Matteo Patrone.

Patrone met with Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze today where he spoke about projects implemented jointly with EBRD and the role of the bank as Georgia's strong supporter and donor in the country's development.

Bakhtadze said that all EBRD-supported projects are a priority for the country's development which promotes Georgia's transformation into a regional hub and economic center (*Agenda.ge, February 6, 2019*).

#### **23. Georgia's central bank purchases \$15 mln at foreign exchange auction**

The National Bank of Georgia (NBG) has purchased \$15 million at foreign exchange auction to control the national currency's changing value against the US dollar.

The weighted average exchange rate was 2.6497 GEL for every 1 USD.

Today 1 USD equaled 2.6506 GEL, while 1 EUR cost 3.0270. From tomorrow, 1 EUR will cost 3.0187 GEL.

So far in 2019 the NBG has purchased \$100 million at foreign exchange auction, while in 2018 the NBG purchased \$197 million in total (*Agenda.ge, February 6, 2019*).

## Additional Information

**September 18, 2018**  
**OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD - 2.6487 GEL	1 GBP - 3.4325 GEL	100 RUB - 4.0293 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0187 GEL	1 TRY - 0.5080 GEL	100 JPY - 2.4154 GEL

Thursday 7 February	Friday 8 February	Saturday 9 February	Sunday 10 February	Monday 11 February
				
4° 11°	4° 14°	3° 8°	3° 9°	3° 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](#)**