

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

April 29-May 1

Compiled by: **Aleksandre Davitashvili**

Date: **May 2, 2019**

❖ Occupied Regions

1. **PACE President: 'We will continue to search for ways to resolve conflicts in South Ossetia, Abkhazia'**

President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Liliane Maury Pasquier said that "we will continue to search for ways" to resolve conflicts in occupied regions of Georgia South Ossetia and Abkhazia "and establish contact between peoples".

Pasquier also talked about relations between Georgia and the Council of Europe and said that her visit to Georgia will contribute to further strengthening of "our cooperation" (*Agenda.ge, April 29, 2019*).

2. **Occupants detain Georgian citizen in Gali district**

The occupation forces detained a citizen of Georgia in Tagiloni village of occupied Gali district. According to State Security Service, a hotline has been activated and the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) to Georgia has been informed about the fact.

Reportedly, 33 years old Zaza Sharia was detained for "illegal crossing of the state border." According to de facto Abkhazian Ministry of Internal Affairs, Sharia has been wanted for committing burglaries in Gali district in 2013-2014 (*ITV, April 30, 2019*).

3. **Abkhazia's government in exile to have a new head**

The legitimate Government of Abkhazia, which is in exile in Tbilisi, will now be headed by Ruslan Abashidze, replacing Vakhtang Kolbaia.

Abashidze was the First Deputy State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia since January 2019.

In 2015-2018 he managed Primera Gold and Residence, after serving at different positions at the Foreign Ministry in 1996-2014.

The new acting head will name his cabinet members and present his action plan in coming days. His main message to Abkhaz people will be the call for unification, as Abashidze stated.

Abkhazia, which is one of Georgia's occupied regions, calls itself an independent state. Its status is recognised by five countries only; Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru and Syria.

The Georgian Government and majority of international community consider Abkhazia as part of Georgia, although the country is not currently in control of its region (*Agenda.ge, May 1, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

4. Georgian top officials, PACE president address parliament on 20th anniversary of Georgia's CoE membership

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze, President Salome Zurbishvili, Parliament Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze and President of PACE Liliane Maury have made speeches in the Georgian parliament earlier today, dedicated to the 20th anniversary of Georgia's membership in the Council of Europe (CoE).

All of the officials pointed at threats coming from Russia towards Georgia and the CoE and spoke about the occupation of Georgian lands by the country (*Agenda.ge, April 30, 2019*).

5. Number of emigrants from Georgia amounted to almost 100 thousand persons

The number of emigrants from Georgia was 98 935 in 2018, 15.8 percent more compared to the previous year.

According to the National Statistics Bureau of Georgia, the number of immigrants increased by 5.9 percent and amounted to 88 152 people.

In the same period, 86.6 percent of emigrants and 84.5 percent of immigrants represent the population aged 15-64 (*ITV, April 30, 2019*).

6. Georgian presidential administration points at cyber-attack after retweet of Trump's 'Sleepy Joe' tweet

The administration of the President of Georgia has announced that the manager of President Salome Zurbishvili's Twitter account made a mistake in re-tweeting US President Donald Trump's tweet calling democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden "sleepy Joe."

She said that an account of one of the employees of the president's administration was attacked several days ago and the case is also being studied. The tweet has now been deleted from the President Zurbishvili's Twitter page (*Agenda.ge, April 30, 2019*).

7. British ship HMS ECHO docks in Batumi

The Royal Navy survey ship HMS Echo arrived in Georgia's Black Sea port of Batumi earlier today. The British Embassy to Georgia said the ship's visit further demonstrates "the ongoing strong and vibrant cooperation" between the United Kingdom and Georgia (*Agenda.ge, April 30, 2019*).

8. Georgian PM expresses support for interim gov't of Venezuela amid recent clash

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has stated that the Georgian government, which recognised the interim government of Venezuela under Juan Guaido earlier this year, is standing by the Venezuelan people who are fighting against the undemocratic leadership of Nicolas Maduro (*Agenda.ge, May 1, 2019*).

9. UN to spend \$100 mln on projects in Georgia in 2019-2020

Various agencies of the United Nations will spend \$100 million on various projects in 2019-2020 in Georgia, announces the Georgian Public Broadcaster's First Channel.

The UN country team revealed its priorities in Georgia for the next two years today, while presenting the UN's achievements in 2018.

UN achievements were presented in five main areas: democratic governance; jobs, livelihoods and social protection; education; health; and human security and community resilience (*ITV, May 1, 2019*).

10. Georgian troops join allied counterparts in 9,000-strong exercise in Estonia

Georgian service members are among over 9,000 troops from over a dozen states involved in the Spring Storm defence drills organised by the Ministry of Defence of Estonia that launched on Monday.

Hosted and run by the Estonian Defence Forces, the exercise also involves units of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence, armoured hardware and air element between April 29-May 17.

Georgian personnel is joining counterparts from the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, Canada, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, Poland and Ukraine in the drills (*Agenda.ge, May 1, 2019*).

11. Georgian president, PM wish success to new emperor of Japan

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili and Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze have sent their best wishes to the new emperor of Japan Naruhito, who has succeeded his father Akihito, who abdicated at the age of 85, becoming the first Japanese emperor to do so in more than 200 years (*Agenda.ge, May 1, 2019*).

12. Salome Zurbishvili: It is not recommended to build an American base in Georgia

Georgia's President Salome Zurbishvili believes that it is not recommended to build an American base in Georgia. As Georgian President said in an interview with Voice of America Georgian Service, it is not necessary to take steps that can be perceived as a provocation.

"I do not think this is recommended. I think the country needs to strengthen its security. There is no need to take steps that can be perceived as a provocation and I do not think the United States is ready to have a military base here, which would draw the attention of not only Russia but also of terrorist movements that are very active in our region. Based on the existing mutual understanding, we should deepen our cooperation and should not take steps that can provoke others' reaction," Zurbishvili said (*ITV, May 1, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

13. Georgian Defence Forces mark 28th anniversary

Georgian Defence Forces are celebrating 28 years since their founding, with formal celebrations involving officials and military commanders joined by congratulatory messages from the public today.

Official occasions to mark the date were held in Georgia as well as locations where peacekeepers from the country are serving in international missions, while service members from allied nations offered their messages of support (*Agenda.ge, April 30, 2019*).

14. Pankisi, David Gareji issues discussed during 1st meeting of Georgia's National Security Council

Secretary of the National Security Council and Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia has stated that the recent developments in Georgia's Muslim-populated Pankisi Gorge and the temporarily closure of David Gareji

monastery by Azerbaijani border guards several days ago were discussed during the first meeting of the eight-member National Security Council.

"We received tasks from the Prime Minister," Gakharia said and stated that he will speak about Pankisi Gorge related issues [a protest regarding the construction of a hydropower plant and others] tomorrow in parliament.

Speaking about the sixth century David Gareji monastery complex, located at the conditional border with Azerbaijan [as the border has not been agreed since the collapse of the Soviet Union], Gakharia said that it is a "very sensitive issue," and there are forces which are trying to "stir an ethnic confrontation." (*Agenda.ge, May 1, 2019*)

15. 220 new buses to appear in Tbilisi

New Isuzu eight-meter length buses will appear this year in Tbilisi, Mayor Kakha Kaladze said at the Tbilisi government session today.

He said the new 220 buses will be equipped with modern systems such as heating, air conditioning, ventilation, USB ports and Wi-Fi.

Kaladze said the new buses will replace the old yellow ones that 'represent a serious problem and discomfort for passengers and pollute the air.' (*Agenda.ge, May 1, 2019*).

16. Parliament approves draft-bill on Courts of General Jurisdiction

Anri Okhanashvili, Chairman of Legal Affairs Committee presented the legislative package about the rule of selection of judges for Supreme Court of Georgia prepared by the parliamentary majority. The 87 lawmakers voted for the package, 33- against.

The draft-bill defines selection criteria and qualification requirements of judicial candidates. Several recommendations of the Venice Commission were reflected in the legislative package including cancellation of qualification examinations for the candidates (*ITV, May 1, 2019*).

17. MP leaves ruling party after parliament approves bill on judges

MP Levan Koberidze left the Georgian Dream ruling party after the parliament approved the bill on the selection and appointment of Supreme Court judges with its third and final reading earlier today.

Koberidze said that the bill drafted by the ruling party MPs fails to ensure transparency in the selection and appointment procedures of judges.

After Koberidzes announcement GD has 106 members in the parliament. As for today GD had been left by following MPs: Eka Beselia, Levan Gogichaishvili, Gedevan Popkhadze, Zviad Kvachantiradze, Beka Natsvlshvili, Koba Narchemashvili, Gia Zhorzholiani, and Mirian Tsiklauri (the last two have joined Alliance of Patriots).

According to rumors two more MPs, Aleksandre Erkvania and Bidzina Gegidze will leave Georgian Dream in the near future.

During the interview with the newspaper Rezonansi, Bidzina Gegidze said that for him the redline will be the appointment of judges that are not acceptable to the society and if there are questions regarding the competences and qualifications of the judges (*Rezonansi, May 2, 2019*).

18. Kutaisi to experience 'project of century' as 41 houses along Rioni River will be renovated

The historic part of Georgian Kutaisi city and 41 houses along Rioni River will be renovated according to the project which is to be launched in 2020. Kutaisi Mayor Giorgi Chigvaria has held meetings with architects regarding the issue (*Agenda.ge, May 1, 2019*).

19. Labour Unions in Georgia demand better working conditions

The Georgian Trade Unions Confederation held a demonstration today for employee rights on International Workers' Day (May 1) in front of the building of Administration of the Government of Georgia in Tbilisi.

Protesters demanded better working conditions, suggested the government sign a 'social contract' and claimed that the government should implement the following measures to ensure social cohesion and public democracy:

- To establish an effective labour inspection which will examine both labour safety and labour rights at every workplace in Georgia;
- The unemployment allowance;
- To determine adequate minimum salary;
- To establish a real subsistence minimum (today it is 361 GEL for a five member household);
- To pay the dignified remuneration of maternity leave and offer equal pay for the equal jobs of women and men;
- Support employment of young people (*ITV, May 1, 2019*).

20. Aleksandre Tabatadze appointed on post of Deputy Justice Minister

Aleksandre Tabatadze has been appointed on the post of Deputy Justice Minister of Georgia – the corresponding order is published on the webpage of the Governmental Administration.

Tabatadze once served as Deputy Justice Minister in 2013. He then changed his job position and worked as deputy head of State Security Service in 2014.

Tabatadze will join the team, which manages the penitentiary system. He will also be in charge of enforcement police and cybersecurity issues (*Agenda.ge, May 1, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

21. IMF: Lowest rate of problem and nonperforming loans among Caucasus and Central Asian countries is in Georgia

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the lowest rate of the problem and non-performing loans among the Caucasus and Central Asia countries is in Georgia.

According to the report published by the organization, Georgia's problem loans constitute 12 percent of its total loans, while non-performing loans are within 2.5 percent. Both indicators have improved compared to statistics published in May 2018, when the share of problem loans exceeded 15 percent, and non-performing loans were within 5 percent.

According to the IMF, in 2015-2018, private sector lending has increased by 15 percent in Georgia, which is the best rate in the region (*ITV, April 29, 2019*).

22. Georgia's economy grows 6% in March 2019

Georgia's economy is growing steadily, show the latest data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

The estimated real gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate in March 2019 equalled 6%, while the estimated average real GDP growth for the first quarter (Q1) of 2019 equalled 4.7% year-on-year (*Agenda.ge, April 30, 2019*).

23. Georgian Gov't to gift flats to 700 soldiers

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has stated that the government will gift flats to up to 700 soldiers in residential complexes built on the Makhata Mountain in central Tbilisi.

Bakhtadze made the statement during the ceremony dedicated to the 28th anniversary of the Georgian Armed Forces. Bakhtadze said that it is a "very emotional project" for him (*Agenda.ge, April 30, 2019*).

24. 2018-2019 winter season: four Georgian resorts hosted 15% more visitors

The 2018-2019 winter season, which lasted 128 days, is over in Georgia and the country's most popular winter resorts hosted an increased number of tourists.

The number of visitors in Georgia's four winter resorts of Gudauri, Bakuriani, Goderdzi and Svaneti increased by 578 per cent in 2018-2019 season compared to 2011-2012 and by 15 per cent compared to 2017-2018.

Here is how the number of visitors increased in 2018-2019 compared to the previous winter season in each winter resort of Georgia:

- Goderdzi – 43%
- Tetnuldi – 17%
- Hatsvali – 13%
- Gudauri – 19%
- Bakuriani – 20% (*Agenda.ge, May 1, 2019*).

❖ Sports and Culture

25. Hollywood filmmakers visiting Georgia

Georgia is hosting a number of officials from Hollywood film producing companies HBO and Universal Pictures. The officials have come to Georgia to learn more about the country's unique filming environment. Their host is Enterprise Georgia – a government institution whose task it is to facilitate export and private sector development through a variety of financial and technical support mechanisms.

HBO and Universal Pictures representatives were among those whom Enterprise Georgia representatives met last year in Los Angeles.

There, they were introduced to the Film in Georgia programme, which is a government initiative to stimulate the local film sector by offering favourable conditions for local and international filmmakers. The filmmakers arrived in Georgia on April 25. They are visiting a number of Georgian towns, including the capital of Tbilisi and the Black Sea town of Batumi to better familiarise themselves with the country's filming potential (*Agenda.ge, April 28, 2019*).

26. British artist Marquis Hawkes releases record based on Georgian mythology

British electronic artist Marquis Hawkes has released a musical recording of tracks reflecting realms of Georgian mythology, with the collection launched on Tbilisi-based Horoom label.

Hawkes, a London-born producer and DJ who has released works starting in 1997, revealed Skneli, his latest recording, to his social media followers on Monday.

On HRM002 Marquis Hawkes delivers his take on Georgian myths. Each track of the EP is dedicated to one realm in the Georgian cosmology. A1 „Zeskneli“ takes us to the white heavens, where the gods reside. A raw and hypnotic house track, deep and celestial. On the B-side we are bound to the earthly plane of „Ukana Skneli“. Trippy yet percussive, Marquis Hawkes shows off his funky side. His vision of the underworld „Kveskneli“ is rich in soul and unapologetically dancy. A beautifully crafted journey through mythology and sounds.

Link for the tracks: <https://soundcloud.com/bassiani/sets/hrm002-marquis-hawkes-skneli> (Soundcloud.com)

Additional Information

May 2, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.7044 GEL	1 GBP - 3.5344 GEL	100 RUB -4.1854 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0392 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4533 GEL	100 JPY - 2.4305 GEL

Thursday 2 May	Friday 3 May	Saturday 4 May	Sunday 5 May	Monday 6 May
				
12° 25°	13° 24°	11° 17°	11° 22°	13° 24°

-  **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](#)**