

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

April 8-10

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. Occupied Abkhazia to strip Georgian citizens of right to inheritance

The so-called parliament of Georgia's occupied region of Abkhazia has passed a bill in its first reading which strips a group of Georgian citizens of their right to receive their inheritance in the region.

The bill says that the "offspring of those who fought against the sovereignty of Abkhazia, took part in military operations or supported the occupying force [referring to the central Georgian government] will not have the right to receive inheritance in Abkhazia".

Georgian Minister of Reconciliation and Civil Equality Ketevan Tsikhelashvili says that the decision is the continuation of the occupation policy (*Agenda.ge, April 10, 2019*).

❖ Tskhinvali Region (*so called South Ossetia*)

2. Airbnb continues to allow listings in Russian occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali

Airbnb will continue to allow listings throughout the two occupied regions of Georgia Abkhazia and South Ossetia, announces the Airbnb.

Earlier this year, Airbnb announced it would remove listings in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but "today, Airbnb is announcing that we have settled all lawsuits that were brought by hosts and potential hosts and guests who objected to the policy the company recently announced concerning listings in disputed areas." (*Agenda.ge, April 10, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

3. 3rd Georgian battalion completes US-Georgia designed, executed trainings

The 13th battalion of the 3rd Infantry Brigade of Georgia is the third Georgian battalion which has completed trainings within the joint US and Georgian Defence Readiness Programme (GDRP). The trainings took place for 13 weeks with the help of American and Georgian instructors.

"Now the battalion is ready to carry out various tasks at a top level," the Georgian Defence Ministry reported (*Agenda.ge, April 8, 2019*).

4. Georgian Foreign Ministry on why 2 Georgian sailors are unable to leave Libya

The Georgian Foreign Ministry has responded to a briefing of the family members of two Georgian sailors who have been unable to leave Libya for two months, saying that the restriction is related to legal procedures and the death of another Georgian sailor back in January.

Georgian sailor David Razmadze went missing from the Turkish ship MV Dogan Bey in Libya while on night guard on January 7, 2019.

He was found dead by law enforcement officers on January 21 and was transported to Georgia on March 5 (*Agenda.ge, April 8, 2019*).

5. PM Bakhtadze responds to CoE lawmakers at PACE Q&A session

PM Bakhtadze responded to a number of questions from legislators of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on his country's domestic and foreign policy yesterday.

"We are trying to make Georgia a regional hub for international business, tourism, logistics and education," Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze said at the Q&A session.

As to whether Georgia will become "a fully democratic" state, PM Bakhtadze said that with last year's presidential elections, which was a "historical milestone" for the Georgian people, the country has moved to a "parliamentary democracy".

PM Bakhtadze also said that "the role of parliament has never been so strong in Georgia" while the relations and communication between the legislative and executive branches "has never been so intense" (*Agenda.ge, April 10, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

6. Omega Case: Gov't to appeal against decision of Stockholm Arbitration relating to Omega Group

The Georgian government is going to appeal against the decision made by the International Arbitration Institute of Stockholm Chamber of Commerce Stockholm in the Omega Group case, according to which the Georgian government has been banned from enforcing the judgment of the Tbilisi City Court.

Omega Group faces more than 50 million GEL in debt to the state, while its debt to the Bank of Georgia exceeds 84 million GEL.

The business says that under the Georgian Dream leadership its cigarette company OGT suffered \$100 million in losses after multinational company British American Tobacco, "which was lobbied by the Georgian Dream government officials", violated the laws on competition and tobacco control.

The corporation says that they had to take loans to cover their necessary expenses for the corporation's staff and their dues to the state, however, they failed to meet their financial obligations.

Omega Group says that they appealed to the government in 2017 to have their debt restructured, "but the government ignored the problem" which led to a further increase in financial debt and the interest rate (*Agenda.ge, April 8, 2019*).

7. Ivanishvili Calls for Unity, 'Rational' Thinking in Written Statement

The founder and leader of the ruling Georgian Dream party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, released a written statement on April 8, calling for unity and “rational, cool-headed” thinking against “speculations of revanchist forces.”

Ivanishvili opened the address by speaking about the tragedy of April 9, 1989, when Soviet Special Forces dispersed a crowd of peaceful protesters on Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi, killing 21 people.

The ruling party leader said the day “determined the fate of the Georgian nation and the future of our country.” “Freeing Georgia from the claws of the Soviet empire and achieving Georgia’s independence and freedom was the very grand national idea that brought the entire nation together [on April 9],” he noted (*Civil.ge, April 8, 2019*).

8. 30 years since tragic events of April 9 when Soviet troops killed Georgians demanding country’s independence

Georgia remembers those who lost their lives when Moscow-directed Soviet tanks dispersed a peaceful demonstration demanding independence for Georgia 30 years ago, killing at least 20 people in the process and injuring hundreds of others. Many of those killed on 9 April 1989 were in between the ages of 16 and 31. Click [here](#) to read the full history behind the April 9 tragedy (*Agenda.ge, April 9, 2019*).

9. Georgian officials, public pay tribute to victims of April 9 tragedy

Today Georgia remembers the people who died while Soviet troops dispersed a peaceful rally in support of Georgian independence in Tbilisi on April 9, 1989. Earlier today, family of victims, ordinary citizens and officials gathered at the April 9 memorial.

Georgian and Lithuanian choirs held a concert within the framework of the international choral music festival and paid tribute to the memory of those killed on April 9, 1989 (*Agenda.ge, April 9, 2019*).

10. Avlabari presidential palace in Tbilisi to be used for high-level ceremonies, receptions

The major building of the Avlabari presidential palace in central Tbilisi, built under the United National Movement leadership, will be used for high-level receptions and ceremonies, head of the Presidential Administration Lasha Zhvania told the media earlier today.

“The palace will be renamed as the palace for state ceremonies,” Zhvania said.

Zurabishvili is expected to receive guests at the Avlabari presidential palace later today, at the event dedicated to the 28th anniversary of the signing of the act of independence of Georgia on April 9, 1991 (*Agenda.ge, April 9, 2019*).

11. Public Attitudes in TI Georgia’s Opinion Survey

Elections, politics

- According to the survey, 45% of respondents believe that the 2020 Parliamentary elections should be held through fully proportional representation.
- Asked about the 2018 presidential elections, 48% of respondents said the elections were unfair, while 40% assessed the elections as fair.
- 37% reported that there was vote-buying during the elections, while majority of respondents said there were no facts of voter intimidation.

- 63% of respondents welcomed the government's decision to write off citizens' bad debts ahead of the Presidential elections.
- 80% of respondents said a new political force has to emerge in Georgian politics.

Foreign policy

- Asked about the foreign policy orientation of the incumbent government, 27% of respondents said the Georgian Dream authorities are pursuing pro-Western agenda; 16% think it is pro-Russian and 41% consider that it is trying to maintain equally good relations with both Russia and the West.
- 46% of respondents said the Russian Federation is an occupying power and the country should not have good relations with Moscow until deoccupation of its territories. 44% of respondents think Russia and Georgia have many things in common, and should therefore have good relations.

Bank regulations, new pensions scheme

- 64% of respondents noted that recently-introduced loan restrictions have created some problems to them (out of those who said they applied for such loans).
- 53% of respondents said they disapprove the new pension savings scheme, and only 20% said they endorse it.

Media, social networks

- The opinion survey showed that 36% of respondents are aware that there are social media pages propagating fake news. 15% of them believe it is the authorities who are standing behind such pages, while 10% think the pages are run by the opposition.
- Majority of respondents said they mostly watch Rustavi 2 TV and Imedi TV. 55% think Imedi TV is pro-governmental and 18% say the same about Georgian Public Broadcaster. 63% of respondents claim Rustavi 2 TV is pro-opposition.
- Asked whether the government interferes in media, only 8% of respondents gave a negative answer. 31% of respondents said the authorities interfere "all the time," and 43% said they interfere "sometimes." (*Civil.ge, April 9, 2019*).

12. Bidzina Ivanishvili speaks about risk of confrontation controlled by external forces

"Our unadvised government "managed" not to avoid the war in 2008, we received a lot of IDPs and a very ruined economy," - Bidzina Ivanishvili, the Chairman of the Georgian Dream party, said in his interview with Imedi TV. Bidzina Ivanishvili made this statement while speaking about the impact of external forces and noted that unity is the main thing in this direction. According to him, majority of the mistakes made by Georgia were triggered by a lack of experience. Bidzina Ivanishvili also noted that the risk of confrontation controlled by external forces is not less today than it was in the past. (*lpn.ge, April 9, 2019*).

13. Ivanishvili about TBC Bank case: Such rough transactions were not made even under Russia's wild environment

"There are no questions, but the opponents do not calm down. They are making focus on why the investigation was opened after 10-11 years and not why this transaction was made, which is too rough. I cannot imagine rougher transaction in the banking sector than it was ," Bidzina Ivanishvili said.

To the question, why the investigation launched 7 years after the Georgian Dream came into power, former prime minister replied that the investigation opened after Giorgi Kadagidze left the post of the President of the National Bank of Georgia and Koba Gvenetadze took the office (*lpn.ge, April 9, 2019*).

14. Bidzina Ivanishvili: Khazaradze should recall that when they could not obtain enough capital for the Anaklia project, I was ready to give him 70 million as a gift

"I was ready to give him 70 million as a gift for the project, but then Abdushelishvili showed up, who has a share in this business, and his money was healthier than the money given as a gift. So my money was not necessary any more, although I was ready to give him money, since I wanted implementation of this project so badly. They cannot deny this," said the chairman of the Georgian Dream.

Ivanishvili added that the state is very interested in implementing the Anaklia port project, but it is difficult for the private business to do, as it will bring profit only a few decades later (*lpn.ge, April 9, 2019*).

15. Bidzina Ivanishvili: They started talking about the bad court after six years, where had they been before that?

"They started worrying about the court after six years. They remembered that they don't like this kind of court only after six years. Where have they been when we adopted the constitution? By the way, it is a very good constitution, a European kind of constitution, which concerns the court, the Council of Justice, election of judges and they voted for all this", Ivanishvili said in his interview with Imedi TV (*lpn.ge, April 9, 2019*).

16. Bidzina Ivanishvili: Murusidze and Chinchaladze - these names and their negative image come from the National Movement and the NGOs led by them

"Apparently, Murusidze-Chinchaladze's names were chosen by the National Movement and not by us. We did not know these names and the Georgian Dream members have never focused on them. We have heard these names when allegations were publicly made against them. All these names and their negative image come from the National Movement and the NGOs led by them. The reason is that they have lost influence on the court and they are trying to get it back," Bidzina Ivanishvili said (*lpn.ge, April 10, 2019*).

17. Gia Khukhashvili: Bidzina Ivanishvili is politically depressed

Bidzina Ivanishvili is in an opposite reality, - expert Gia Khukhashvili told InterPressNews when assessing Bidzina Ivanishvili's interview. He is politically depressed, he wants people to love him.

"Throughout the interview, he said black about white and vice versa. He is not in an objective reality. Moreover, he is in the opposite reality. He is politically depressed and wants people to love.," Khukhashvili said (*lpn.ge, April 10, 2019*).

18. Eka Beslia: Bidzina Ivanishvili is angry because he could not silence us down

«Mikheil Saakashvili could not hush me up, when my teenager son and my brother were charged. That was done in order to hush me up. Now Bidzina Ivanishvili wants me to be silent. Sorry, but when it comes to fairness, ideals and future of this country, I will not be silent even for the sake of my son and brother, even though I do not have anyone more precious than them. He is mad today and tells things differently. We are the same, but he has changed his vision," Eka Beselia said (*lpn.ge, April 10, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

19. New factory to produce electric cars in Georgia from 2020

Georgia will start producing electric cars that will be appear on local as well as EU markets starting in 2020, announced the Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze.

One of the world's largest electric car manufacturers, the Changan Corporation, will construct a production factory in the western Georgian city of Kutaisi.

Production capacity of the plant will be 40,000 cars a year, out of which 50% will be designated for the domestic market, while 20,000 cars will be exported to the European Union (EU)", said Bakhtadze (*Agenda.ge, April 8, 2019*).

20. TBC Bank Acquires Uzbekistani Payment Platform

Georgian universal bank TBC Bank has agreed to acquire more than half of LLC Inspired, a leading payment platform in Uzbekistan trading under the name Payme.

TBC will spend \$5.5m in cash on the 51% stake, implying a valuation of \$10.8m for Payme, which will be satisfied with the group's own funds. The FTSE 250 resident expects the transaction to close before the end of April (*CBW.GE, April 10, 2019*).

❖ Sports and Culture

21. President of Karate Federation accused of fraud

President of the National Karate Federation of Georgia Kakha B. has been accused of fraud by the State Security Service of Georgia.

Kakha B. submitted documentation to the Ministry of Sports and Culture according to which Georgia planned to send 10 representatives of the national team to the 9th Shotokan Karate Championship in Istanbul on April 18-22 in 2018.

The ministry sponsored the trip according to the documentation, however in total, only four athletes took part in the competition from Georgia.

Having lied to the Ministry, Kakha B. received 10,441 GEL that was allocated to send the other 'six participants' of the championship from Georgia. An investigation is in progress – the detainee faces six to nine years in prison (*Agenda.ge, Aril 8, 2019*).

22. Broken cars on posts – Tbilisi launches new road safety campaign



Tbilisi residents awoke to a strange sight on the roads today: destroyed cars mounted upside down on posts at several locations across the city.

Supposedly the installations are meant to remind drivers to drive slow and carefully.

Tbilisi City Hall told Rustavi 2 that a local, well-known company installed the damaged vehicles as a part of a campaign.










The agency says the company was permitted by City Hall, but the parties agreed to keep the information on the author of the project confidential.








Additional Information

April 4, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.6912 GEL	1 GBP - 3.5206 GEL	100 RUB -4.1622 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0346 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4731 GEL	100 JPY - 2.4199 GEL

Friday 12 April 12-18	Saturday 13 April 12-18	Sunday 14 April 10-16	Monday 15 April 10-16	Tuesday 16 April 10-16	Wednesday 17 April 10-16	Thursday 18 April 10-16	Friday 19 April 10-16	Saturday 20 April 10-16
								
19°	19°	14°	16°	15°	10°	11°	4°	5°
0 mm	0 mm	0 mm	0 mm	0.6 mm	11.8 mm	0 mm	0.5 mm	0 mm

-  **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](#)**