

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

April 4-7

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## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Abkhazia Region

#### 1. Breakaway Abkhazia to reintroduce the death penalty for drug crime from 2020

The de facto parliament of breakaway Abkhazia has adopted a new law which imposes tougher punishments for selling large quantities of drugs, including life sentence and even death penalty.

The law also provides for other draconian measures against drug-related crimes, including abolishing the right to pardon and the rule of early release, as well as barring the person's from occupying public offices within three years of release.

Under the new law, driving a car while high also qualifies as a criminal offense. The sentence for this will be a fine of 600,000 rubles (USD 9,200) and being stripped of the right to occupy a public office for one year (*DFWatch.net, April 5, 2019*).

#### 2. Georgian citizen illegally detained by occupying forces near Abkhazia

Georgian citizen Gela Rostobaia was detained by occupying forces for "illegally crossing" the so-called border in the village of Shamgona, near Georgia's occupied region of Abkhazia. Rostobaia, 39, was detained while fishing in the Enguri River yesterday, his father said.

The occupying forces in the two Russia-controlled Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali have detained 327 Georgian citizens for "illegally crossing the border" between 2017 and 2019, the Georgian State Security Service says (*Agenda.ge, April 6, 2019*).

## ❖ Foreign Affairs

#### 3. NATO to 'Deter and Defend' against Russia in the Black Sea – officials

The ways to continue building "deterrence and defense against Russian aggression," among others in Georgia and Ukraine, will be among the major issues at the NATO Foreign Ministerial held in Washington D.C. on April 3-4, United States Permanent Representative to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchison said in her news briefing on April 1.

"We must make sure that all of the NATO countries that live in the Black Sea and around the Black Sea are also under our security umbrella," she said, speaking of the "Black Sea initiative," which is aimed "for the deterrence of Russia," as well as to make it "stop the destabilization of the Ukraine."

"Georgia is one of our primary partners that we want to work with to protect from any further incursion by Russia," Ambassador also said.

At a news briefing on April 2, Hutchison expanded on the topic, noting that the Black Sea initiative considers air surveillance as well as more of the NATO ships going into the Black Sea "to ensure that

there is a safe passage from Ukrainian vessels through the Kerch Strait, the Sea of Azov." (*Civil.ge*, April 3, 2019).

#### **4. FM Zalkaliani on NATO-Georgia relations, Black Sea security**

Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani participated in a discussion dedicated to the seventieth anniversary of NATO on the sidelines of the NATO Foreign Ministerial on April 3 in the United States.

Minister Zalkaliani reiterated that the European Union and NATO integration remains among Georgia's key foreign policy priorities.

"Georgia is recognised as a frontrunner among other aspirant countries and today Georgia is absolutely different than it was ten years ago, which demonstrates significant change in its state institutions, in building vibrant democratic society, in liberal market economy and free media – all of this we see in the context of NATO integration", Zalkaliani added (*Agenda.ge*, April 4, 2019).

#### **5. NATO Sec-General: we stepped up support for Georgia, Ukraine**

"We have stepped up support for our close partners, Georgia and Ukraine, sovereign nations with the sovereign right to choose their own path", NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated during the joint meeting of the United States Congress in Washington on Wednesday.

"We do all of this not to provoke a conflict. But to prevent a conflict. And to preserve the peace. Not to fight, but to deter. Not to attack, but to defend," Stoltenberg said.

Stoltenberg's speech focused on the bond between Europe and North America, the enduring strength of the NATO Alliance and the importance of unity in an unpredictable world (*Agenda.ge*, April 4, 2019).

#### **6. NATO FMs agree to strengthen support for Georgia, Ukraine**

NATO Foreign Ministers have agreed on a package of measures to improve the Alliance's situational awareness in the Black Sea region and strengthen support for its partners – Georgia and Ukraine.

We agreed on a package of measures to improve our situational awareness and to step up our support for both Georgia and Ukraine in areas such as the training of maritime forces and coast guards, port visits and exercises and sharing information", NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said.

The NATO Secretary General believes "this will build on our already close cooperation".

Stoltenberg spoke of the security situation in the Black Sea region at a press conference following the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Foreign Ministers' session in Washington DC.

"Right now, one of NATO's naval groups is on patrol in the Black Sea and today, it is exercising with Ukrainian and Georgian ships", Stoltenberg said. "So we will maintain our focus, and our presence in this vital region", he added.

Jens Stoltenberg is in Washington with foreign ministers from all 29 allied states to mark the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Washington Treaty, NATO's founding document, in 1949 (*Agenda.ge*, April 4, 2019).

#### **7. Georgia purchased all US anti-tank Javelin missiles required and they are in Georgia**

Georgian Defence Minister Levan Izoria says that Georgia has already purchased all US anti-tank Javelin missiles which were required for the country and all of them have been transported to Georgia.

"Now we have launched the purchase of anti-tank systems," Izoria said.

He stated that the US and Georgia have jointly provided 18 million USD for the renovation of helicopters this year. First Javelins were brought to Georgia in 2017.

## **8. NATO former Sec-Gen Rasmussen: not granting MAP to Georgia in 2008 was a mistake**

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, former Secretary General of NATO, says that not granting the Membership Action Plan to Georgia in 2008 "was a mistake."

"At the insistence of Germany and France, we decided to postpone that decision until the end of the year. In my view, that was a mistake. Just months after our summit, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev ordered the invasion of Georgia, and Russia has occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia ever since," he said in his letter dedicated to the 70th anniversary of NATO.

He said that NATO member states "should move beyond offering warm words" about the democratic will of the Georgian and Ukrainian people, and acknowledge the disruptive role that "Kremlin paranoia is playing" in the accession process (*Agenda.ge, April 5, 2019*).

## **9. Georgian, Spanish police detain Georgians in joint operation**

A large scale operation with the involvement of Georgian police was conducted on April 4 in Barcelona, Spain which resulted in the arrest of 25 Georgian citizens.

In total, more than 100 arrests were made, with most individuals accused of robbing flats and membership in an organized criminal group.

41 Georgian citizens were also arrested for the violation of immigration regulations. The criminals had illegally occupied a school building where the special operation was later conducted. Stolen items and large amounts of money were seized from the flats where the criminals lived (*Agenda.ge, April 5, 2019*).

## **10. Georgia joins Landmine Free South Caucasus campaign**

For the first time this year International Mine Awareness week is being marked in the South Caucasus with region-wide campaign. The campaign is running in various place in the South Caucasus countries, including Georgia. Under the slogan "Landmine Free South Caucasus" events are being held at various locations between April 4-10 (*Agenda.ge, April 6, 2019*).

## **❖ Internal Affairs**

### **11. TV Interview: Saakashvili on oponents, policies and future**

Former President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili gave an extensive interview to Rustavi 2 TV talkshow "Accents of the Week" on April 2, touching upon the multitude of matters pertaining to Georgia's domestic and foreign policy.

**On Ivanishvili:** *"we should have grabbed him and shown him out of the country"*

#### **Government of Georgia**

Saakashvili spoke dismissively of the current cabinet, saying he barely remembers the name of the Prime Minister, but had special treatment reserved for Tea Tsulukiani, the Minister of Justice, who he characterized as "evil embodied", claiming she works to put the Georgian military on trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague.

**Russia-Georgia:** *Russia is not interested in a new provocation*

#### **Plans in Georgia**

"I will come to my vineyards, will gather my first harvest and perhaps, afterwards, I could become a mayor of Kvareli [a town in Kakheri region of Georgia], maybe I'd go to Lazika [deep-sea port on Black Sea shore, named Lazika by Saakashvili's administration and renamed into Anaklia, during Ivanishvili's

administration] and become mayor there...perhaps I won't run for any office, will consult a young and active government... How could Misha Saakashvili crave the spot of Bakhtadze? Being the mayor of Lazika seems to me a better way to serve people, than sitting in Bakhtadze's cabinet," former president said.

**Drug policy:** *No need for prison terms, but smoking pot "makes stupid"*

**Sex tapes:** we never used them

**Robakidze and Girgvliani cases:** *"mistake not to fire Vano [Merabishvili]" (Summnerized by Civil.ge, April 4, 2019).*

### **12. Gov't vows treatment, plan to decrease lead levels in affected children**

The Georgian Health Ministry will create a programme to help children with high lead levels in their blood and will also provide a long-term plan to combat the problem, head of the National Centre for Disease Control Amiran Gamkrelidze said.

He stated that the first, large research study was conducted last year in Georgia when 1,578 children, selected randomly, were tested for lead.

The results of the research will be available on April 20. However, as we already have preliminary results, environmentalists and doctors have been sent to the families for additional checks where the tests confirmed higher levels of lead in children," Gamkrelidze said.

He stated that the additional checks will identify the source of lead pollution, which is "crucially important" in the fight against the problem (*Agenda.ge, April 4, 2019*).

### **13. Three Russian citizens detained for online drug trafficking in Georgia**

The Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs has uncovered an online drug trafficking scheme and detained three drug dealers who are the citizens of Russia, announces the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The detainees were a group of organised drug dealers who came to Georgia to sell drugs. They were packaging the drugs in small packs, hiding them at different addresses in Tbilisi, taking photos of the drugs and posting them on the internet to sell them", says the ministry. The crime is punishable by eight to 20 years in prison or life imprisonment (*Agenda.ge, April 4, 2019*).

### **14. One detained for paying bribe to Signagi City Hall official**

Officers of the Anti-Corruption Agency of the State Security Service of Georgia have arrested an individual, identified only as Beka Kh for giving a bribe. The detainee is a cultural events organizer.

Beka Kh. contacted the head of the culture, education, sports and youth Service of the Signaghi Municipality City Hall and offered to organise a concert with the finances of Signagi City Hall. He offered 2,500 GEL in exchange for the agreement and transferred it electronically (*Agenda.ge, April 4, 2019*).

### **15. Georgian far-right groups reach agreement about forming new political party**

Georgian March leader Sandro Bregadze said on Friday that the group has reached an agreement with other nationalistic organizations about merging and setting up a new political movement.

Bregadze, who in 2014-2016 held an office of Deputy Minister of Diaspora Affairs, said the new coalition, National Front, would be similar to Marine Le Pen's Front National of France, which was renamed National Rally last year.

"We will take part in absolutely all political processes. We hope that nationalist forces will succeed in the [upcoming] election," Bregadze said.

One of the first initiatives of the new coalition would be to demand to reintroduce a section in the Georgian passport which specifies an individual's ethnicity, which was customary in Soviet and post-Soviet passports.

More details about the new coalition will be released after it holds a mass convention 'in the near future', Bregadze said (*DFWatch.net, April 6, 2019*).

#### **16. Eight injured in Tbilisi gas explosion, investigation underway**

Eight people including a seven-month-old child have been injured in an explosion in Tbilisi's Digomi district this morning.

The explosion happened on the fourth floor of a five-storey residential building, allegedly because of a gas leak. An investigation is looking into violations of safety procedures.

Healthcare Minister Davit Sergeenko said the health condition of the injured is "average". He said they have been taken to different hospitals and doctors are sparing no efforts to help them recover. Local authorities will accommodate those affected by the explosion (*Agenda.ge, April 7, 2019*).

## **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

#### **17. Georgia striving to launch direct flights with the United States**

The Ministry of Economy of Georgia is working on an economic study to find a company that will launch flights between Georgia and the United States, says the Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze.

"Relations between Georgia and USA are at all times high and I strongly believe that it is important to launch direct flights between the two countries", said Bakhtadze at a regular press briefing held prior to the executive government meeting today. Bakhtadze said that the Ministry of Economy will complete the study "in a few weeks" (*Agenda.ge, April 4, 2019*).

#### **18. South Korea to resume Seoul-Tbilisi charter flights in May**

The South Korean flag carrier Korean Air will resume its charter flight on the route Seoul-Tbilisi-Seoul from May 30. In summer the airline will perform charter flights from Tbilisi International Airport. Korean Air performed its first charter flight on the route Seoul-Tbilisi last May, the operator company of Tbilisi and Batumi International Airports - TAV Georgia said (*Agenda.ge, April 4, 2019*).

#### **19. Passenger traffic up by 21% at Georgian airports in Jan-March 2019**

Georgia's three international airports served 1,014,732 passengers in January-March 2019, which is a 21% increase in comparison to last year, says the United Airports of Georgia.

More specifically:

- Tbilisi International Airport served 804,673 passengers - a 11% increase y/y
- Kutaisi International Airport served 156,784 passengers – 101% increase
- Batumi International Airport served 51,916 passengers – 41% increase (*Agenda.ge, April 5, 2019*).

#### **20. Q1 of 2019: Georgia earns \$47 mln by exporting 19.4 mln bottles of wine**

Georgia exported about 19.4 million bottles of wine to 37 countries in the first quarter (Q1) of 2019, which is a 10% increase compared to the same period of 2018, announces the Georgian National Wine Agency.

*The top five countries that imported the most bottles of Georgian wine in January-February 2019 were:*

- *Russia – 13,279,083 bottles*
- *Ukraine – 1,419,222 bottles*
- *China – 1,372,839 bottles*
- *Poland – 1,032,400 bottles*
- *Kazakhstan – 560,460 bottles*

In total, Georgia has sold \$67.7 million worth of alcoholic beverages in the Q1 of 2019, including wine, brandy, chacha and others (*Agenda.ge, April 5, 2019*).

### **21. Number of tourists visiting Georgia increases 4.3% in March 2019**

Georgia hosted 328,486 tourists in March 2019, showing an increase of 4.3% year-on-year (y/y) announces the Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA).

During January-March of 2019 Georgia hosted 1,617,548 international visitors, that is 2.2% year-on-year increase, says the GNTA (*Agenda.ge, April 5, 2019*).

### **22. 217 residential areas will be supplied with natural gas in 2019-2022**

The government of Georgia is continuing to provide natural gas supply to areas of the country where natural gas is still not available. About 217 areas will be gasified in 2019-2022, announces the government of Georgia.

“As a result, over 1,200,000 subscribers will have access to the natural gas, meaning that about 85% of Georgia’s population will be provided with the natural gas”, read the press release published by the government of Georgia (*Agenda.ge, April 5, 2019*).

### **23. World Bank projects 4.6% economic growth in Georgia in 2019**

The World Bank forecasts 4.6% economic growth in Georgia in 2019, 4.8% in 2020 and 5% in 2021, shows the Europe and Central Asia Economic Update of the World Bank.

As for Georgia’s neighbouring countries, Armenia will experience 4.2% economic growth, Azerbaijan – 3.3% growth, Russia – 1.4% growth and Turkey – 1% growth.

Another report of the World Bank which was published in January 2019 said that the Georgian economy would grow 5% in 2019, 5% in 2020 and again 5% in 2020 (*Agenda.ge, April 5, 2019*).

### **24. First Mechanized Parking Opening in Georgia**

The first two-stage mechanized park opening in Georgia was held on Wednesday, April 3, at 16: 00, at King David’s multifunctional complex.

The event is attended Tbilisi City Hall, representatives of banking leasing sector, King David Business Center

Tenants and residents of King David Residences.

Rezid Holding GmbH Director General will open the ceremony with an official announcement and the demonstration of mechanized parking will be arranged on the site. Within the meeting, Rezid Holding GmbH and Yongxin Industry Group Limited will sign a contract about purchasing of three-storey parking.















King David is the first development project that in response to the challenges in the city, solved the problem of autoparking, by creating multi-level mechanized parking lots. Currently King David's multifunctional complex is equipped with 296 parking lot and the total number of autoparking will reach 605 after mechanical parking (CBW.Ge, April 5, 2019).








### **Additional Information**

#### April 8, 2019

##### OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.6903 GEL	1 GBP - 3.5168 GEL	100 RUB -4.1142 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0212 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4811 GEL	100 JPY - 2.4076 GEL

Friday 5 April 12-18	Saturday 6 April 12-18	Sunday 7 April 10-16	Monday 8 April 10-16	Tuesday 9 April 10-16	Wednesday 10 April 10-16	Thursday 11 April 10-16
						
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-  **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](#)**