

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

April 18-21

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. Syria plans to enhance cooperation with occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Syria hopes to enhance its cooperation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia and sees a huge potential in it – Syrian Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade Samer al-Khalil said during an economic forum in Yalta, occupied Crimea of Ukraine.

“I think we will be able to further develop cooperation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia within the economic treaties. We have a lot of cooperation opportunities, but there are a number of difficulties that we have to overcome,” he said.

“During the last year, Syria could develop relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the economy and other fields and to establish new channels,” Samer al-Khalil said (*1TV, April 19, 2019*).

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

2. UN Ambassadors Meet President Zurabishvili, Visit Occupation Line

President Salome Zurabishvili received permanent representatives from the Dominican Republic, Eswatini, Finland, Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and Senegal to the United Nations. The Ambassadors are visiting Georgia on April 14-21.

According to Zurabishvili’s press office, the ambassadors were briefed on Georgia’s EU integration process, as well as on the human rights and security situation in the occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia (*Civil.ge, April 18, 2019*).

3. Georgian occupied Tskhinvali region eager to open Damascus “embassy”

The Georgian occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region has plans to open a so-called embassy in Damascus Syria, after the latter became the fifth worldwide to recognise Tskhinvali as an independent state in May 2018.

“We are eager to strengthen political and economic ties with Syria,” de facto President of Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) Anatoly Bibilov stated at a business forum being held in the occupied Crimea of Ukraine, organised by Russia, Tskhinvali media reports (*Agenda.ge, April 19, 2019*).

4. Georgian citizen illegally detained by occupying forces

The occupying forces have detained Georgian citizen Gocha Pidiuri near the occupation line with occupied Tskhinvali region for “illegally crossing the border” yesterday. The man was abducted from the village of Mejvriskhevi in Gori municipality, Georgian media reports (*Agenda.ge, April 21, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

5. Ruling party says two Venice Commission recommendations on judges already met

Ruling Georgian Dream party member Archil Talakvadze says that two of the Venice Commission recommendations regarding the bill on the selection and appointment procedures of the Georgian Supreme Court judges have already been taken into account and the related sections in the bill have been amended.

The statement comes after the meeting of the Georgian Dream ruling party earlier today, which followed the recommendations provided by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe on April 16 on the bill offered by ruling party MPs (*Agenda.ge, April 18, 2019*).

6. Georgia improves world press freedom index

Georgia comes in 60th of 180 countries in the 2019 World Press Freedom Index by the international, non-profit organisation Reporters Without Borders, which promotes and defends the freedom of information and the press. Last year Georgia was 61st. The survey reads that Georgia’s media landscape is “pluralist but still very polarised”.

The reforms of recent years have brought improvements in media ownership transparency and satellite TV pluralism, but owners often still call the shots on editorial content,” reads the survey (*Agenda.ge, April 18, 2019*).

7. EU, Georgia launch new project to support environmental sector

Georgia’s Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture and the European Union have launched a new project aimed at raising support for the environmental sector in the country.

The project is called "Support for implementation of environmental commitments to the Association Agreement between Georgia and the European Union"(*Agenda.ge, April 18, 2019*).

8. Meeting Putin, Estonia’s Kaljulaid Raises Georgia

President of Estonia Kersti Kaljulaid, who was visiting Moscow on April 18, raised the matters related to Georgia and Ukraine, as she spoke about the conflicts in the two countries during the meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Kaljulaid later told Moscow-based Kommersant newspaper that the two presidents disagree about these issues, but she stressed that Estonia, as the European Union member, “fully supports” European mechanism of sanctions, as well as territorial integrity of Georgia and Ukraine (*Civil.ge, April 18, 2019*).

9. Georgian, Estonian Presidents hold phone call

President of Georgia Salome Zurbishvili held a phone conversation with her Estonian counterpart President Kersti Kaljulaid yesterday.

Zurabishvili, who was the initiator of the call, thanked Kaljulaid for raising the issue of Georgia at her recent meeting with the Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, her press office said.

President Zurabishvili said, Estonia is Georgia's significant supporter, which is using all the international formats to express its "unwavering support" to Georgia (*Agenda.ge, April 19, 2019*).

10. PM says government welcomes NATO decision to prioritize Black Sea region

Government of Georgia welcomes the decision of NATO to prioritize the Black Sea among key regions, Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze said at a briefing on Friday. He said that sustainable security of the European family is impossible without Black Sea security.

"When we refer to economic cooperation, it is very important to further develop the transport and connectivity. We still have serious challenges towards this end. Unfortunately, we need to acknowledge that logistics appears to be a bottleneck in increasing the trade from Georgia towards EU, in supporting other countries of the region to increase their trade with the EU.

Hence, Romania and Bulgaria have very significant resources to support us towards this end and I am confident that this mission will be achieved in due course," PM said (*ITV, April 19, 2019*).

11. Foreign Minister called on citizens to follow requirements of visa-free regime

"Visa-free movement is an important advantage for our country. It has great political importance. The number of countries, which declared Georgia as a safe country increased up to 13. This means that if Georgian citizens apply to any of those countries with the request to grant asylum, their application will not be satisfied," Zalkaliani explained.

Foreign Minister said that work continues both on a legislative and executive level to prevent the increase of asylum seekers from Georgia (*ITV, April 20, 2019*).

12. Georgia hosts UN permanent representatives

Georgia is hosting the United Nations (UN) Permanent Representatives from the Dominican Republic, Eswatini, Finland, Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and Senegal.

The ambassadors arrived on April 14. They have already met with President Salome Zurabishvili, Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze and Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani (*Agenda.ge, April 20, 2019*).

13. MIA opens investigation into case of ten Ukrainian children on charge of trafficking

The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) opened an investigation into the case of 10 Ukrainian children placed at Zugdidi Referral Hospital on charge of trafficking.

As Georgian First Channel was told by the MIA, a citizen of Ukraine accompanied by 10 children arrived in Georgia by a Moscow-Tbilisi flight on April 8. Reportedly, all kids are children of the Ukrainian woman. The woman planned to travel to the occupied Abkhazia region.

Based on the presented documents, four out of 10 children are all born in 2017 that generated suspicion. An investigation is ongoing into the fact with active cooperation with foreign partners. The children were brought to Zugdidi Hospital with signs of food intoxication (*ITV, April 20, 2019*).

14. US ship visits Batumi, shows 'continued cooperation' between Georgia and America

The United States Ship Ross entered Georgia's Black Sea port of Batumi to mark "continued cooperation" between US and Georgia "by promoting regional peace and stability". This is the ship's first visit to the country.

Its commander David Coles said "our allies in the Black Sea continue to play a key role in maintaining security in the European theater" (*Agenda.ge, April 21, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

15. 307,805 GEL will be spent on demolishing 20 metal pedestrian bridges in Tbilisi

Metal pedestrian bridges will be demolished in Georgia's capital city of Tbilisi and zebra crossings will be arranged instead, announces Tbilisi City Hall.

The process of dismantling has already started and in total 20 bridges will be demolished by the end of the current year. A total of 307,805 GEL (about \$114,213/€101,464) will be spent on the work.

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze said that the bridges will be demolished at addresses where zebra crossing are already present (*Agenda.ge, April 18, 2019*).

16. Georgia to have new Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has appointed Natia Turnava Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development.

Turnava has been the Deputy Economy Minister since 2018, and will replace Giorgi Kobulia, who took up the ministerial position in July 2018.

PM Bakhtadze signed two orders today: one on dismissing Kobulia and another on appointing his deputy as the new minister (*Agenda.ge, April 18, 2019*).

17. PM Bakhtadze on Reasons for Sacking Economy Minister

At a press briefing on April 19, Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze spoke briefly of reasons for dismissing the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, Giorgi Kobulia.

Speaking to reporters, PM Bakhtadze said Kobulia, "an experienced economist and professional financier," elaborated important development strategies for Georgia "which we will use in the future."

The PM stressed, however, that the Ministry of Economy necessitates quick and effective decision-making. "We need quick decisions that serve the interests of our society and our entrepreneurs," he noted (*Civil.ge, April 18, 2019*).

18. Company director detained for violation of safety rules, claiming lives of 2 workers

The director of the Khimini Service 2 construction company has been detained earlier today for the violation of safety rules, which claimed the lives of two workers on Chavchavadze Avenue in Central Tbilisi on March 31, 2019.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs says that vertical digging at the scene went against safety rules, leading to the fatalities. The workers died after a sinkhole opened up during renovation works on the basement of a hospital (*Agenda.ge, April 19, 2019*).

19. Adjara Public TV Board Dismisses Director

The Board of Advisors of Adjara TV and Radio Company, a publicly-funded broadcaster based in Batumi, decided at its session on April 19 to dismiss Natia Kapanadze as the broadcaster's director.

Four out of five members of the board voted in favor of Kapanadze's dismissal through a secret ballot, and the remaining one voted against. The broadcaster will announce within 10 ten days a competition to select a new director. Until then, Natia Zoidze, former deputy director, will serve as an acting director.

Prior to making a decision, the advisory board held a public session, which was also attended by representatives of local civil society organizations. Two board members – Giga Chkhartishvili and Irakli Dartsmelidze – who lodged a complaint requesting Kapanadze's impeachment, accused her of mismanagement of public funds, neglecting program priorities, shortcomings in organizational and human resource management, and closure of highly rated programs.

Commenting on the allegations, Natia Kapanadze said that all documents concerning the priorities, as well as monitoring and control of budget fulfillment were available to everyone and that she was ready to discuss the issues with all parties concerned (*Civil.ge, April 19, 2019*).

20. Chief of President's Administration to Step Down

Lasha Zhvania, Chief of President's Administration announced that he will step down from his position on May 1, 2019. He will return to the Charity Foundation of the Patriarchy of the Georgian Orthodox Church, a position that he held before assuming office alongside President Salome Zurbishvili.

In his Facebook post on April 19, Zhvania explained that he approached the President in March and requested to vacate the position at a convenient moment.

Zhvania explained, that at the time when he assumed the office at the Presidency "his Holiness [Patriarch Ilia II] satisfied the President's request to assign me to the President's administration, but did not release me from the Charity Foundation of the Patriarchy." "So starting from May 1, I will leave the President's administration and continue my work with my sweet and wise Patriarch," Zhvania wrote (*Civil.ge, April 19, 2019*).

21. GD-supported Judiciary Bill Endorsed in Second Hearing

With 87 votes for and 31 against, the Georgian Parliament endorsed with its second hearing on April 19 the controversial amendments to the Law of Georgia on Common Courts, backed by the ruling Georgian Dream party.

The lawmakers launched discussions on the bill at plenary sessions after the parliamentary committees held a series of sittings and the Venice Commission released its opinion about the bill. The ruling majority tried to launch discussions at a plenary session on April 17, but had to postpone it for a day amid the parliamentary opposition's protest (*Civil.ge, April 20, 2019*).

22. Police, Pankisi Locals Clash over Hydro Power Plant Construction

55 people, 17 civilians and 38 police officers were injured today according to the Ministry of Interior in Georgia's mountainous Pankisi gorge.

Tensions have flared today as the locals protesting the construction of the hydro power plant have clashed with the riot police, deployed near village Dzibakhevi at the request of the Ministry of Economy, to protect the construction workers, the police stated.

Locals have long been protesting the construction works on the series of small powerplants, fearing possible loss of drinking and irrigation water. They have managed to halt the construction of this particular five mgwt capacity powerplant, "Khadori-3" in June 2018.

The clashes have intensified mid-day, however, as protesters responded angrily to deployment of the additional police force into the area, while the talks with Minister Gakharia were under way. The construction machinery was burned down, and several police cars damaged.

Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia arrived on the scene shortly after the incident. Locals agreed to cease the demonstration after the community leaders agreed with the Minister that the authorities would remove the riot police from the area.

In a statement later on April 21, the Interior Ministry said it is leading the investigation into the incident under articles 353 and 187 of the Criminal Code of Georgia, involving assault on police officer and damage by setting fire (*Civil.ge, April 21, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

23. What were Georgia's main exports and imports in Jan-March 2019?

Copper ores and concentrates, motor cars and ferroalloys are Georgia's top export items in January-March 2019, announces the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

More specifically, copper ores and concentrates reclaimed the first place in the list of top export items, equalling \$135.6 million, or 16.4% of total exports. The re-export of motor cars totalled \$99.1 million and their share in the total exports amounted to 12% (*Agenda.ge, April 19, 2019*).

24. Hotels in Georgia will be rated with stars from May

Hotels in Georgia will be classified with stars by Hotelstars Union from next month, founder of Federation of Hotels, Restaurants and Cafes Ketil Meladze told a local media outlet.

For this reason a group from Hotelstars Union will arrive in Georgia in May and classify Georgian hotels in accordance with the European standards.

The classification will not be mandatory and the hotels will be enabled to undergo the procedure voluntarily. However, hotels which intend to obtain the assessment of the Hotelstars Union, should be the members of the Federation of Hotels, Restaurants and Cafes and meet certain criteria (*Agenda.ge, April 19, 2019*).

❖ Sports and Culture

25. Georgia's U18 rugby team wins European Championship






Georgia's Under 18 rugby team has defeated Spain in the final of U18 European Championship in the Russian city of Kaliningrad. The young Georgian Lelos handed a defeat to Spain with a score of 20 to 10 (*Agenda.ge, April 20, 2019*).








Additional Information

April 22, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.6935 GEL 1 GBP - 3.5021 GEL 100 RUB -4.2126 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0291 GEL 1 TRY - 0.4646 GEL 100 JPY - 2.4066 GEL

Monday 22 April	Tuesday 23 April	Wednesday 24 April	Thursday 25 April	Friday 26 April
				
4° 10°	5° 14°	5° 16°	6° 17°	7° 17°

-  **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](#)**