

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

May 2-5

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## ❖ Occupied Regions

### 1. CoE Committee of Ministers issues decision on conflict in Georgia

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE) adopted a decision on conflict in Georgia at its 1345th meeting of minister's deputies in Strasbourg on May 2.

The deputy ministers reiterated CoE's "unequivocal support" for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders (*Agenda.ge, May 3, 2019*).

### 2. Estonian Foreign Minister: [We] will never recognise occupation of Abkhazia, South Ossetia

Abkhazia and South Ossetia are an inseparable part of Georgia and this must be respected", the the newly-appointed Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu said.

"Estonia will never recognise the occupation of these territories," he told his Georgian counterpart Foreign Minister Davit Zalkaliani during a phone conversation yesterday.

Both ministers reaffirmed that the relations between their countries "are good and their friendship remains strong", the Estonian foreign ministry reported (*Agenda.ge, May 4, 2019*).

## ❖ Foreign Affairs

### 3. 'Countering a Resurgent Russia' - US Congress holds hearing, condemns Russian aggression in Georgia

The US House of Representatives held a hearing on the topic Countering a Resurgent Russia, where diplomats and congresspeople condemned the occupation of Georgian lands by Russia, urging stronger support for Georgia.

Daniel Fried, who served as the US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, said that the occupation of Georgia and Ukraine "undermined peace and stability, which have been built for decades."

He said that the occupation of Georgian lands in 2008 by Russia was a "signal" which was not perceived appropriately by the US and NATO (*Agenda.ge, May 2, 2019*).

### 4. Russia declines to pay €10 mln fine for deportation of Georgians, Georgia addresses European Council

Georgian Justice Ministry has called on the European Council Committee of Ministers to examine the case of the deportation of hundreds of Georgian nationals in late September 2006 and early 2007 from Russia under intensified surveillance procedure.

On January 31, 2019 the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights announced its judgment in the case Georgia v. Russia regarding the arrest, detention and collective expulsion of Georgian nationals from Russia in the autumn of 2006.

The verdict said Russia had to pay Georgia €10,000,000 for non-pecuniary damage suffered by a group of at least 1,500 Georgian nationals.

As Russia did not pay the amount within the three-month term established by the court (by May 1, 2019), Georgian Justice Ministry demanded the Committee of Ministers of the European Council to hold debates regarding the issue on the nearest session.

The Ministry also requested the Committee to receive the official explanation from Russia regarding the non-fulfillment of the commitment as shortly as possible (*Agenda.ge, May 3, 2019*).

#### **5. Georgian patriarchate cites 'positive steps' in Georgia-Azerbaijan negotiations on Gareji monastery**

The Georgian Patriarchate has stated that positive steps have also been taken during the "active negotiations" of Georgia and Azerbaijan regarding Georgia's 6th century monastery complex David Gareji located at the conditional border between the two countries. The patriarchate condemned the attitudes of statements which could harm Georgian-Azerbaijani "friendly ties" (*Agenda.ge, May 3, 2019*).

#### **6. US Dep. Assistant Secretary of State: Georgia is 'our partner'**

The United States Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs George Kent said US supports Georgia as its partner.

"We support Georgia's success as a prosperous country, a secure country, and one with democratic and accountable institutions", George Kent stated.

The US official made remarks at the meeting of the Democracy Work Group of the US-Georgia Strategic Partnership Charter on May 3 (*Agenda.ge, May 4, 2019*).

#### **7. Georgian soldiers return home from Afghanistan**

The 22nd battalion of the 2nd Infantry Brigade of the Georgian Defence Forces who defended international peace and security in war-torn Afghanistan returned home to Georgia earlier today.

The Georgian soldiers had left to Afghanistan last September to contribute to the NATO-led Resolute Support mission (*Agenda.ge, May 5, 2019*).

#### **8. Georgian leaders join Europe Day celebrations in Tbilisi**

Georgia's capital of Tbilisi turned into a Eurovillage today celebrating Europe Day at Rike Park. Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili, Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze and Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze joined the celebrations in downtown Tbilisi (*ITV, May 5, 2019*).

### **❖ Internal Affairs**

#### **9. US citizen, ex-head of Caucasus Nature Fund becomes Georgia's Environmental Ombudsman**

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has appointed the US citizen, former head of the Caucasus Nature Fund (CNF) with a previous 28-year career in law, David Morrison as Georgia's Environmental Ombudsman.

During the presentation at Tbilisi Botanic Garden earlier today, Bakhtadze stated that the ombudsman will report to him.

"This institute will be the most important mechanism to overcome environmental challenges in Georgia," Bakhtadze said.

Minister of Environment and Agriculture Levan Davitashvili said that the ombudsman will have his secretariat to discuss environmental issues (*Agenda.ge, May 2, 2019*).

#### **10. New report: what is the main cause of air pollution in Tbilisi?**

Vehicle exhaust is the main cause of air pollution in Georgia's capital city of Tbilisi, says the report of the parliamentary committee on environmental protection and natural resources.

The report is based on a report by the State Audit Office of Georgia, which states that there are two main sources of air pollution: emissions from stationary sources – emission of harmful substances from industrial and construction sites and emissions from moving sources – vehicles (*Agenda.ge, May 2, 2019*).

#### **11. Interior Minister gives 5th report to parliament, announces creation of modern criminal lab**

Georgian Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia has reported to parliament for the fifth time this year, pointed at the importance of transparency and stated that a modern criminal laboratory will be built in Georgia, the only one of its kind in the South Caucasus. He stated that the criminal laboratory will have its own DNA lab.

Gakharia said that this year his body spend about 97 million GEL on the development of the police infrastructure.

He stated that all preliminary detention facilities in the country have been renovated and equipped with cameras. Doctors are also present in all such facilities.

Gakharia stated that the "precise crime statistics" provided by his employees revealed that 44 per cent of crimes committed in Georgia are crimes against property.

"Of the 44 per cent, 70 per cent is robbery," Gakharia said, noting that there is a need of changes in the criminal code to address the issue.

Gakharia said that the number of patrol police employees has not been increased since 2010, when the number of registered vehicles in the period increased from 700,000 to 1,200,000.

Gakharia said that Georgia has no naval forces and stated that cooperation with NATO in this regard is crucial.

"NATO Black Sea Security component is very important both for the state security and protection of our coasts," Gakharia stated (*Agenda.ge, May 2, 2019*).

#### **12. Georgian Security Service head: influence, supporters of terrorist Islamic State decreased in Georgia**

Head of Georgia's State Security Service Vakhtang Gomelauri has reported to parliament today, stating that the number of supporters and the influence of the terrorist Islamic State has "significantly" decreased in Georgia.

"None of the incidents were recorded last year when a Georgian citizen attempted to leave the country to join the terrorist organisation in Syria or in Iraq," Gomelauri said (*Agenda.ge, May 3, 2019*).

#### **13. Georgian Parliament approves bill on sexual harassment**

The Georgian MPs have unanimously approved a bill on sexual harassment with 102 votes in favor and 0 against. The definition was established in the law and the form of this kind of discrimination was regulated.

The Labour Code of Georgia will be added with the sexual harassment definition:

'Undesirable sexual behavior towards a person aims or/and tarnishes his/her dignity or creates intimidating, hostile, degrading or abusive environment for him/her.'

Sexual harassment will be punished by a 300 GEL (\$112) fine and 500 GEL (\$187) if repeated. The offence will also be punishable with up to one-month community work.

Deliberate sexual harassment of a minor, a pregnant woman or someone in a critical condition or in the presence of a minor will be punished by 500-800 GEL (\$187-\$299), and if repeated by 800-1,000 GEL (\$299-\$374) fine or 10-day imprisonment (*Agenda.ge, May 3, 2019*).

## ❖ Economy and Social Affairs

### **14. 25 currency exchange offices closed in Tbilisi for manipulating foreign exchange rates**

Twenty-five currency exchange offices have been closed and 10 have been fined in Georgia's capital city of Tbilisi for not abiding by the rule of registration and regulations set by the National Bank of Georgia (NBG) in 2016.

New rules oblige currency exchange booths to provide information about the currency exchange rate and their commission fees, if any.

The NBG explained that some currency exchange booths had manipulated the foreign exchange rates in the tourist zones of Tbilisi and consciously mislead customers (*Agenda.ge, May 2, 2019*).

### **15. New hotel opens in Tbilisi, brings \$48 million in investments**

New hotel Wyndham Grand Tbilisi opened today in Georgia's capital city of Tbilisi, Gudiashvili street with \$48 million in Israeli investments.

Located in the capital's historical neighborhood, the hotel features an architectural mix of modernism and traditionalism, and incorporates 158 rooms, including 17 top-class, conference rooms (*Agenda.ge, May 2, 2019*).

### **16. ADB president: 'Georgia can be an example for many Asian countries'**

Georgia is developing stably and it can be an example for many Asian countries, stated President of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Takehiko Nakao at the press conference held on the sidelines of the 52rd ADB Annual Meeting in Fiji.

"Georgia's index of macroeconomic stability and doing business is quite high. It is necessary to maintain macroeconomic stability, to invest in infrastructure projects, including in road construction. It is important to develop energy, especially with renewable energy. It is also important to make investments in education and tourism development, which is a significant source of income in Georgia", said Nakao (*Agenda.ge, May 3, 2019*).

### **17. Inflation data: prices of vegetables, meat, fruits, grapes up in April**

Prices of vegetables, meat, fruit and grapes have increased in Georgia, show the latest inflation data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

In April 2018 the prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages increased by 0.7%. The prices in the group increased for the subgroups of:

- Vegetables (5.6%)
- Fruit and grapes (5%)

- Meat (1%)

Meanwhile, the prices decreased for milk, cheese and eggs (-3.8%). Overall in April 2019, the consumer price index increased by 0.2% compared to the previous month, while the annual inflation rate amounted to 4.1% (*Agenda.ge, May 3, 2019*).

**18. Number of tourists visiting Georgia increases 4.2% in April 2019**

Georgia hosted 348,519 tourists (+4.2%) and 647,770 international travellers (+4.6) in April of 2019, announces the Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA) (*Agenda.ge, May 3, 2019*).

**19. 13km line of cars at Russia-Georgia border crossing as tourism season kicks off**

The number of visitors from Russia to Georgia has skyrocketed, triggering several kilometer long lines at Zemo Larsi border crossing.

Most of the queue is on the Russian side, where at least 600 cars were standing still Saturday, waiting to enter Georgia from North Ossetia – Alania; one of the constituent republics of the Russian Federation. The queue was 10km long on Friday and grew to 13km Saturday. Travelers with smaller vehicles have to wait for about 10 hours to cross the border.

The increasing number of visitors to Georgia related to the start of the tourist season and the May holidays in Russia (*DFWatch.net, May 5, 2019*).

 **Additional Information**

**May 6, 2019**  
**OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD - 2.7070 GEL	1 GBP - 3.5183 GEL	100 RUB - 4.1400 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0194 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4532 GEL	100 JPY - 2.4278 GEL

<b>Monday</b> 6 May	<b>Tuesday</b> 7 May	<b>Wednesday</b> 8 May	<b>Thursday</b> 9 May	<b>Friday</b> 10 May
				
12° 22°	13° 26°	13° 27°	14° 25°	14° 19°

-  **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](#)**