

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

February 21-24

Compiled by: **Aleksandre Davitashvili**

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❖ Occupied Regions

1. Top students from Georgia's occupied territories awarded scholarships

Top students from the occupied territories of Georgia have been awarded the Dimitri Gulia and Kosta Khetagurov scholarships today.

The scholarship was founded on the initiative of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Education Ministry this year – it is for students from occupied territories who got the highest grades on the Unified National Examinations.

GTU (Technical University of Georgia) first-year student Giorgi Tsikolia and CIU (Caucasus International University) student Robizon Iluridze were provided with a scholarship this year.

They are from the occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) regions. The students will get a 300 GEL monthly scholarship for a year (*Agenda.ge, February 21, 2019*).

2. De facto President of Tskhinvali: we want direct dialogue with Tbilisi

De facto leader of Georgia's eastern occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region Anatoly Bibilov says that his "country" wants a direct dialogue with Tbilisi, or such a dialogue to be mediated by Russia, Bibilov told the Russian media Izvestia.

"We have always wanted such a direct dialogue. However, it depends on Tbilisi. Herewith, we have our main demand. Before such a dialogue takes place, Tbilisi must sign a non-use of force agreement with us," Bibilov says.

He also stated that the "most desirable guest", Russian President Vladimir Putin, is invited to attend the celebrations in the summer in Tskhinvali, which will be dedicated to the 11th anniversary of the recognition of the region as an independent republic by Russia on 26 August 2008, in the wake of the Russia-Georgia war (*Agenda.ge, February 22, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

3. Georgian Defence Minister, Armenian PM meet to boost defence ties

Georgian Defence Minister Levan Izoria and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan have met to discuss how the cooperation in the defence field may be boosted between the two countries. The meeting took place in Yerevan today.

"We spoke about the importance of stability in the region and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Both countries are eager to boost relations in the defence field," Izoria stated after the meeting (*Agenda.ge, February 22, 2019*).

4. Georgia elected president of the International Anti-Corruption Academy

Georgia was elected president of the International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA) in Vienna, Austria yesterday.

Deputy Justice Minister of Georgia Gocha Lortkipanidze will serve as Georgia's representative in the international organization and educational institution aimed at analysing challenges in terms of combating corruption and training professionals.

Successful anti-corruption reforms conducted by Georgia caused its election as the Academy President," the Georgian Justice Ministry stated in a press release. Georgia was the Academy Vice President from September 2018. It joined the academy in 2015 (*Agenda.ge, February 22, 2019*).

5. PM Bakhtadze: Georgia stands in international solidarity with Interim President of Venezuela

Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze has published a tweet in which he pledges Georgia's support to Venezuelan opposition y Juan Guaido as interim president.

He said Georgia is also ready to join the international community in delivering humanitarian aid to Venezuelans to help those in need.

"We support the courage of the people of Venezuela in the fight for democracy and respect for Human Rights," PM Bakhtadze said (*Agenda.ge, February 22, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

6. Ivanishvili's Georgia – Article by BAKU Research Institute

"Georgia's current political order, though democratically advanced in comparison to other former Soviet countries, entails oligarchy – the rule of few – which thrives on the democratic order, but asserts itself as an alternative rule. This oligarchy, as theory stipulates, pursues the concentration of material wealth and its defence, which causes political inequality due to massive wealth in the hands of the few.[v] Within the norms of democratic political culture, the oligarchy finds detours and areas hidden from the public eye and displaces formal, official state institutions, moving the center of decision-making into exclusive and corporative informal leadership – which is commonly known in Georgia as the team. Similarly, as evidenced by voting patterns in prerevolutionary Armenia, the oligarchy is very disruptive when their money and their financed parties buy votes in exchange for social provisions and welfare. Oligarchy as an informal actor emulates the role of state institutions and, for local voters, their images stand above public servants.[vi] Democracy, to be fully implemented, needs the support of mature voters who must resist and break the spell of a benefactor and not be fooled by this generosity. – reads the [article](#) written by PhD Rail Safiyev lecturer at the Comparative Politics Department, University of Bergen in Norway (*Baku Research Institute, February, 2019*).

7. Freedom House 2019 report says Georgia held competitive elections, mentions oligarchic actors

Freedom House has released its Freedom in the World 2019 Report, which says that Georgia holds regular and competitive elections, and its democratic trajectory shows signs of improvement.

However, progress has stagnated in recent years. Oligarchic actors' hold outsized influence over policy and political choices, and the rule of law continues to be stymied by political interests," the report reads.

In the key developments of 2018, the report featured:

- Stepping down of Giorgi Kvirikashvili as the prime minister of Georgia.
- Protests erupted in May in response to raids on two popular nightclubs where police said illegal drugs were being sold.
- A two-round presidential election was held in October and November.

While the election took place in a generally peaceful environment, it was marred by allegations of vote buying, voter intimidation, and ballot-box stuffing." (*Agenda.ge, February 21, 2019*).

8. Levan Gogichaishvili has quit the Georgian Dream

Levan Gogichaishvili has quit the Georgian Dream (GD) ruling party today after the party members refused or refrained from supporting the bill regarding the court proposed by him and eight other legislators of the ruling party.

Gogichaishvili stated that the Georgian Dream party "lost the moral advantage" when it did not vote for the postponement of the lifetime appointment of judges until 31 December of 2024 (*Agenda.ge, February 22, 2019*).

9. MP Eka Beselia leaves ruling Georgian Dream party

Eka Beselia, former head of the Georgian Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee, has announced she is leaving the Georgian Dream ruling party, saying that the party had "betrayed its values."

Beselia cited the ongoing, court-related row as the "decisive issue" which pushed her to "make the painful decision."

Most of the Georgian Dream legislators refused to support the bill proposed by her and eight other MPs yesterday, which offered the postponement of the lifetime appointment of judges until 2025 (*Agenda.ge, February 22, 2019*).

10. MP Beka Natsvlishvili leaves ruling party

Beka Natsvlishvili had decided to leave Georgian Dream after his version of the Pension Reform failed to receive support from his former teammates.

"I'm leaving the majority and faction, from this moment I'll be independent member of the parliament and I will cooperate on certain initiatives based on values of the reforms." – said Natsvlishvili (*lpn.ge, February 22, 2019*).

11. Georgia's ruling party loses constitutional majority in parliament

The party's "old guard", those individuals who actively supported Georgian Dream in its struggle against UNM in 2011 and 2012, is flatly opposing the core figures in the court system, whom they blame for conforming with Saakashvili government during his tenure. They accuse another group of GD MPs, dubbed

as "the newcomers", of collaborating with "corrupt judiciary". The latter group consist of a dozen of young men and women who hold key offices in the parliament and enjoy unequivocal backing from Bidzina Ivanishvili, the country's strongman. The speaker of parliament and several chairs of its committees also belong to the group.

The "old guard's" animosity is strengthened by the fact that they deem "the newcomers" haven't played such a drastic role in political battles against Saakashvili government, thus don't deserve the upper hand in politics which they effectively enjoy.

Between these two groups there is a majority of MPs who don't belong to either camp. However, they tend to side with "the newcomers" whom they see as backed by the sole master of the ruling party, billionaire Ivanishvili (*DFWatch.net, February 23, 2019*).

12. Georgian Dream confirms Gedevan Popkhadze, Eka Beselia and Levan Gogichaishvili are no longer part members

MP Gedevan Popkhadze has addressed the Georgian Dream with an application to leave the party. The information was confirmed by the Georgian Dream's press office.

According to the press service, Gedevan Popkhadze has filed an application, while Eka Beselia and Levan Gogichaishvili made public statements about leaving the party.

"Gedevan Popkhadze, Eka Beselia and Levan Gogichaishvili are no longer members of the Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia" the press service said (*Agenda.ge, February 23, 2019*).

13. Mamuka Mdinaradze says Gedevan Popkhadze has already left the majority

"Gedevan Popkhadze has already left the majority and as far as know has filed an application on leaving the party. In general, it's a pity when team members leave the team, but we are dealing with a situation when some members left our team because we had refused to support the anti-constitutional law. This is their choice and their decision. I believe we should not support an anti-constitutional law, no matter of how emotional the situation is. In my opinion, it was a political mistake," said Mdinaradze, leader of the parliamentary majority (*Agenda.ge, February 23, 2019*).

14. MP Gedevan Popkhadze will talk about his decision today

MP Gedevan Popkhadze is considered to join his former colleagues and leave the ruling party. On Friday he announced that so far he had not taken decision over this issue (*February 25, 2019*).

15. Bidzina Ivanishvili to meet small groups of majority MPs

"Since issues cannot be discussed in detail in the majority format, meetings have been scheduled between the chairman of the party and small groups of MPs. The aim of the meetings is to give everyone an opportunity to express their opinions on various issues.

Due to the significance of the issue, the chairman first met the group who has a different position on the bill on common courts. The chairman continues thematic meetings with members of the majority in the small group format. The next meeting will be held on 25 February", - reads the information posted on the website of the Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia (*February 23, 2019*).

16. European court rules for Georgian citizens treated inhumanely under UNM gov't

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has released its verdict regarding two cases involving Georgian citizens and ruled that their rights had been violated under the United National Movement leadership.

One case is Gablishvili and others v. Georgia and another is Manukiani v. Georgia.

The court said that the third article of the European Convention of Human Rights, which prohibits torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, was violated regarding the Gablishvili case, while the 3rd and 13th articles of the convention were violated in terms of the Manukiani case.

The 13th article of the conversion refers to the right to an effective remedy.

"The Gablishvili and others v. Georgia [four individuals sued the state] concerned the attempted escape of prisoners on 30 March 2009 and inhumane treatment against them by the prison staff, as well as the inappropriate investigation of the fact," the Georgian Justice Ministry reported (*Agenda.ge, February 22, 2019*).

17. Flags at half-staff around Georgia to mark 1921 Soviet occupation of Georgia

The Georgian national flag is flying at half-staff at government buildings around the country today in remembrance of thousands of ordinary citizens and soldiers who died in the battle against Soviet forces 98 years ago. On this day in 1921, Georgia lost its independence after the Bolshevik Red Army took over Tbilisi (*Agenda.ge, February 25, 2019*).

18. Head of "League of Law Enforcers" detained

Police have detained Zviad Kuprava, Head of "League of Law Enforcers", - the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, has told InterPressNews.

The Ministry explains that in June, court ordered 5000-GEL bail for Zviad Kuprava, who was charged in connection with the incident that occurred in the court canteen. MIA says that Zviad Kuprava, who was released on bail, physically assaulted a lawyer in the vicinity of the court building.

"Zviad Kuprava was charged under Article 126 of the Criminal Code (involving valance) in absentia. Since he avoided to arrive in a law enforcement agency, on February 21, the court changed its bail order and sentenced Zviad Kuprava to imprisonment in abstention as the defendant deliberately absconded to avoid trial. On February 24, 2019, Zviad Kuprava was detained. The detention process was recorded by police body cameras, "the MIA statement reads (*lpn.ge, February 24, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

19. National Bank of Georgia provides details why it demanded the withdrawal of TBC Bank's top figures

The National Bank of Georgia (NBG), a supervisory bank in Georgia, has provided details on why it demanded the withdrawal of the TBC Bank founders from the bank's supervisory council.

NBG says that as a rule it refrains from releasing the information related to its supervisory activities, however, "the lack of information regarding the TBC Bank issue has given a way to speculations and the spread of false information." (*Agenda.ge, February 22, 2019*).

20. Germany offers €10 million for internally displaced people in Georgia

The government of Federal Republic of Germany will offer €10 million to Georgia to improve the living conditions of internally displaced people in Georgia.

A total of 236 houses will be built in Georgia on the land plots owned by internally displaced families. A village settlement will be created in Marneuli, a small city in the Kvemo Kartli region of southern Georgia for internally displaced families.

Also, 24 small scale infrastructural projects will be implemented near the settlements where the internally displaced people live (*Agenda.ge, February 23, 2019*).

21. Fitch upgrades Georgia to 'BB' with stable outlook

Fitch has upgraded Georgia's rating to 'BB' from 'BB-'. The outlook is stable.

The upgrade was due to the trend that the Georgian economy has proved resilient to negative developments in 2018.

"Economic growth remained robust, the currency was relatively stable and the National Bank of Georgia (NBG) built reserves despite a severe economic shock in Turkey and heightened sanctions risk in Russia," Fitch said in a release on February 22.

Georgia's current account deficit (CAD) is structurally still high, but Fitch estimates that it narrowed to 7.5 percent of GDP in 2018, despite the testing external environment.

"Rising tourism revenues and remittances, notably from the EU, and exports resulted in an estimated 13.9 percent increase in current external receipts. The first quarterly current account surplus on record was recorded in 3Q, the peak tourism season," the agency said (*February 23, 2019*).

❖ Sports and Culture

22. Tbilisi competes for hosting the UEFA Europa League club finals in 2021

UEFA (the Union of European Football Associations) announced that it has received bid dossiers from nine member associations to host UEFA club competition finals in 2021, Tbilisi among them.

Tbilisi's Boris Paichadze Dinamo Arena will be competing with Sevilla's Ramón Sánchez Pizjuán for hosting the UEFA Europa League club finals.

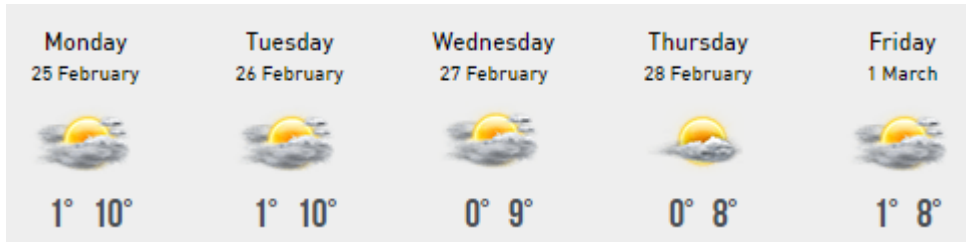
The UEFA Executive Committee will select the successful host associations for the finals of the 2021 UEFA Europa League, UEFA Women's Champions League and UEFA Super Cup on 29 May 2019 (*Agenda.ge, February 23, 2019*).








Additional Information

February 18, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

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|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1 USD - 2.6598 GEL | 1 GBP - 3.4617 GEL | 100 RUB - 4.0543 GEL |
| 1 EUR - 3.0162 GEL | 1 TRY - 0.4986 GEL | 100 JPY - 2.3992 GEL |



-  **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](#)**