

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

March 4-6

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Date: **March 7, 2019**

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Tskhinvali Region

1. Vladimir Putin to Anatoly Bibilov: "We are strategic partners"

"We are doing our best to ensure the socio-economic development and security of the Republic of South Ossetia. This will definitely continue in the future too," Vladimir Putin said.

The Russian president said he was sure that "the parliamentary elections in South Ossetia will be held democratically."

"As we've agreed, we will send observers to South Ossetia for the parliamentary elections. I'm sure you will do your best to ensure that the parliamentary elections are held democratically", Russian President Vladimir Putin said at the meeting with the de facto president of occupied South Ossetia, Anatoly Bibilov (*lpn.ge, March 6, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

2. Georgian delegation leaves for Brussels to present Georgia's 'very ambitious' EU integration roadmap

A Georgian delegation headed by Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has left for Brussels, Belgium to present a 'very ambitious' roadmap for Georgian integration into the EU today which offers ways for Georgia, beyond the Georgia-EU Association Agreement, to integrate faster into the EU.

The roadmap consolidates progress already achieved within the Georgia-EU Association Agreement and provides opportunities for Georgia to take faster steps for integration into the EU. The steps concern deeper and more comprehensive, integration into the EU including the sectoral integration," the Prime Minister's press office reports. The roadmap will be presented during the fifth meeting of the Georgia-EU Association Council (*Agenda.ge, March 5, 2019*).

3. Georgia, EU hail 'excellent state of relations'

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze, who chaired the Georgian delegation at the EU-Georgia Association Council in Brussels said at a joint press conference that today's meeting was "very fruitful".

"We were able to discuss the great progress we have made on a wide range of issues of our cooperation agenda",

"We discussed the implementation of the Association Agreement including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA)", he also said, adding that Georgia continues "to overhaul its legislative and

institutional system to bring it in line with the EU norms and standards" - PM Bakhtadze said (*Agenda.ge*, March 5, 2019).

4. Georgia to become 1st in S. Caucasus to sign agreement with Eurojust

Georgia will become the first country in the South Caucasus to sign an agreement with the EU agency Eurojust which was created in 2002 to help EU member and several non-member countries cooperate more effectively to combat terrorism and serious crimes, the Georgian Chief Prosecutor's Office says.

"The office stated that the European Parliament has already held a vote regarding the issue and its 555 legislators supported the signing of the deal between Georgia and the Eurojust, while 29 voted against and 20 refrained from voting.

In the coming days, Georgian Justice Minister Thea Tsulukiani and Prosecutor General Shalva Tadumadze will go to The Hague to sign the agreement," the Prosecutor's Office said (*Agenda.ge*, March 5, 2019).

5. Georgian troops return from Central African mission

A group of Georgian service members returned from their six-month duty within the European Union Training mission in the Central African Republic today after being relieved by a replacement unit in Bangui. A platoon of the National Guard of Georgia arrived in Tbilisi and were welcomed back by Georgian Defence Forces and National Guard commanders including Brigadier General Zaza Chkhaidze, Chief of the General Staff of the armed forces.

He was joined at the Tbilisi International Airport by Lieutenant Colonel Danny Pith, the French Defence Attache to Georgia, as the National Guard soldiers arrived in the capital on a nighttime flight (*Agenda.ge*, March 5, 2019).

❖ Internal Affairs

6. Georgia's parliamentary minority dissolves

The parliamentary minority of Georgia has dissolved as seven MPs have left the ruling party in recent days. MP Davit Bakradze has been stripped of the title of parliamentary minority leader. European Georgia will no longer be entitled to benefit from additional time for speech on the floor. MP Gia Zhorzholiani said he is joining the Alliance of Patriots with other several MPs as well.

Mirian Tsiklauri and I will continue working within the framework of a joint parliamentary faction with the Alliance of Patriots," Gia Zhorzholiani stated. The parliamentary minority included 20 members of European Georgia.

There are 41 MPs outside the parliamentary majority and minority as a result of recent decisions by MPs Eka Beselia, Gedevan Popkhadze, Levan Gogichaishvili, Beka Natsvlisvili, Zviad Kvachantiradze, Mirian Tsiklauri and Gia Zhorzholiani to leave the ruling party.

The changes caused the dissolution as a parliamentary minority can be formed only if it includes more than half of the MPs outside the parliamentary majority (*Agenda.ge*, March 4, 2019).

7. TBC Bank founder demands resignation of head of National Bank, creation of investigation commission for TBC case

Co-founder of TBC Bank Mamuka Khazaradze has demanded the resignation of the head of the National Bank of Georgia Koba Gvenetadze and the creation of an investigation commission regarding the money-laundering case involving top former TBC bankers. Georgian Chief Prosecutor's Office releases new details on TBC case

The demands come after claims of the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia that Khazaradze and Japaridze, the founders of TBC, may be involved in laundering 17 million USD in 2007-2008, when the bank issued a loan to two private companies and the same day the money was placed on the personal accounts of Khazaradze and Japaridze (*Agenda.ge, March 4, 2019*).

8. Georgian Prosecutor's Office: TBC founder's claims that he informed us about threatening letter from interior minister are lies

The Georgian Chief Prosecutor's Office has dismissed a statement made yesterday by TBC Bank founder Mamuka Khazaradze that he had informed prosecutors regarding the "threatening letter" he received from Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia ahead of the second round of Georgian presidential elections in November 2018.

Khazaradze told legislators yesterday that the letter included threats that the reputation of the TBC Bank would be destroyed if the demands were not fulfilled (*Agenda.ge, March 5, 2019*).

9. TBC Bank founder says he sent original letter with threats 'received' from Interior Minister to London

TBC Bank Founder Mamuka Khazaradze says that he has sent a letter he claimed he received from Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia and which allegedly included threats against him and TBC Bank, to London to be studied, while a copy has been handed to the Georgian Prosecutor's Office (*Agenda.ge, March 5, 2019*).

10. Georgian Prosecutor's Office publishes threatening letter TBC founder claims to have received from Interior Minister

The Prosecutor's Office says the letter submitted to the investigation by the founder and former Board Chair of the TBC Bank, Mamuka Khazaradze, and allegedly containing threats against the embattled businessman, is a copy of the original document, making it impossible to verify its authenticity.

The announcement was made on March 6, two days after Khazaradze reported that he received written threats from Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia ahead of the second round of Presidential elections in 2018, warning him of reputational damage, should he fail to meet the proposed conditions.

In a statement on March 6, the Prosecutor's Office said "the so called document is printed on a piece of paper and contains no identification data and signs, including no information on the date, the place and the author." It also said the document is a copy and not an original (according to Khazaradze, the original letter was sent to London for forensic examination) (*Civil.ge, March 6, 2019*).

11. Text of the letter

- We know for sure that you are against us and that it concerns not only financial matters.
- We said we were ready for talks, but you still continue destructive actions.
- Without any preconditions:

1. In coming five days, TV Pirveli should follow TV Imedi's suit and move to emergency broadcasting; We should see that based on its editorial policy [Editor's note: TV Pirveli is owned by Khazaradze's business partner, Vakhtang Tsereteli];
2. M.Kh. [Editor's note: Mamuka Khazaradze] has to issue an official statement saying that the return of the United National Movement is unacceptable, [that] Georgian businesses remember very well how they were treated under UNM government and that it cannot happen again. He should call on businesspeople with similar positions to unite and act jointly (he is free to give additional interpretations);
3. Artarea should demonstrate high degree of impartiality [Editor's note: Artarea is a television station established by TBC bank, mostly covering arts and cultural scene] .
4. In this case, we are ready to hold healthy dialogue without any preconditions.

Otherwise, we will use all legal and objective instruments at our disposal and will do so publicly, for internal and external audiences (*Civil.ge, March 6, 2019*).

12. TV Pirveli founder releases statement regarding letter published by Prosecutor's Office

"I am the owner of 100% of TV Pirveli shares. I would like to once again tell the public that TV Pirveli is funded by own sources of income and these sources of income are transparent.

The channel's editorial independence is defined by this TV station and its journalists. The editorial policy of the channel does not subordinate to any political or other kind of outlook and "trend", which is confirmed by the conclusions of international and local organizations and reputation of journalists working on this channel. The TV station will continue its independent editorial policy and it will never change according to the political calendar, "said Vakhtang Tsereteli (*lpn.ge, March 6, 2019*).

13. Majority leader pledges government will do everything for implementation of Anaklia port project

"Within our authority, we are following the case related to the founders of "TBC Bank", where, according to the Prosecutor's Office, the investigation is underway related to a large amount of financial transactions. I would like to emphasize : this is one of the most important projects for the economy and security of the state and the government has been doing everything for the successful implementation, regardless of attitudes and private interests of various persons towards this project," MP Talakvadze said (*lpn.ge, March 6, 2019*).

14. Former NBG President summoned to Prosecutor's Office

Giorgi Kadagidze, former President of the National Bank of Georgia, has been summoned to the Prosecutor's Office.

As the Prosecutor's Office told InterPressNews, Giorgi Kadagidze has to arrive for questioning tomorrow within the investigation into "TBC Bank" case (*lpn.ge, March 6, 2019*).

15. Former NBG President rejects questioning

Former President of the National Bank of Georgia Giorgi Kadagidze rejects to arrive in the Prosecutor's Office for questioning (*lpn.ge, March 6, 2019*).

16. Mamuka Khazaradze confirms he fulfilled one of the points of the letter received from Interior Minister

According to Mamuka Khazaradze's lawyer Zviad Kordzadze, the businessman confirmed that he fulfilled one of the points of the letter received from Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia by making a statement on the National Movement on November 2. Khazaradze explained the above by his desire to protect TBC Bank and Anaklia port project.

"Mamuka Khazaradze says that he fulfilled only one point of the letter. As for the rest of the points, he says he has nothing to do with TV Pirveli," Zviad Kordzadze said (*lpn.ge, March 6, 2019*).

17. Former PM Irakli Garibashvili returns to politics

Former Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, who resigned in December 2015, has returned to politics as the political secretary of the Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia party, announces the party's secretary general and mayor of Tbilisi Kakha Kaladze.

"Garibashvili's return will make the party stronger," Kaladze said. Members of the ruling party welcomed the decision and praised Garibashvili's management skills (*Agenda.ge, March 5, 2019*).

18. Georgian president's annual speech: unprecedented European prospects open to Georgia

Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili says that unprecedented European prospects have opened up for Georgia after the offer of French President Emmanuel Macron to the EU member states regarding the creation of a new, European concept: an open Europe for everyone.

"Europe's future image is shaping now, which opens up new prospects for Georgia," Zurbashvili said, adding that Macron's address to the 27 EU member states also included changes for the existing acceptance model into the EU.

Zurbashvili stated that Georgia has a chance to express its views [regarding the new concep] during the Batumi international conference this year (*Agenda.ge, March 6, 2019*).

19. Pardon Commission to work under Justice Ministry

The Pardon Commission will move under the Justice Ministry, - President of Georgia Salome Zurbashvili said while delivering an annual report to the lawmakers in parliament today (*lpn.ge, March 6, 2019*).

20. President Zurbashvili initiates simplified procedures for dual citizenship

"During my visits, I met with our students and emigrants abroad. The status of the Georgian citizenship is very important for emigrants, especially for those who were born abroad, in order to maintain ties with their native country.

We are cooperating with the Ministry of Justice to simplify the procedures for obtaining and maintaining dual citizenship," President Zurbashvili said while delivering her annual report in parliament (*lpn.ge, March 6, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

21. Number of tourists visiting Georgia increases 5.1% in February 2019

Georgia hosted 247,705 tourists in February 2019, showing an increase of 5.1% year-on-year (y/y) announces the Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA) (*Agenda.ge, March 4, 2019*).

22. Georgia, Romania, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan launch new transport corridor



Georgia, Romania, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan have signed a document establishing the Black Sea-Caspian Sea Freight Transport Corridor today, opening new possibilities for connectivity and regional development in the region. The foreign ministers of all four countries met today in Bucharest, Romania to sign the

deal.

Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani posted on his official Twitter account about today's meeting and deal (*Agenda.ge, March 4, 2019*).

23. Sakura 2019: Georgian wine wins Diamond Trophy in Japan

An international wine competition judged exclusively by Japanese female wine specialists has awarded Georgian wine the competition's highest award, the Diamond Trophy.

The winner of the sixth Sakura competition highest award was a Kisi 2017 of the wine company Vaziani Winery.

Kisi 2017 was also the winner of the Double Gold award in the Sakura competition in February, and according to the competition rules, was presented to the Foodex Japan 2019 Award for the highest award - Diamond Trophy (*Agenda.ge, March 5, 2019*).

24. Japan to host 'Georgia – Homeland of Wine' exhibition from 10 March

Japanese capital city of Tokyo will host project of 'Georgia – Homeland of Wine' from 10 March to 7 May, announces the National Wine Agency of Georgia.

The partners of the project are one of the world's largest companies Sony Music Communication and TOPPAN.

Exhibition hall Terrada Warehouse will host the exhibition for two months, where the visitors will be able to see unique archaeological exhibits of Georgia (*Agenda.ge, March 5, 2019*).

25. Georgia's businesses employ 684,500 people in Q4 2018

Georgian businesses employed about 684,500 people in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2018, of which 40.6% were women and 59.4% were men.

The number of people employed in the Georgian business sector increased by 3.7% compared to the same quarter of 2017, shows the latest data by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

The majority of people employed in the business sector worked in Georgia's capital of Tbilisi, which is regarded as the country's economic hub (*Agenda.ge, March 6, 2019*).

26. Passenger traffic up by 25% at Georgian airports in Jan-Feb 2019

Georgia's three international airports served 625,236 passengers in January-February 2019, which is a 25% increase in comparison to last year, says the United Airports of Georgia.

The number of passengers who took regular or charter flights in Georgia increased in all three main airports of the country: Tbilisi Shota Rustaveli International Airport, Batumi Aleksandre Kartveli International Airport and Kutaisi David Aghmashenebeli International Airport.

More specifically:

- Tbilisi International Airport served 433,202 passengers - a 13% increase y/y
- Kutaisi International Airport served 103,468 passengers – 112% increase
- Batumi International Airport served 30,251 passengers – 67% increase (*Agenda.ge, March 6, 2019*).

27. Jan-Feb 2019: Georgia earns \$30 mln by exporting 12 mln bottles of wine

Georgia exported about 12.2 million bottles of wine to 32 countries in January-February 2019, which is a 13% increase compared to the same period of 2018, announces the Georgian National Wine Agency. Last month Georgia generated \$30 million from the sale of wine abroad – 21% increase year-on-year (*Agenda.ge, March 6, 2019*).

28. EBRD President says Georgia is developing in the right direction

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) President Sir Suma Chakrabarti said Georgia is developing in the right direction at today's meeting with Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze in Tbilisi.

Chakrabarti said Georgia "remains an exemplary country" and many of the bank's partners "are interested in learning from its experience".

At the meeting the parties welcomed the record number of investments brought into the country last year and noted that EBRD plans to further increase its investments in Georgia.

PM Bakhtadze and EBRD President Chakrabarti also spoke of the importance of supporting inclusive economic growth in small and medium businesses (*Agenda.ge, March 6, 2019*).

29. Georgian Health Minister: Hepatitis C programme may end in 2020

Georgian Health Minister David Sergeenko says the country's Hepatitis C elimination programme may come to an end. The reason the programme may end is that less people are involved in the programme than was expected.

"The goals of elimination are defined up to 2020, nonetheless a longer contract has been signed with pharmaceutical company that supplies us with medicines", stated Sergeenko (*Agenda.ge, March 6, 2019*).








Additional Information

March 7, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.6810 GEL 1 GBP - 3.5202 GEL 100 RUB -4.0709 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0298 GEL 1 TRY - 0.4986 GEL 100 JPY - 2.3970 GEL

Thursday 7 March	Friday 8 March	Saturday 9 March	Sunday 10 March	Monday 11 March
				
3° 11°	3° 14°	2° 13°	4° 16°	4° 16°

-  **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](#)**