

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

February 25-27

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## ❖ Occupied Regions

### 1. 327 detained illegally by occupying forces in Georgia between 2017-19

The occupying forces in the two Russia-controlled Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) have detained 327 Georgian citizens for “illegally crossing the border” between 2017 and 2019, the Georgian State Security Service says.

The agency reports that 242 of 327 were detained for “illegally crossing the border” between Georgia and its eastern occupied Tskhinvali region.

16 individuals have been illegally detained in 2019,” the State Security Service says. The remaining 85 individuals have been detained for “illegally crossing” the so-called border between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia.

Four detentions have taken place in 2019,” the agency says. Most of the individuals were released after paying a fine.

Only Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Nauru and Syria have recognised the regions as independent states since the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, with the influence of Russia (*Agenda.ge, February 26, 2019*).

### 2. Russia to supply Georgia’s occupied Abkhazia region with electricity

Russia will supply Georgia’s occupied region of Abkhazia with electricity from today due to the critical situation at the Enguri HPP.

From 20 February scheduled power outages began in Abkhazia that last three hours per day in order to deal with a decline in the level of water in the reservoir of the Enguri HPP

Gudauta, Gagra and part of Sokhumi will be supplied with electricity from Russia, while the rest of occupied Abkhazia will be supplied with electricity from the Enguri HPP (*Agenda.ge, February 27, 2019*).

## ❖ Foreign Affairs

### 3. Highly-qualified Georgians to be able to seek employment in Germany

The German government has introduced a bill to the Bundestag which would allow highly-qualified Georgians to search for jobs in the country, the Head of the Economy and Law Department of the German Embassy to Georgia Jan Bittner told IPN.

Bittner says those planning to search for a job in Germany should provide documents to confirm their education and qualifications. “Only IT specialists will be allowed to search for a job without a diploma,” he said (*Agenda.ge, February 25, 2019*).

#### **4. Interim President of Venezuela thanks Georgian gov't for its support**

Guaido made the statement during his meeting with Georgian Ambassador to Brazil David Solomonia, on the sidelines of the 11th foreign ministerial of the Lima Group composed of 14 countries in Bogota yesterday, assembled to find solutions to the political and economic crisis in Venezuela.

"Guaido stated ... that the existing humanitarian crisis in Venezuela will end soon with the support of the international community. He also expressed hope that the political crises created by Maduro's regime will be defeated through the democratic transition of power," the Georgian Foreign Ministry says (*Agenda.ge, February 26, 2019*).

#### **5. Georgia-EU Association Council Meeting to be held on 5 March in Brussels**

The Georgia-EU Association Council Meeting will be held on 5 March in Brussels, Belgium and will be chaired by Georgia this year, Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has announced.

"[This is] a very important format to further deepen our integration process, which has commenced and is successfully progressing", said Bakhtadze.

Bakhtadze said that at the meeting, a special focus will be made on the economic policy of the Georgian government, the modernisation of the education system and a wide-scale reform that the government is carrying out in the education sector, along with the stimulation of free trade with the EU (*Agenda.ge, February 26, 2019*).

#### **6. Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani delivers speech at UN Human Rights Council**

Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani has delivered a speech at the 40th session of the UN Human Rights Council.

David Zalkaliani emphasized the importance and role of the institution in terms of the protection of human rights especially when there are raging conflicts and instability, inequality and discrimination, as well as other violations of human rights across the world.

Zalkaliani highlighted Georgia's progress in terms of human rights protection and focused on the role of civil society in this process (*Agenda.ge, February 26, 2019*).

#### **7. OSCE ready to provide further support for Georgian democratic reforms, election law**

The OSCE leadership has expressed readiness to provide further support for Georgian democratic reforms and to help the country refine its election legislation, the Parliament of Georgia press office says.

OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger made the statement after his meeting with Georgian Parliament Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze and members of the Georgian parliamentary delegation in Austria today (*Agenda.ge, February 26, 2019*).

#### **8. Georgian Parliament Speaker names Russia as regional threat at Viennese Diplomatic Academy**

Georgian Parliament Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze has named Russia as a regional threat in his speech at the Viennese Diplomatic Academy in Austria yesterday.

"Increased militarisation of the two occupied regions of Georgia Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) by Russia poses significant risks not only to our security but also to regional peace and stability," Kobakhidze said.

He stated that the Georgian government is not only concerned with the question of sovereignty and security, but also of humanitarian and human rights situation in the regions (*Agenda.ge, February 27, 2019*).

### **9. Georgian President meets Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on first regional visit**

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili has met with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev at the Zagulba Presidential Palace in Baku today on her first regional trip as president.

"This is my first official visit as the president in the region and I am meeting with the president of a country with which we are linked by centuries-old cooperation and partnership," Zurbishvili said (*Agenda.ge, February 27, 2019*).

### **10. Air France to launch Paris-Tbilisi flights on 31 March**

The French flag carrier Air France will launch direct regular flights on the route Paris-Tbilisi from 31 March, announces the Georgian Civil Aviation Agency. The regular flights will be carried two times a week until 23 October.

In total flights between Tbilisi and Paris will be carried out four times a week: two flights will be performed by the local Georgian Airways and two by Air France.

Negotiations between Air France and the operator company of Tbilisi and Batumi International Airports - TAV Georgia started in November 2018 (*Agenda.ge, February 27, 2019*).

### **11. Russian Defence Minister: we are forced to respond to NATO expansion**

Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoygu says that the expansion of NATO military potential "destroys" the existing world security system and forces Russia to take responding steps, Shoygu said at a recent meeting in the Russian defence ministry.

"NATO has increased the scales and intensity of its exercises twice, in which Georgia and Ukraine, non-NATO member countries, are more and more frequently involved. Such behavior destroys the current world security system," he said. Shoygu also condemned NATO activity in the Baltic States (*Agenda.ge, February 27, 2019*).

### **12. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister warns Georgia of "unpleasant surprises"**

"My message is the same. We should continue to develop relations and I would like to warn my Georgian colleagues about possible unpleasant surprises, as they will be unpleasant for both countries," the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister said in conversation with Radio Liberty (*lpn.ge, February 27, 2019*).

### **13. Zurab Abashidze comments on Karasin's "unpleasant surprises"**

"Our format discusses issues such as trade-economic, transportation, humanitarian problems and the Prague meetings and dialogue are focused on these issues, although at the beginning of the meeting we focused on the difficult situation in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, on the grave human rights conditions there. We submitted examples of gross violations of international law norms and ignoring the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity. In this context it was noted that the Geneva International Consultations is the main discussing format.

He made this comment in his conversation with journalists and I have not heard it. He said nothing like this I find it difficult to say what did he mean in this remark," Zurab Abashidze said (*lpn.ge, February 27, 2019*).

## ❖ Internal Affairs

### **14. Georgian President to deliver annual speech at Parliament on 6 March**

President of Georgia Salome Zurbashvili will deliver her annual speech at the Parliament on 6 March, First Deputy Chairperson of the Parliament Tamar Chugoshvili said. Chugoshvili stated Salome Zurbashvili will discuss the most significant issues regarding the country. She said only President's speech is on the agenda of the day.

Salome Zurbashvili's inauguration was held on 16 December 2018. Therefore she will present a report on the period when her predecessor Giorgi Margvelashvili occupied the post (*Agenda.ge, February 25, 2019*).

### **15. Georgian PM: no tragedy that some MPs have left the ruling party**

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has stated that the Georgian Dream will definitely preserve its majority in parliament and that it is not a tragedy that several of its members have decided to leave.

"The ongoing process is part of democracy. The Georgian Dream party has fought for democratic values and the diversity [of views] is one of the biggest gains of the fight," Bakhtadze said.

Bakhtadze stated that media reports that the Georgian Dream may lose its majority in parliament were incorrect (*Agenda.ge, February 26, 2019*).

### **16. MP Zviad Kvachantiradze leaves Georgian Dream party**

Georgian MP Zviad Kvachantiradze has left the ruling Georgian Dream party and its faction in parliament.

The parliamentary faction Chairperson Mamuka Mdivaradze said the faction members were notified by Kvachantiradze on his decision to leave the faction.

Mdivaradze said Kvachantiradze will be dismissed as the Head of Diaspora and Caucasus Issues Committee.

The MP himself said he is joining the small number of his friends who did the same a while ago as the ongoing 'court-related' row led him to resign (*Agenda.ge, February 27, 2019*).

### **17. Koba Narchemashvili may leave parliamentary majority**

Kutaisi majoritarian MP Koba Narchemashvili does not rule out leaving the parliamentary majority.

"It will be morally unacceptable to be in the majority if I am against a number of issues. So I do not rule out leaving the majority," Koba Narchemashvili said.

As for the appointment of judges for a life tenure, Narchemashvili thinks it was possible to postpone the process until 2024 for getting a healthier situation in the judiciary system (*lpn.ge, February 27, 2019*).

### **18. Court sentences man charged with attempted murder of opposition MP to 18 years in jail**

Tbilisi City Court has sentenced Davit Khechuashvili to 18 years in jail for the attempted murder of Georgian opposition MP Givi Targamadze. The verdict was delivered in absentia as the man is still wanted.

Tbilisi City Court states Davit Khechuashvili was charged for attempted premeditated murder under aggravating circumstances.

He illegally purchased and stored firearms, explosives and explosive devices and caused significant damage.

On 4 October 2016, at 21:09 the convict, sure that the MP was inside the car with another person, activated the explosive device. Five people near the scene were injured as a result (*Agenda.ge, February 26, 2019*).

### **19. Study: 1.4 million Georgians left the country in 2002-17**

About 1.4 million Georgians have left the country between 2002 and 2017, a study conducted by the NGO Society and Banks with the support of the Ilia University Financial Education Centre reads.

About 20 per cent of those who have left country have a higher education, are young and they could have contributed to the development of the state economy”, the study says.

The study reads that the workforce is decreasing in the country from year to year. The reasons are low birth rate, increased ageing rate and migration,” the study reports.

The study says that between 1995 and 2002 the birth rate in the country was decreasing by three per cent annually, which led to a reduction of the number of people who should have been engaged in economic activities.

The whole portion of people aged 65 and over was increasing by at average 0.4 per cent between 2010 and 2017 and amounted to 14,6 per cent of the whole population in 2017, while the data for the other world countries is about 8,7 per cent.” (*Agenda.ge, February 27, 2019*).

### **20. Committee Hearing on TBC Bank Ends without Deliberations**

The Parliament’s Economy and Economic Policy Committee convened on February 26 to deliberate on the TBC bank case, but the hearing ended without case-related discussions.

The President of the National Bank of Georgia, Koba Gvenetadze, who was to deliver a report to the Committee members, said he did not consider it reasonable to speak on the issue publicly, implying that he would not answer the politicians’ questions.

“Discussing the NBG’s oversight decisions in such formats is not reasonable as it could endanger the financial sector; questioning the NBG decisions [in such formats] is an attack against the regulator and an attempt to exert influence on it,” he noted.

Georgian Dream MPs agreed with Gvenetadze, saying public discussions could harm the country’s financial stability. The idea, however, was unacceptable for the opposition, and the Committee hearing ended without discussions as sides failed to agree a mutually-acceptable format.

Mamuka Khazaradze spoke to reporters as well, saying he simply wanted to give his explanations. “We wanted to inform the media, the public and the MPs of what happened in reality; [that] we have become target of an orchestrated attack; we were forced to leave the bank, but we will not give up our dignity and justice,” he said.

“The issue is not about Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze. It is also not about TBC Bank only. It concerns the reputation of Georgia... Regrettably, some opinions have already been voiced [internationally] that Georgia is moving in the wrong direction,” Khazaradze added (*Civil.ge, February 27, 2019*).

## ❖ Economy and Social Affairs

### **21. 4 mln GEL programme to ensure better access to agricultural equipment for farmers**

Farmers in Georgia will soon have better access to agricultural equipment thanks to a new programme that the government of Georgia is launching. The programme will help Georgian farmers purchase agricultural equipment through co-financing.

The budget will be about 4 million GEL (about \$1.50m/€1.32m) and the programme carried out by the United Agricultural Project.

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze said at today's government meeting that Georgian farmers face a significant deficit of agricultural equipment (*Agenda.ge, February 26, 2019*).

### **22. Government to provide military servicemen with apartments in Gori, Tbilisi**

Approximately 180 military servicemen will be provided with apartments in Gori by the end of the year, Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze said at a briefing today.

Prime Minister Bakhtadze stated the apartments are under renovation and by 2020 all contract-based military servicemen will get apartments in Gori and Tbilisi.

"We launch construction of two new buildings and will hand over the flats to more than 480 military servicemen next year. Since 2013 we have provided 1724 military servicemen with residential area," Bakhtadze said (*Agenda.ge, February 26, 2019*).

## ❖ Sports and Culture

### **23. Georgian judoka Guram Tushishvili tops global rating**

Georgian judoka Guram Tushishvili has topped the new world rating of International Judo Federation after the completion of the Dusseldorf Grand Slam. Earlier, the top of the list was occupied by the captain of the Georgian team Varlam Liparteliani.

Four other Georgians are listed as the best 10 judokas. Guram Tushishvili leads with 7752 points and is followed by Varlam Liparteliani who has 7477 points (*Agenda.ge, February 27, 2019*).








## **Additional Information**

**February 28, 2019**

### **OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD - 2.6940 GEL      1 GBP - 3.5817 GEL      100 RUB -4.0939 GEL  
1 EUR - 3.0701 GEL      1 TRY - 0.5084 GEL      100 JPY - 2.4398 GEL

Monday 18 February	Tuesday 19 February	Wednesday 20 February	Thursday 21 February	Friday 22 February
				
1° 8°	-3° 6°	-2° 4°	0° 12°	0° 10°

-  **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](#)**