

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

March 14-17

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❖ Occupied Territories

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. Autopsy carried out of Georgian man who died in unclear circumstances in occupied Abkhazia

A post-mortem examination lasting longer than five hours was carried out earlier today to clarify the reasons behind the death of 29-year-old Irakli Kvaratskhelia while in illegal detention in the Georgian occupied Abkhazia region on March 10.

Expert Irakli Toidze told the media that the deceased suffered damage to the throat.

"Pieces of rope were also found inside the wounds. No other damage, actually, has been found. As for the damage on the throat, laboratory studies should say whether it was inflicted when the man was alive or whether they appeared after death," Toidze said (*Agenda.ge*, March 14, 2019).

2. Vanuatu, formerly recognising independence of Georgian occupied regions, says it is big supporter of Georgia's territorial integrity

Foreign Minister of Vanuatu Ralph Regenvanu, who is paying an official visit to Georgia, has stated that his country firmly supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and is eager to share successful Georgian reforms.

Vanuatu was among the few countries which recognised the two Russian-occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) as independent states in the wake of the Russia-Georgia war in 2008 (*Agenda.ge*, March 14, 2019).

3. Georgian President in Armenia: "it is very sad that delegations from Nagorno-Karabakh visit the occupied regions of Georgia"

Georgian President has stated in Armenia that it is "very sad" that delegations from Nagorno-Karabakh visit the two occupied regions of Georgia, Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia), and discuss these two conflicts as if they are of a similar nature.

"This is very sad and painful for us," Zurabishvili stated in response to the words of the head of the National Assembly of Armenia Ararat Mirzoyan that cooperation is necessary to settle regional conflicts. Zurabishvili also stated that the subordination of Armenian churches in Abkhazia to the Russian church "is a violation of [Georgia's] sovereignty." (*Agenda.ge*, March 14, 2019).

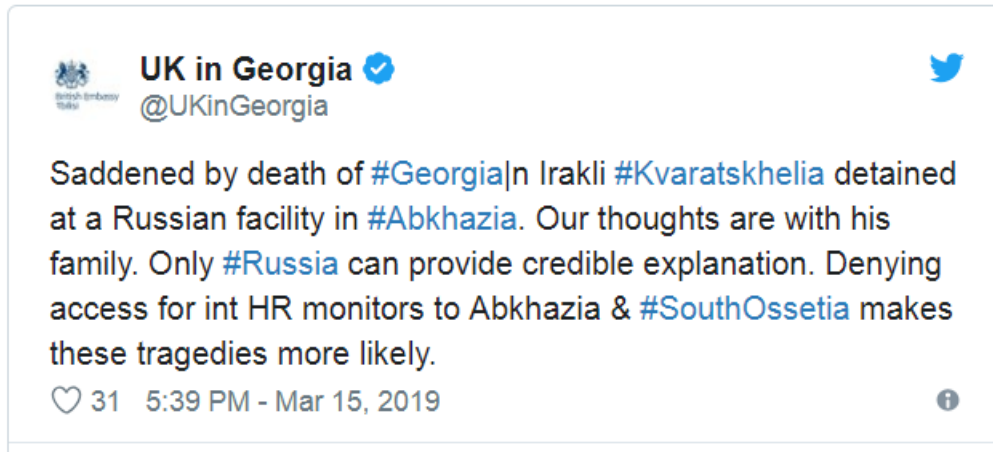
4. Georgian president to Armenian patriarch: Armenian churches in Georgia's occupied Abkhazia region must not be subordinate to Russia

Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili has told Armenian Patriarch Karekin II in the town of Echmiadzin today that Armenian churches in the Georgia's Russian-occupied region of Abkhazia should not be subordinated to the Southern Eparchy of Russia.

"The fact [that the Armenian churches are now under the subordination of the Russian church in Abkhazia] is perceived as a violation of Georgia's territorial integrity," Zurabishvili said, and stated that the Armenian Church "must [address the situation] as soon as possible" and bring the church under the subordination of the Georgian Eparchy of the Armenian Church, as it was in previous years. Zurabishvili said that Georgian Patriarch Ilia II is "very much concerned" by the issue (*Agenda.ge*, March 14, 2019).

5. British Embassy saddened by Georgian man's death in Abkhazia

British Embassy to Georgia is saddened by the death of 29-year-old Georgian citizen Irakli Kvaratskhelia, who died in unclear circumstances in occupied Abkhazia earlier this week.



6. EU Ambassador: Georgian man's death in occupied Abkhazia 'tragic'

European Union Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell is saddened by the death of Georgian citizen Irakli Kvaratskhelia, who died in unclear circumstances in occupied Abkhazia earlier this week.

The Ambassador joined others in expressing his condolences to the family of the 29-year-old man.

"While the European Union welcomes the speedy handover of his body, it is important now for the Russian Federation to provide all necessary evidence to Georgian authorities regarding the circumstances of his death", Ambassador Hartzell said (*Agenda.ge*, March 16, 2019).

7. Georgian diplomats inform OSCE, EU of Georgian man's death in Abkhazia

Georgia's Permanent Representative to Geneva, Victor Dolidze, spoke with European Union ambassadors about the recent tragic death of Georgian citizen Irakli Kvaratskhelia in occupied Abkhazia.

Dolidze participated in the meeting of the EU and "EU friends" Ambassadors on the sidelines of the 40th session of the UN Human Rights Council.

At the meeting Dolidze highlighted that, at this point, the relevant authorities of Georgia are in the process of determining the circumstances of Kvaratskhelia's death.

He also noted that "updated information regarding this tragic case will be immediately communicated" to the international community (*Agenda.ge*, March 16, 2019).

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

8. Two Georgian men detained near Tskhinvali region released

Two Georgian citizens, who were detained near occupied Tskhinvali region for "illegally crossing the border" on March 13, have been released today.

Alan Marghishvili and Giorgi Chitishvili are locals of the villages of Karapila and Zadiantkari, in the Kaspi municipality of Georgia's Shida Kartli region, close to the occupation line with Tskhinvali region.

The de facto security service of Tskhinvali said, the two Georgians were detained near the occupation line and were released after paying a fine (*Agenda.ge, March 14, 2019*).

9. De facto leadership of occupied Tskhinvali region of Georgia reopens so-called border after 2-month closure

The so-called border between the Georgian occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region and the rest of Georgia has reopened after about a two-month closure, the European Union Monitoring mission head to Georgia Erik Hoeg has confirmed (*Agenda.ge, March 14, 2019*).

10. Co-chairs of Geneva International Discussions welcome reopening of crossing points, say 'closure was not justified'

Co-chairs of the Geneva International Discussions welcome the reopening of crossing points connecting the occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region and the rest of Georgia, but say "the closure was not justified".

In a statement released yesterday, the co-chairs said they "have made this position clear through continuous engagement since the first day of the closure", at the Ergneti Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meeting in February and during their recent meetings in Tskhinvali (*Agenda.ge, March 16, 2019*).

11. Khurvaleti Incident

On March 15, Friday at 13:10 one of the civil activists mostly protesting Russian occupation in Georgia, Giga Makarashvili had informed society through his Facebook account that Russian occupation forces have taken part of Khurvaleti village and he was going to the hotspot. Soon after this post one more activist David Katsarava, former president of rafting federation had written the same. The information had not been confirmed by any news agency or journalist for approximately 20 minutes. First was TV Pirveli who had interviewed the source of Makarashvili and Katsarava. The director of the retirement shelter in Khurvaleti said that she has seen tens of military vehicles crossing the ABL and they have occupied gardens and yards of locals.

Katsarava and Makarashvili have arrived at the hotspot but they were not allowed by Georgian police officers to enter the village. They were calling citizens of Georgia to start moving towards Khurvaleti village as soon as possible, as they do not trust the government. "tens of thousands of Georgians are necessary in order to avoid occupation of Khurvaleti. The government is inefficient and they are locked in their cabinets. Their reaction will be too late when Russians take Tbilisi." – said Katsarava.

Meanwhile, Mayor of Gori Municipality was in Tbilisi and he could not make any statement regarding ongoing processes. Later he said that three masked Russians have moved closer to Khurvaleti village but as there is not barbed wire fence, for locals it's hard to understand whether they have crossed so called ABL or not.

State Security Services had not confirmed entrance of Russian forces in Khurvaleti. In addition, they have called civilians to refrain from disseminating fake news that is raising panic in the society.

Head of EUMM mission twitted that his employees are at the spot and they could not record movement of Russians on the territory controlled by Georgian Government.

As soon as the information was confirmed that Khurvaleti village was safe police officers have given right to the civil activists to enter the village. In the meantime locals have been disappointed with the actions of Makarashvili and Katsarava. According to them activists are increasing turbulence in the village with their actions and for the next time they will not allow them to enter the village (*TV Pirveli, Rustavi 2, IPN.GE, Agenda.ge, Facebook, Twitter March, 15, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

12. Georgian peacekeepers awarded for exemplary service in Afghanistan

Georgian military servicemen of the 4th mechanized brigade have been awarded for their honest, exemplary behavior in the Resolute Support mission in Kabul, Afghanistan.

The peacekeepers were officially thanked on behalf of the Head of Georgia's Defence Forces while the Head of the Georgian troops deployed in Afghanistan Malkhaz Merlani awarded them.

Corporal Nikoloz Partsvania found a wallet with a large amount of money at the base's gym – he found the owner and gave it back to him.

Senior sergeant Mamuka Meladze, Corporal Giorgi Mgebrishvili and Senior Lieutenant Archil Shavdatuashvili also showed examples of honest and exemplary deeds: they found especially large sums of cash while carrying out their duties gave them back to the owners (*Agenda.ge, March 14, 2019*).

13. Georgia among Poland's foreign policy priorities

"Poland consistently supports the territorial integrity and European and Atlantic ambitions of Georgia", Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz said today.

"For Poland, the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia and of other countries of the region, which have such ambitions, is a guarantee of long-lasting stability and economic, political and social growth of our partners", the Polish Minister said.

Minister Czaputowicz touched on his ministry's foreign policy tasks for 2019 at the Sejm (legislative body of Poland), in which Poland's eastern partners, in particular Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, "remain a key area" of the country's activity (*Agenda.ge, March 14, 2019*).

14. NATO Secretary General: 'Georgia is a critical partner'

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said in his annual report that "Georgia is a critical partner for the Alliance" and that the allies "have consistently reaffirmed their commitment to Georgia's eventual membership".

In his annual report for 2018 which was released today, Stoltenberg said "Georgia is also a significant contributor to NATO's operations and missions".

He also said that the Alliance sees "the importance of increased presence of NATO in Georgia, with the training and evaluation centre, with the exercises that will take place later on this month" (*Agenda.ge, March 14, 2019*).

15. Deadly New Zealand mosque attack: Georgia working with partners on seized cartridges with Georgian inscriptions

The Georgian State Security Service has responded to photos of cartridges of firearms released by the Daily Mail, with inscriptions in different languages, Georgian among them, following the deadly terror attack on mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand today, claiming 49 lives.

The cartridges were posted by an attacker, Australian Brenton Tarrant, himself on his Twitter page, containing inscriptions in English, Russian, Georgian and other languages (*Agenda.ge, March 15, 2019*).

16. Foreign Minister says Georgians will not be able to receive asylum in the EU

Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani said that Georgian citizens ask for asylum in the EU in vain, given that most European countries have put Georgia on the list of safe countries.

Minister Zalkaliani said the Georgian government has taken measures and conducted a large-scale information campaign to prevent the misuse of visa-free travel (*Agenda.ge, March 15, 2019*).

17.5 years since annexation of Crimea: Georgia reaffirms support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty

Georgia reaffirms "strong and unequivocal support" for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders, and condemns "the illegal referendum" conducted in Crimea five years ago.

In a statement released yesterday, the Georgian Foreign Ministry urged that "after five years, Russian Federation continues aggressive and illegal actions against Ukraine".

"The Autonomous Republic of Crimea and city of Sevastopol, as well as parts of Eastern Ukraine regions are still occupied. There are numerous cases of gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law on the temporary occupied territories of Ukraine," the Foreign Ministry said (*Agenda.ge, March 15, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

18. Tbilisi Mayor: historic day as Tbilisi to receive city development plan

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze says that it is a historic day today, as the Tbilisi City Assembly "will confirm a general [development] plan for Tbilisi" later this afternoon.

Kaladze said that many problems have accumulated in Tbilisi over the past 20-25 years, starting from chaotic constructions to environmental and transport problems.

"The source of the problems were the absence of a systemic vision and a plan for city development," Kaladze said.

He stated that all the problems will not be settled in a day, however, the plan will become a starting point of a new approach to development in Tbilisi (*Agenda.ge, March 14, 2019*).

19. Georgian Interior Ministry arrests 29 drug dealers

The Interior Ministry of Georgia has conducted a large-scale operation and arrested 29 members of an organised group of drug dealers, Deputy Interior Minister Vladimer Bortsvadze said at today's briefing.

A criminal operation of the transportation and sale of drugs across Georgia was uncovered during an investigation that lasted several months. The drug dealers were detained in Tbilisi's Ponichala settlement (*Agenda.ge, March 15, 2019*).

20. Police seize large quantity of ecstasy

The Georgian Interior Ministry has detained a Georgian citizen for the purchase and possession of a large quantity of drugs in the country's Black Sea region of Adjara. The individual, identified only as N. G., was found to be in possession of 921 pills of ecstasy (*Agenda.ge, March 17, 2019*).

21. Two conscripts detained for financial extortion, violence

The military police of Georgia's Defence Ministry has detained two conscripts for alleged financial extortion and physical abuse of a recruit at the Krtsanisi training centre.

19-year-old recruit Kazim Gakhramov had reported earlier that several people tried to extort money from him and several others and then physically abused him (*Agenda.ge, March 16, 2019*).

22. Pilot project launched for green waste separation, collection and recycling in eastern Georgia

The waste separation, collection and recycling pilot project was launched in Marneuli, Georgia's Kvemo Kartli region.

The project aims to assist the Marneuli compost plant in improving the collection of green waste to effectively utilise the waste that currently goes into regional landfills as compost (*Agenda.ge, March 17, 2019*).

23. Warehouse catches fire in Tbilisi, one injured

The warehouse of electrical equipment caught fire in Tbilisi's Didi Digomi district last night, injuring one. State Emergency Service employees say that more than 1,800 square meters were affected.

One man suffered smoke intoxication and a fractured shin; he is being treated in hospital, but doctors say his life is not in danger.

Three explanations as to why the fire broke out have been named: negligence, outdated and faulty wiring and a violation of safety regulations.

After the firefighters fully extinguish the fire and clear the scene, specialists and police officers will enter the scene (*Agenda.ge, March 17, 2019*).

❖ Economic and Social Affairs

24. PM at Georgia-Japan business forum: "Our market is fully open, economy liberal and location strategic"

A Georgia-Japan business forum was held in Tokyo today, where Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze and Economy Minister Giorgi Kobulia introduced Japanese business society to Georgia's investment climate and business opportunities. Bakhtadze said that Georgia is remarkably attractive for international investments.

"Our market is fully open, our economy is liberal and our location is strategic", said Bakhtadze.

Bakhtadze focused on the excellent people-to-people and political relations, thereby noting that the time has come to let these extraordinary relations expand to economic interaction. Bakhtadze also talked about Georgia's potential to become a regional and global business hub (*Agenda.ge, March 15, 2019*).

25. Georgia, Japan sign deal on insurance of export and investment

Georgia and Japan have signed an agreement on the insurance of exports and investments today within the Georgia-Japan business forum held in Tokyo.

The memorandum of understanding was signed between Georgian Economy Minister Giorgi Kobulia and President of NEXI, a Japanese government corporation specialised in export credits, Musafumi Nakada.

NEXI aims to facilitate the export of Japanese goods and services, expansion of Japanese businesses overseas and the stable supply of natural resources from foreign countries through such insurance products as export credits, investments and loan insurance.

The memorandum focuses on the development and implementation of macroeconomic policy, production and manufacturing, tourism, energy, transport and logistics, telecommunications and high-tech, trade and

export facilitation, public property management, construction policy, investments (*Agenda.ge, March 15, 2019*).

26. Saudi Arabia's Flynas launches flights to Black Sea town of Batumi

Saudi Arabia's budget airline Flynas is expanding in Georgia, adding new flights to Georgia's Batumi International Airport, announces the Georgian Civil Aviation Agency.

Flynas entered Georgia last year, when launched flights from three Saudi Arabian cities of Riyadh, Dammam and Jeddah to Georgia's capital of Tbilisi. Now the airline company will launch Riyadh-Batumi-Riyadh flights.

Regular flights will be carried out from June 2 to August 31 three times a week on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays (*Agenda.ge, March 15, 2019*).

27. Georgia receives \$125m in remittances in February 2019

Georgia received \$125.5 million from abroad in February 2018, while remittances leaving Georgia totalled \$17.7 million, says the National Bank of Georgia. Last month Georgia received 10.2% more in remittances than in February of 2018.

Russia (\$31.62 million), Italy (\$17.44 million) and Greece (\$14.16 million) were the largest remittance senders in February 2019 (*Agenda.ge, March 15, 2019*).

❖ Sports and Culture

28. Tokyo display brings Georgian winemaking to virtual reality for visitors

Residents and visitors of Japan's capital Tokyo can now learn about Georgia's ancient winemaking traditions in an interactive exhibition bringing the history within touching distance of visitors.

Launched at the city's Terrada Warehouse exhibition venue, Georgia: Homeland of Wine uses Warp Square mixed reality technology to introduce the story of 8,000 years of viticulture on the territory of modern Georgia to museum-goers.

The technology connects viewers to the subject of the display using tactile interaction, enabling them to get closer to the iconic national culture.

The theme of Georgia as an ancient winemaking location is presented in Tokyo using "unique archaeological exhibits", the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia said. (*Agenda.ge, March 15, 2019*).

29. It's official now: Georgia wins Rugby Europe championship

Georgia's national rugby team has defeated Russia in the Rugby Europe championship to become the victor of the competition. The Georgian 'Lelos' handed a defeat to Russia 22 to 6 in the Russian city of Krasnodar today (*Agenda.ge, March 17, 2019*).

Additional Information

March 19, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.6840 GEL

1 GBP - 3.5539 GEL

100 RUB - 4.1590 GEL


1 EUR - 3.0458 GEL

1 TRY - 0.4912 GEL


100 JPY - 2.4078 GEL


Tuesday 19 March	Wednesday 20 March	Thursday 21 March	Friday 22 March	Saturday 23 March
				
1° 12°	3° 15°	3° 15°	4° 13°	4° 12°

 **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](#)**