

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

March 11-13

Compiled by: **Aleksandre Davitashvili**

Date: **March 14, 2019**

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. Bodies of 23 people lost in Georgia military conflicts identified

The bodies of 23 people who went missing as a result of military conflicts in Georgia in the 1990s and in 2008 have been identified by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The ICRC has held group and individual meetings with members of the families of the deceased, and provided them with information on the identification process and answered their questions.

The families were also provided with psychological consultation.

"The decades of vagueness for 23 Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian missing people's families have ended," said Nicolas Fleury, the ICRC operations coordinator for Europe and Central Asia (*Agenda.ge, March 12, 2019*).

2. Georgia launches grant programme to encourage trade across dividing lines

A new grant programme 'Produce for a Better Future' will soon be launched in Georgia within the peace initiative 'A Step to a Better Future' in order to encourage trade across the dividing lines.

The initiative promotes trade relations in such a way as to enhance economic relations across dividing lines, develop new opportunities and access to both internal and external markets.

The maximum amount of financing is defined:

Up to 7,000 GEL for one beneficiary who must be/work in the occupied territories of Georgia;

Up to 15,000 GEL for beneficiaries group, which consists of two beneficiaries, one beneficiary should be/work in the occupied territories of Georgia;

Up to 20,000 GEL for beneficiaries group consisting of three beneficiaries, including at least one beneficiary to be/work in Georgia's controlled territory;

Up to 35,000 GEL for beneficiaries group consisting of four or more beneficiaries, including at least one beneficiary to be/work in the territory controlled by Georgia.

Persons interested in participating in the programme at the first stage of the selection will complete and register electronic business plans in Georgian or Abkhaz languages. At the second stage business plans will be evaluated and the winners will be revealed (*Agenda.ge, March 12, 2019*).

3. Georgian citizen 'commits suicide' in occupied Abkhazia

The State Security Service of Georgia reports that a young Georgian man, Irakli Kvaratskhelia, has reportedly committed suicide in the Gali district, in Georgia's Russian-occupied region of Abkhazia.

The State Security Service said, the information was shared “by representatives of de-facto Abkhazia via Hot Line operational in the scope of the EU Monitoring mission”.

“The State Security Service of Georgia is conducting activities aimed at identification of the objective circumstances in relation to the death of the mentioned person through every instrument at its disposal,” the statement reads (*Agenda.ge, March 12, 2019*).

4. Tbilisi concerned, Georgian embassies to inform partners of death of Georgian citizen in prison of occupied Abkhazia

All Georgian embassies have received instructions to inform their host countries of the death of 29-year-old Georgian citizen Irakli Kvaratskhelia in the prison of the Georgian occupied Abkhazia region, Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani said.

Information about his death was published by the European Union Monitoring mission (EUMM) to Georgia late on Tuesday. Suicide is the version offered by de facto authorities of Abkhazia.

“We have received information about the alarming case yesterday by the EUMM mission. The reasons behind the death are being identified with the help of the mission. Before all causes of the incident are found, we have already taken steps to inform the international community regarding the issue,” Zalkaliani said (*Agenda.ge, March 13, 2019*).

5. The EU Monitoring Mission Statement on the death of Mr Irakli Kvaratskhelia

On 12 March, the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia, through the Mission-managed hotline, learned about the death of Mr Irakli Kvaratskhelia. The EUMM wishes to extend its condolences to the family of the deceased.

The EUMM, in its monitoring capacity and in line with its mandate, continues to follow developments closely.

The Mission-managed hotline has been and continues to be actively used for communication regarding this tragic event.

The EUMM stands ready to support exchange of information through the hotline or any other appropriate mechanism (*EUMM.EU, March 13, 2019*).

6. Co-chairs of Geneva International Discussions from UN, OSCE and EU visit occupied Abkhazia amid death of Georgian citizen

Co-chairs of the Geneva Internal Discussions from the EU, UN and EU, dealing with Georgian conflict issues, are in the Russian occupied Abkhazia region of Georgia to discuss the details of the recent death of Georgian citizen Irakli Kvaratskhelia in the region. The European Union Monitoring mission reported the incident yesterday.

De facto authorities claim that the 29-year-old man, who was illegally detained for the crossing of so-called border, committed suicide in a holding cell. Tbilisi is demanding details to verify the account of events offered by the de facto authorities.

The Georgian Foreign Ministry has already informed the international community regarding the “alarming incident” (*Agenda.ge, March 13, 2019*).

7. Body of Georgian man who died in Abkhazia handed over to Georgian officials

The body of 29-year-old Georgian citizen Irakli Kvaratskhelia, who died in unclear circumstances in occupied Abkhazia, has been handed over to his relatives on Tbilisi-controlled territory.

Deputy State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality Ruslan Abashidze and officials from the State Security Service were also waiting for the young man's body near the Enguri Bridge, connecting occupied Abkhazia with the rest of Georgia. Ruslan Abashidze said an autopsy and investigation will reveal the reasons of Kvaratskhelia's death (*Agenda.ge, March 13, 2019*).

❖ Tskhinvali Region

8. De facto leadership of occupied Tskhinvali region of Georgia announces plans to reopen so-called border after 2-month closure

The so-called security committee of the occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region of Georgia says that the so-called border with the rest of Georgia will reopen on March 15, at 18:00.

The de facto leadership of Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) closed the so-called border on 11 January "to avoid the spread of the H1N1 respiratory virus," depriving locals of access to vitally important everyday items they buy in other regions of the country (*Agenda.ge, March 12, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

9. Georgia and Italy sign deal to jointly combat economic crime

Georgia and Italy are teaming up to fight economic and financial crime, announces the Investigation Service of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia.

The Investigation Service of Georgia and the Financial Guard of the Italian Republic signed a memorandum of understanding today.

The memorandum includes not only combating economic and financial crime, but also the exchange of information and the improvement of staff qualifications (*Agenda.ge, March 12, 2019*).

10. Georgian embassies to open in United Arab Emirates, Vietnam

Georgia will open embassies in the United Arab Emirates and Vietnam, Georgia's Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani announced earlier today. "We annually extend the zones of diplomatic coverage," David Zalkaliani said.

Zalkaliani said the government made the decision per the priorities set out under the country's external policy strategy document that is to be approved shortly (*Agenda.ge, March 12, 2019*).

11. Georgia joins long list of countries banning Boeing MAX jets

All Boeing 737-8 MAX and 737-9 MAX aircraft operations are temporary prohibited in Georgian airspace in order to assure safety for passengers and flights, announces the Georgian Civil Aviation Agency (GCAA).

Aviation regulators around the globe, including in Georgia, are grounding Boeing's 737 MAX aircraft following Sunday's deadly plane crash in Ethiopia.

"GCAA is closely following the directives of the Federal Aviation Administration of America (FAA) and the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). Boeing MAX jets' flights will be temporary prohibited in Georgian

airspace until the international aviation organisations ... receive further information about the reasons that caused the crash in Ethiopia", reads the statement of the GCAA (*Agenda.ge, March 13, 2019*).

12. Georgian-Armenian presidents meet, discuss ways of boosting ties

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili has visited Armenia on her official trip today and has held a meeting with her Armenian counterpart Armen Sarkissian. Both presidents stated that there is still room to further boost bilateral relations.

Zurbishvili said that Georgia and Armenia agree on many issues - first of all, on the fact that the region which Georgia and Armenia belong to has a big potential for development (*Agenda.ge, March 13, 2019*).

13. Georgian President Zurbishvili discusses development of cooperation with Armenian Prime Minister

President of Georgia Salome Zurbishvili has met with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan within the framework of her official visit to Armenian Republic.

The parties discussed the key aspects of development of political and economic cooperation between Georgia and Armenia.

President Zurbishvili focused on the progress in terms of Georgia's European integration and Georgia-EU future plans.

Nikol Pashinyan stated that he conducted his first visit as the PM in Georgia that means Georgia is significant for the Armenian government.

He said Georgia and Armenia should focus on joint strategic interests during cooperation and feels very happy to see Georgia shares the point of view (*Agenda.ge, March 13, 2019*).

14. Venice Commission ready to help Georgia make clear procedures for selection of judges

The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe says that it is ready to help Georgia make clear and transparent procedures for the selection and appointment of judges, which has become one of the top issues of discussion over the past two months.

Head of the Venice Commission Gianni Buquicchio wrote on the official webpage of the council that the commission had received a request for an opinion from the speaker of the Georgian parliament regarding the appointment of Supreme Court judges.

"I welcome the willingness of the Georgian authorities to cooperate with us in order to establish clear and transparent criteria and procedures for the selection and appointment of these judges," Buquicchio said (*Agenda.ge, March 13, 2019*).

15. Georgian PM: signing investment deal with Japan will boost economic ties

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze, who is visiting Japan, says that the signing of a bilateral investment deal between Georgia and Japan in the future will further encourage economic relations between the two countries. Bakhtadze made the statement earlier today, during his meeting with Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono.

Bakhtadze and Kono believe that the PM's visit to Japan will upgrade the cooperation of the two countries to a higher level.

"We appreciate your visit to Japan and are waiting for further boosting of political and economic cooperation," Kono said.

Bakhtadze thanked the Japanese government for its support in the implementation of important projects and stated that Georgia values the continued assistance from the friendly nation (*Agenda.ge, March 13, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

16. Infrastructure Minister says Anaklia Consortium faced problems before TBC case

Georgian Infrastructure Minister Maia Tskitishvili says that there is no connection between the Anaklia deep sea port project and the ongoing money laundering investigation involving the founders of TBC Bank.

She says that Anaklia Consortium, which won the state tender to construct the port and signed a deal with the government in 2016 with TBC Holding as its principal partner, had faced problems in attracting funds for the 2.5 billion USD project before the investigation was launched (*Agenda.ge, March 11, 2019*).

17. Recruit says he was beaten at a training centre, Defence Ministry responds

A 19-year-old recruit Kazim Gakhramov says that several people tried to extort money from him and several others and then physically abused them.

"We [recruits] were called at 2 pm on that day and demanded money from us. We refused to do so and they beat us brutally," Gakhramov told the Rustavi 2 and added that the "illegality" took place with the presence of Sergeant Undiladze.

The Ministry of Defence says that the investigation has been launched regarding the issue and the people mentioned by the recruit have been interrogated, who "refuse any type of violence." (*Agenda.ge, March 11, 2019*).

18. Georgia celebrates 100th anniversary of establishment of first parliament

One hundred years have passed since the creation of the Constituent Assembly of the First Democratic Republic of Georgia, which was the first parliament in the country. The legislative body passed laws in between 1919-1921, until the invasion of the Red Army.

The first meeting of the 130-member assembly took place on that day 100 years ago, with six political parties, one independent MP, five female lawmakers and 21 legislators from ethnic minorities (*Agenda.ge, March 12, 2019*).

19. Court leaves UNM member in custody amid protests in courtroom

Gurjaani Court has upheld the detention of United National Movement member David Kirkitadze which was followed by protests and uproar in the courtroom.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia detained a member of the United National Movement opposition, former state official David Kirkitadze on December 17, 2018 for verbally and physically abusing the police and damaging property during a clash between law enforcers and opposition activists on presidential inauguration day.

Kirkitadze's lawyer Giorgi Kondakhishvili requested his release on bail. Kondakhishvili also said 2,000 Georgian citizens are ready to vouch for the detainee, and added that Kirkitadze's family member has recently died and the funeral will be held on Thursday (*Agenda.ge, March 12, 2019*).

20. Georgian penitentiary system will no longer be staffed by military conscription

The Ministry of Justice has announced that the country's penitentiary system will no longer be staffed with military conscripts. Instead, guards and security forces will be hired on a contract basis.

The decision was announced today after a meeting between Justice Minister Thea Tsulukiani and the head of Parliament's Defence and Security Committee Irakli Sesiashvili.

Tsulukiani believes that the initiative will make the penitentiary system security service more attractive for youth (*Agenda.ge, March 12, 2019*).

21. Georgia to introduce law on mediation to simplify civic disputes

Georgia plans to promote mediation as alternative to solving disputes without lengthy and costly judicial procedures.

Justice Minister Thea Tsulukiani stated on March 12 that the Government of Georgia supports "the reform project" that her ministry has been working on for over a year and a half with "all the interested groups" including businessmen, lawyers, mediators and arbitrary specialists.

"This reform is called 'Georgia's draft law on Mediation and Consecutive Changes', which will now be introduced to the parliament as a government initiative", Minister Tsulukiani (*Agenda.ge, March 13, 2019*).

22. Two detained in western Georgia with \$2.8 million worth of uranium

The Georgian State Security Service has detained two individuals in the Kobuleti region of western Georgia on Tuesday for the illegal possession and sale of radioactive materials.

Both of the detainees are citizens of Georgia and they intended to sell the \$2.8 million worth of uranium.

"The detainees Roman G. and Gocha K. wanted to sell uranium for 2,800,000 USD. The total weight of the nuclear material is 40.19 gr and it contains radioactive isotope - uranium-238. The confiscated substance poses a risk to human health and life" the agency reports. The crime is punishable by five to 10 years in prison (*Agenda.ge, March 13, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

23. Azerbaijan, UK, Netherlands are Georgia's top investor countries in 2018

Azerbaijan, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands were the countries that invested the most heavily in Georgia in 2018.

In total, foreign direct investments (FDI) in Georgia amounted to \$1.23 billion in 2018 as shown by preliminary data published by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat). Last year FDIs were down by 34.9 % compared to 2017 (*Agenda.ge, March 11, 2019*).

24. Georgian PM names 3 factors that caused FDI reduction in 2018

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has responded to recent statistics on foreign direct investments (FDI) in Georgia and explained the reasons for their decrease.

The main reasons for the decrease in FDIs is the completed pipeline project and also transferring of ownership in telecommunication companies in the middle of last year”, Bakhtadze.

To note foreign direct investments (FDI) in Georgia amounted to \$1.23 billion in 2018 as shown by preliminary data published by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

Last year FDIs were down by 34.9 % compared to 2017.

Bakhtadze said that there were three factors that caused FDI reduction in 2018: “The liabilities of non-resident investors were repaid, which was reflected in the statistics”, he said.

25. New 7-year, \$32 mln programme to help prevent natural disasters in Georgia

Georgia is starting a new seven-year programme worth \$32 million that will help the country to prevent natural disasters.

The project first will be launched in Georgia’s Adjara region where geological and hydrological maps of high precision will be made. The project will step-by-step cover all the regions of Georgia where early warning systems will be installed.

The goal of the project is to prevent or mitigate possible negative consequences caused by natural disasters in the country.

Early warning systems are already installed in the basin of the River Vere in the capital of Tbilisi and in the Devdoraki Gorge in northern Georgia.

Green Climate Fund, a financial mechanism under the UNFCCC, offered \$27 million while the Swiss government allocated \$5 million for the programme (*Agenda.ge, March 11, 2019*).

26. Local airline company, Georgian airport operator dispute 9 million GEL debt

A disagreement between TAV Georgia, the sole operator of Tbilisi and Batumi International Airports and local airline company Georgian Airways continues.

TAV Georgia released a statement today that Georgian Airways faces a debt exceeding over 9 million GEL (about \$3.36m/€2.99m) and the airline company refuses to fulfill the financial liabilities in spite of the fact that TAV Georgia set up a payment schedule for the company (*Agenda.ge, March 11, 2019*).

27. Foreign investors now able to simply buy securities issued by Georgian companies

Buying securities issued by Georgian companies will be easier for foreign investors, announces the Bank of Georgia.

From now on besides international financial institutions, private companies will also be able to save and pay with securities through the international central securities depository Clearstream. Today the first transaction of the Georgian corporate bond was first implemented with this system.

“Thousands of clients of Clearstream who have accounts in foreign currency are able to simply add sub-account in Georgian national currency Lari and buy or save Georgian securities. To go through these procedures by themselves would cost more for the investors and they would probably refrain from investing in Georgia”, said the NBG.

Clearstream is an important player in the securities services industry with consistently high credit ratings that entered Georgia in 2016 and gave the opportunity to the investors from various countries around the

world to make convenient and safe investments in the Georgian securities market (*Agenda.ge, March 12, 2019*).

28. Georgia's external trade up 3.6% in Jan-Feb 2019

Georgia's external trade grew by 3.6% in January-February 2019, reaching \$1.73 billion, says the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

In the reporting period the value of Georgian exports increased by 13.2% to \$505 million, while the value of imports also increased 0.1% to \$1.23 billion with respect to January-February 2018, said Geostat.

Last year Georgia's trade deficit came out to \$729.7 million, which was a 41.9% share of the country's total trade turnover.

Trade deficit is an economic measure of the negative balance of trade in which a country's imports exceed its exports (*Agenda.ge, March 13, 2019*).

29. Georgia's central bank: refinancing rate drops 25 basis points to 6.5%

The National Bank of Georgia (NBG) decreased its refinancing rate by 25 basis points following today's advice from the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC). With this change the bank's refinancing rate now stands at 6.5 per cent.

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, March 13, 2019*).

❖ Sports and Culture

30. Adventure in the trees: hanging rope park opens in Georgia's Algeti National Park

A new ecotourism attraction, a hanging rope park, will be set up in Georgia's Algeti National Park, located in Georgia's Tetrtskharo municipality. A total of 250,000 GEL (about \$92,936/€82,403) will be spent on the project.

With rope bridges to cross, aerial tightropes and swinging log steps to navigate and moving platforms to cross amongst many other thrills, the hanging rope park in Algeti National Park will be a place for adventure seekers ready to try their hand at life in the treetops (*Agenda.ge, March 12, 2019*).








Additional Information

March 14, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.6872 GEL 1 GBP - 3.5331 GEL 100 RUB -4.1033 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0349 GEL 1 TRY - 0.4919 GEL 100 JPY - 2.4133 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](#)**