

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

March 25-27

Compiled by: **Aleksandre Davitashvili**

Date: **March 28, 2019**

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Tskhinvali Region

1. **Bodies of seven victims of 2008 Russia-Georgia war returned home**

The bodies of seven Georgian citizens who died in the 2008 Russia-Georgia war have been transferred to their families after the National Forensic Bureau conducted studies.

The transfer was implemented with the help of the State Security Service and under the aegis of the International Community of the Red Cross (ICRC). The bodies were transferred from the occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region on March 19, 2019 (*Agenda.ge, March 26, 2019*).

❖ Abkhazia Region

2. **Abkhazia de facto leadership 'unhappy' with NATO Sec-Gen's statements made in Tbilisi**

The de facto leadership of Abkhazia is unhappy with statements made by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Tbilisi yesterday to the effect that Russia must withdraw its troops from Georgian territory.

The de facto Foreign Ministry of Abkhazia says that such statements by Georgian allies such as NATO, US and the west are no longer surprising.

"The statements have become part of the propagandist rhetoric of Washington and Brussels," the de facto Foreign Ministry says (*Agenda.ge, March 26, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

3. **NATO Sec-Gen in Tbilisi: hope to welcome Georgia soon into NATO, Russia must withdraw its forces from Georgia**

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg hopes Georgia can soon be welcomed into NATO, and praises the progress achieved by the country. He also urges Russia to withdraw its forces from Georgian territories. NATO-Georgia Exercise 2019 kicks off with 24 states, 350 soldiers involved

"Georgia will become a NATO member," Stoltenberg stated during a joint press conference with Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze at the Georgian government's administration building today, and underlined that it is only up to Georgia and NATO to make decisions about cooperation and partnership (*Agenda.ge, March 25, 2019*).

4. **Georgian president meets with NATO Sec-Gen, Georgian occupied territories in focus**

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili has hosted NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in the presidential residency in Tbilisi earlier today.

She stated that the two Georgian occupied territories of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) and the importance of the alliance's open door policy were key issues of the meeting.

"The NATO open door policy is the cornerstone of NATO-Georgian relations. We are happy that the open door policy continues and North Macedonia is an example," Zurabishvili said (*Agenda.ge, March 25, 2019*).

5. NATO Sec-Gen: Afghanistan no longer shelter of terrorism, the goal would be unachievable without Georgia

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg says that Afghanistan is no longer a shelter for terrorists and that the achievement of this goal would have been unimaginable without Georgia.

Stoltenberg made the statement during his meeting with Georgian soldiers who received injuries in NATO-led missions in Afghanistan at the NATO-Georgia Joint Evaluation and Training Centre near Tbilisi earlier today (*Agenda.ge, March 25, 2019*).

6. Georgia, Thailand simplify visa procedures

Visas on arrival will be available to Georgian citizens arriving in the country starting April 14, 2019. Georgian citizens will be able to spend up to 15 days in Thailand after receiving a visa on arrival at the border.

Georgian and Thai citizens, owning diplomatic and official passports, as well as office-related passports, are already exempt from visa requirements as of March 14, 2019. The agreement was signed by the countries on September 26, 2018. An official delegation from Thailand is set to visit Georgia on March 31 – April 2 (*Agenda.ge, March 25, 2019*).

7. Georgia improves maritime security by joining EU's long-range tracking system

Georgia is improving maritime security, sea-search and rescue operations as well as protection of marine ecology by joining the Long-Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT CDC) system, announces the Maritime Transport Agency of Georgia.

The objective of the system is to identify and track European Union (EU) flagged vessels worldwide and integrate them into the wider international LRIT system. Georgia passed a strict monitoring and evaluation procedure for membership in the LRIT CDC system (*Agenda.ge, March 25, 2019*).

8. ECHR says Russia must pay €20-15,000 to Georgians deported from Russia in 2006

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) stated today that Russia must pay from €2,000 to €15,000 to Georgian nationals who were mistreated by the Russian government in the autumn of 2006, when hundreds of Georgian citizens were illegally detained and then deported from Russia. The court found that 14 of the 19 applicants were unlawfully expelled from Russia.

It also held that 13 of them had faced a breach of their liberty and security rights, faced inhumane and degrading treatment and did not have access to an effective legal remedy.

On January 31, 2019 the court also announced its judgment in the case of Georgia v. Russia, regarding the arrest, detention and collective expulsion of Georgian nationals from Russia in the autumn of 2006. ECHR held by sixteen votes to one that Russia has to pay Georgia 10,000,000 euros for non-pecuniary damage suffered by a group of at least 1,500 Georgian nationals (*Agenda.ge, March 26, 2019*).

9. Georgian consulate opens in Bulgaria

A Georgian consulate has opened in the city of Blagoevgrad, in southwestern Bulgaria. A reception was held during the event, during which Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Georgia to Bulgaria Tamuna Liluashvili spoke about the particular closeness of Georgia-Bulgaria relations (*Agenda.ge, March 26, 2019*).

10. Georgia to chair Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers in November

Georgia will take over the chairmanship of Council of Europe's (CoE) Committee of Ministers for a six-month term from November 2019 to May 2020.

The chairmanship will be passed from France to Georgia at a meeting in mid-November 2019 at the CoE's Strasbourg headquarters, attended by representatives of its 47 member states (*Agenda.ge, March 27, 2019*).

11. Council of Europe's social rights committee on labour right in Georgia

- Taking notes of the information contained in the report submitted by Georgia on November 3, 2017 the Committee says that among other issues it has not established that:
- there is appropriate authority that supervises that daily and weekly working time limits are respected in practice;
- the work performed during public holidays is adequately compensated and a weekly rest period is also guaranteed;
- night workers are effectively the subject to compulsory regular medical examination;
- employees are adequately protected against discrimination on grounds of trade union membership in practice;
- trade unions are entitled to perform their activities without interferences from authorities and/or employers;
- members of police and those employed in internal affairs, customs and taxation, in judicial bodies and the office of the public prosecutor enjoy the right to organise;
- the right to collective action of workers and employers, including the right to strike, is adequately recognised;
- adequate prevention of moral (psychological) and sexual harassment in relation to the workplace is ensured (*Agenda.ge, March 27, 2019*).

12. Travellers can now walk on 'Street of Georgians' in Lithuania's capital

The visitors of Lithuania's capital city Vilnius can now walk on Georgians Street – Kartvelu Street from now on.

Georgian Ambassador to Lithuania Khatuna Salukvadze opened Kartvelu Street during the cultural days 'the Summer of the Georgian Culture in Lithuania 2019.' (*Agenda.ge, March 27, 2019*).

13. Serbia to open diplomatic representation in Georgia

A diplomatic representation of the Republic of Serbia will be opened in Georgia, announces the Parliament of Georgia.

The Speaker of the Parliament Irakli Kobakhidze met the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, in Serbia today where the officials talked about opening a diplomatic representation in Georgia. The two officials also discussed direct flights between the countries. To note, Georgia and Serbia signed visa free agreement in March 2018 (*Agenda.ge, March 27, 2019*).

14. NATO Military Committee chairman urges Russia to withdraw troops from Georgia's occupied territories

The Chairman of the NATO Military Committee has urged Russia to withdraw its troops from Georgia's occupied regions of Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) and Abkhazia, as the committee opened its meeting in Tbilisi earlier today.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach spoke at the meeting of the body that advises NATO on military matters, as he was joined by Minister of Defence of Georgia Levan Izoria and high-ranking officials and military commanders at the event.

Peach said the visit of the committee was a demonstration of support for Georgia and its territorial integrity, as the two regions are under occupation by the Russian military (*Agenda.ge, March 27, 2019*).

15. Georgian FM meets NATO Deputy Sec-Gen, attends NATO-Georgia Commission meeting

During his visit Minister Zalkaliani addressed the meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission as well. At the meeting the participants discussed Georgia's role and practical engagement in ensuring Black Sea security (*Agenda.ge, March 27, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

16. Social Workers Go on Strike, Demand Better Working Conditions

Hundreds of social workers across the country went on strike on March 25, demanding higher wages and more resources to improve their working conditions. The protest follows series of unsuccessful negotiations with the Ministry of Healthcare.

The strikers, employees of the Social Service Agency, have a list of six demands from the authorities; they want to increase of what they say is one of the lowest public salaries in the country. They also want the authorities to hire more social workers, buy vehicles for social service centers, and add more psychologists and lawyers (*Agenda.ge, March 25, 2019*).

17. Georgian Dream ruling party names candidates for Mtatsminda MP and mayoral by-elections

The Georgian Dream ruling party has named a candidate for Tbilisi Mtatsminda district MP and mayors in five cities - Zugdidi, Marneuli, Zestaponi, Tchiatura and Khulo. **The by elections are scheduled for May 19.**

Doctor Lado Kakhadze has been nominated for Mtsatsminda MP. The seat became vacant after the election of Salome Zurabishvili as the president of Georgia.

- Zestaponi, Tchiatura and Khulo mayors resigned last year, while Zugdidi Mayor Lasha Gogia resigned due to a financial scandal in 2018 and was later detained on bribe-related charges, while Marneuli Mayor Temur Abazov left the post after a video reflecting inhumane treatment [on his order] went viral.
- Givi Modebadze: Tchiatura - acting mayor of Tchiatura. He is an economist in profession.
- Giorgi Goglichidze: Zestaponi - a member of Zestaponi City Assembly between 2006 and 2010. He is a lawyer by profession.
- Giorgi Shengelaia: Zugdidi - vice Mayor of Zugdidi. He is an Economist by profession.
- Vakhtang Beridze: Khulo - deputy mayor of Khulo. He is a Lawyer by profession.

- Zaur Dargali: Marneuli / deputy governor of Kvemo Kartli. He is an English language specialist (*Agenda.ge, March 25, 2019*).

18. Central Election Commission to spend 4,466,910 GEL on by-elections

The Central Election Commission of Georgia will spend 4,466,910 GEL (about \$1663653.59/€1473572.85) on parliamentary and mayoral by-elections that will be held on May 19, 2019.

2,664,104 GEL will be allocated to salaries of those employed in the election process. 724,192 GEL is for services and goods, while political parties will receive 770,400 GEL in funding. 1,078,614 GEL will be spent on other expenses (*Agenda.ge, March 26, 2019*).

19. Three detained for membership in 'criminal underworld', 'requesting help from criminal bosses'

The Georgian Interior Ministry has detained three individuals for 'membership in the criminal underworld' and 'requesting help from criminal bosses to settle a dispute'.

The ministry stated that one of the detainees, who had a dispute with his business partner, appealed to two members of the criminal underworld to settle the dispute in his favour, with the help of a Georgian criminal boss living abroad, Zaal Makharoblidze.

On the phone, the two individuals and Makharoblidze tried to exercise pressure on the business partner of one of the detainees to make him refuse his own shares in their activities (*Agenda.ge, March 26, 2019*).

20. Former ruling party MP says ex-colleague accidentally sent negative message about her

Former member of the Georgian Dream ruling party Eka Beselia, who is now opposing her former party members regarding court-related issues, says that a current member of the ruling party Mamuka Mdinardze mistakenly sent her a message which included swearwords about her.

"When I received the message on WhatsApp I immediately guessed that it was not for me. The message, I guess, was for members of the ruling party, telling them what they should say about me so that their statements would be similar," Beselia said.

Mdinardze confirmed that he mistakenly sent the message to Beselia, but it was not a common message for Georgian Dream members.

"Such things happen very often. I was writing to one of my colleagues and sent her the message mistakenly. I am thinking too much about Beselia these days and this could be the reason for the mistake," Mdinardze said (*Agenda.ge, March 26, 2019*).

21. One detained for uploading private footage of Georgian politician on YouTube

One person has been detained for uploading the private footage of a Georgian politician on YouTube late yesterday, Deputy Interior Minister Natia Mezvrishvili said.

She stated that the individual had no private motivation to upload the video, and, consequently, the crime had no client.

"An ordinary citizen has been detained for uploading the footage," Mezvrishvili said.

She stated that the opposition encourages the crime when they say that particular offences related to private footage are less serious (*Agenda.ge, March 27, 2019*).

22. Shepherd accused of brutal murder of Smith family sentenced to life in prison

Malkhaz Kobauri, accused of brutally murdering the Smith family in eastern Georgia in the summer of last year, has been sentenced to life imprisonment. He and his family members reacted with protest to the prison term, calling it 'unfair' (*Agenda.ge, March 27, 2019*).

23. Georgian PM says some Georgian regions facing environmental challenges

The lead level in children's blood and water quality were the main topics of the Intersectoral Coordination Council session headed by Georgian PM Mamuka Bakhtadze on March 26.

Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze said some Georgian regions are facing important environmental problems adding that water quality also remains one of the most important challenges.

"All this requires active steps to be made by us," PM Mamuka Bakhtadze said. Lead exposure is an important public health problem that causes cumulative toxicity in multiple body systems, Georgian National Center for Disease Control reports (*Agenda.ge, March 27, 2019*).

24. Interior Ministry says it met nearly all recommendations of Public Defender

The ministry says that it:

- Provided medical service in many of its temporary detention facilities. From 29 facilities the medical service is now available in 17. The service will be provided in the remaining detention centers this year.
- 213 police departments and stations around Georgia have been equipped with cameras. 1,188 cameras were added in 2018 and video recording is possible now in all the temporary detention facilities. The video monitoring system were completely renewed in six temporary detention centers last year and the process will continue this year.
- 2,500 modern arm cameras have been purchased for patrol police employees with longer record time and quality.
- A maximal number of the people in temporary detention facilities has been specified, with each detainee must have at least four-square meters of individual space.
- Chkhorotsku, Tsalka, Akhalkalaki, Mtskheta, Poti and Samtredia temporary detention facilities have been renovated and etc (*Agenda.ge, March 27, 2019*).

25. Tbilisi Mayor Kaladze provides information on upcoming taxi reforms

Mayor of Tbilisi Kakha Kaladze spoke about upcoming taxi reforms in Tbilisi at a city administration meeting today.

Kaladze said taxi licenses will be divided into A and B categories. Category B license owners will not be obliged to repaint their vehicles, nor will they have to install lights on their vehicles.

Category B license holders will be permitted to work for taxi applications such as Taxify or Uber and provide their services to the Tbilisi population; they will not be allowed to take a passenger directly from the street (*Agenda.ge, March 27, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

26. Georgian wine showcased at French festival

Georgian wine has been showcased at the annual festival of wines and gastronomy Salon Bacchus in Toulon, France, announces the National Wine Agency of Georgia.

About 11 Georgian wine producing companies were represented at the festival. More than 30,000 people visited the three-days exhibition that was held on March 22 – 24 (*Agenda.ge, March 25, 2019*).

27. Georgian wine masterclass held in Japan

Sommeliers, distributors, restaurant and hospitality sector representatives attended a Georgian wine masterclass held in the Japanese city of Naha, announces the National Wine Agency of Georgia.

About 60 guests attended the masterclass, where they had the opportunity to taste seven varieties of Georgian wine. An exhibition called 'Georgia – Homeland of Wine' is taking place in the Japanese capital of Tokyo (*Agenda.ge, March 26, 2019*).

28. Georgia's Myway Airlines launches flights to Zhukovsky Airport near Moscow

Georgia's Myway Airlines will conduct regular flights from Tbilisi to Zhukovsky, Russia starting April 26, 2019 until the end of the summer aviation season.

Zhukovsky is a city located 40 kilometers south-east of Moscow, and is serviced by train and bus connections from and to the city centre.

Direct flights will initially be carried out three times a week while the number will grow to four from July 1 – September 9 (*Agenda.ge, March 25, 2019*).

29. 142 former prisoners receive business grants from Justice Ministry

The Georgian Justice Ministry, with the partnership of the charity Apkhazeti, has allocated funds for 142 former prisoners between 2013 and 2019 to help them start businesses (*Agenda.ge, March 26, 2019*).

30. New 500 million GEL green city will be built in Black Sea town of Kobuleti

A multifunctional green city will be built in Georgia's Black Sea resort town of Kobuleti, bringing 500 million GEL (about \$185.53m/€ 164.60m) European investments to the region.

"This will be the largest investment ever made in Adjara, in our touristic infrastructure. We are talking about the construction of a new green city that will become a calling card for all of Georgia", said Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze who presented the project today (*Agenda.ge, March 27, 2019*).

❖ Sports and Culture

31. Teenage driver Sandro Tavartkiladze claims Asian Formula Renault win on debut

Georgian teenage racing driver Sandro Tavartkiladze marked his promotion to the Asian Formula Renault Series with a victory in the opening round of the championship in China last weekend.

The 19-year-old won the opening race of the season in Zhuhai Circuit, held in treacherous weather, to mark his entrance into the championship promoted as the "cornerstone of formula racing in the Asia region" (*Agenda.ge, March 26, 2019*).

Additional Information

February 18, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.6956 GEL

1 GBP - 3.5574 GEL








100 RUB - 4.1594 GEL

1 EUR - 3.0412 GEL

1 TRY - 0.4964 GEL

100 JPY - 2.4428 GEL

Thursday 28 March	Friday 29 March	Saturday 30 March	Sunday 31 March	Monday 1 April
				
2° 13°	2° 10°	1° 8°	3° 7°	3° 7°

-  **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](#)**