

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

May 8-12

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Date: **May 13, 2019**

## ❖ Occupied Regions

### ❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

#### 1. Occupying forces detain two Georgian men near Tskhinvali region

Dimitri Isergishvili and Vasil Patarkatsishvili, locals of the village of Kvemo Chala, in Kaspi Municipality, were picking asparagus at the edge of the village of Karapila when they were detained.

The Georgian State Security Service said the European Union Monitoring mission has been informed of the illegal detention and the hotline has been activated to resolve the issue.

Occupying forces have detained 327 Georgian citizens for “illegally crossing the border” between 2017 and 2019 in the two Russia-controlled Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) (*Agenda.ge*, May 11, 2019).

## ❖ Foreign Affairs

#### 2. Investigation of Russia-Georgia war is in active phase, ICC members say in Tbilisi

Members of the International Criminal Court (ICC), who are visiting Tbilisi, have told the Georgian media that the investigation of the Russia-Georgia war launched by the court prosecutor Fatou Bensouda in 2015, is in its active phase.

“The process is confidential and we are not allowed to reveal details,” they said.

Georgian Justice Minister said that range of activities have been conducted by the court alone and with the help of the Georgian government to establish the truth regarding “ethnic cleansing in Georgia during the Russia-Georgia 2008 war and the torture of Georgian war captives.” (*Agenda.ge*, May 8, 2019).

#### 3. Georgia and its Neighborhood Conference in Washington: ‘Georgia moving on right path’

The Georgia and its Neighborhood Conference has been held in the Washington DC yesterday, co-hosted by the Levan Mikeladze Foundation for Caucasus Studies and the Georgian Association in the USA at the Middle East Institute, where foreign experts and diplomats stated that Georgia is moving on the right path.

“The important thing is that Georgia keeps moving on the right path. Its trajectory is correct and precisely this is indicative,” stated Luke Coffey, a political analyst for the Heritage Foundation.

He said that Georgia has great potential to become a worthy member of the Euro-Atlantic Alliance and the European Union (*Agenda.ge*, May 8, 2019).

#### 4. Kurt Volker: After his meeting with Salome Zourabichvili, Macron strictly demanded from Russia to meet commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement

After his meeting with Salome Zourabichvili, Macron strictly demanded from Russia that it meet commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement, – the former U.S. Ambassador to NATO and Executive Director of McCain Institute for International Leadership Kurt Volker said at the panel discussion held at the Middle East Institute at the initiative of the Levan Mikeladze Foundation.

Kurt Volker said that due to the current situation in Europe, Western Europe has become frustrated in relations with Russia.

“I think that due to the current situation in Europe, Western Europe has become frustrated in relations with Russia. They tried to reach agreement with Moscow, but they never succeeded, as the Kremlin’s behaviour makes agreement impossible. Speaking about this problem, I would also like to touch on Salome Zourabichvili’s meeting with President Macron, which has proved to be fruitful. After the meeting, Macron strictly demanded from Russia that it meet commitments under the 2008 ceasefire agreement,” – Kurt Volker said (*ITV, May 9, 2019*).

#### **5. French Interior Minister visits Georgia, deal signed to combat organised crime**

French Interior Minister Christophe Castaner has visited Georgia and signed a deal with his Georgian colleague earlier today, which allows two Georgian officers to be directly involved in the investigations of crimes in France that may involve Georgian nationals.

“We already have a police attaché in France. However, further measures were needed and a better cooperation to combat the organised crime,” Georgian Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia said.

He stated that illegal migration of Georgians and cooperation for security were two other top issues of the meeting.

Gakharia said that people from the French migration service will monitor the flights carried out to France from Georgia and the employees of the Georgian migration service will be sent to France with the same goal (*Agenda.ge, May 10, 2019*).

#### **6. Number of Georgian asylum seekers in Germany decreased by almost 27%**

The number of Georgian asylum seekers has been decreased in Germany by 26.5 per cent, officials figures read.

The German migration service reports that 1,628 Georgian nationals requested asylum in Germany between January and March of 2019, while the figure stood at 2,215 in the same period of the last year. 3,462 Georgians requested asylum in Germany in 2017. The figure was 4,265 in 2018 (*Agenda.ge, May 10, 2019*).

#### **7. PM Bakhtadze to join in on 10th anniversary celebrations of Eastern Partnership in Brussels**

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze will visit Brussels next week to participate in events dedicated to the 10th Anniversary of the Eastern Partnership (EaP).

On May 13-14 the European Union and its six Eastern partners - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine - will mark the EaP anniversary with a number of events.

At yesterday’s news briefing, PM Bakhtadze underscored that relations between Georgia and Europe are “at an all time high” and now they “require special care, nurturing and deepening” (*Agenda.ge, May 11, 2019*).

## **8. Renewed Georgia-Azerbaijani border demarcation commission to resume talks next week**

The joint commission working on the demarcation of the Georgia-Azerbaijani border will resume its work next week.

Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Zalklaiani announced at yesterday's news briefing that the commission, which will be composed of new members, will be chaired by his deputy Lasha Darsalia.

"This is a very important, sensitive issue, therefore, we should put all our emotions aside and let the commission work in a normal environment -relevant to our strategic partnership - to reach a mutually beneficial result", Minister Zalkaliani stated.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia has only demarcated the border with Turkey, while the borders with Azerbaijan and Armenia still need to be agreed upon (*Agenda.ge, May 11, 2019*).

## **9. CoE torture prevention committee commends Georgia in report**

The Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) commends the Georgian authorities for combatting ill-treatment and urges them to address informal prisoner hierarchy and a lack of out-of-cell activities, as well as to improve mental health care.

In the report on Georgia published on May 10, CPT welcomes the absence of allegations of ill-treatment in the institutions visited, commends the efforts to address overcrowding, improve access to healthcare and living conditions (*Agenda.ge, May 12, 2019*).

## **❖ Internal Affairs**

### **10. Malkhaz Machalikashvili: They do their best to destroy me, but this will not happen**

They do their best to destroy me, but this will not happen, – Malkhaz Machalikashvili, the father of Temirlan Machalikashvili, a 19-year-old youth killed during the special operation in Pankisi Gorge, told journalists in front of the Parliament while commenting on the allegations of the State Security Service against him.

As Malkhaz Machalikashvili noted, he is standing in front of the Parliament building and demanding the punishment of the murderers of his son for more than a year (*ITV, May 8, 2019*).

### **11. Malkhaz Machalikashvili about audio recordings : These are my thoughts, but not my intention**

"My message to the authorities and to the whole Georgia is: When I am accused of [plotting] a terror attack and they say that I am dangerous, they should pay attention if I have bought a weapon...

In this case the terror attack must be excluded. For one year, I have been standing here to protect killed Temirlan Machalikashvili, but I have sworn to protect not only him, his name, but all young people in the country. I have had such talks only when I was upset by the authorities. These are my thoughts, but I have no intention. If they want to create something from my thoughts, I am ready to be held to account for," Machalikashvili said (*lpn.ge, May 8, 2019*).

### **12. Ioseb Gogashvili – It was not difficult to believe that Malkhaz Machalikashvili was plotting crime**

"I would like to thank the State Security Service to prevent the crime during the preparation process. My family was in fact saved from destruction as Machalikashvili was plotting to do it. This person was preparing this crime step by step. It was not hard for me to believe as I was informed that he was able to do it. Such actions are not unusual for Malkhaz Machalikashvili. He has ties with the groups such as Chataev's group," Gogashvili, Former first deputy head of the State Security Service (*ITV, May 8, 2019*).

### **13. Ioseb Gogashvili – Accusations in my direction are absurd. I was not present in Pankisi Gorge during special operation**

"There has never been a necessity for my arrival in Pankisi Gorge. The situation was controlled and preventive measures were being undertaken to avoid joining of Islamic State by Georgian citizens and youngsters," he said.

Gogashvili told First Channel that he instated on questioning of those people who were present at the site during the special operation. Gogashvili also said he was ready to answer questions of the Prosecutor's Office including those regarding the links of Machalikashvili's family with terrorism (*ITV, May 8, 2019*).

### **14. Tbilisi welcomes 90 modern buses**

Georgia's capital Tbilisi is continuing to modernise its public bus fleet by introducing 90 brand new, 10-meter long diesel operated buses.

There are 27 seats in the new buses, which can take up to 82 passengers in total. The buses are equipped for people with disabilities and with modern systems such as heating, air conditioning, ventilation, USB ports and Wi-Fi (*Agenda.ge, May 8, 2019*).

### **15. Gubaz Sanikidze leaves Democratic Movement**

Gubaz Sanikidze has left the Democratic Movement party. As InterPressNews was told by the press service of the party, one of the leaders of the Democratic Movement Gubaz Sanikidze met with the party leader Nino Burjanadze.

"Gubaz Sanikidze and Nino Burjanadze expressed their views on the ongoing political processes and agreed that Gubaz Sanikidze will continue political activity independently.

At the end of the meeting, Nino Burjanadze and Gubaz Sanikidze wished each other success,"- reads the information released by the press service (*lpn.ge, May 9, 2019*).

### **16. Georgian Justice Minister dismisses allegations of Rustavi 2, cites European Court's decision**

Georgian Justice Minister Thea Tsulukiani has dismissed the allegations of Rustavi 2 private broadcaster director Nika Gvaramia regarding the government's interest in shutting down the opposition-leaning channel and stated that no decision might be enforced by state agencies concerning the channel Rustavi 2 until the European Court of Human Rights delivers a verdict in the broadcaster's ownership issue.

Tsulukiani made the statement in response to Gvaramia, who said that Nino Nizharadze, who inherited nine percent of shares of Rustavi 2 – one of the largest private companies in Georgia – from her husband is demanding 28 million GEL (about \$10.3m/€9.2m) in court (*Agenda.ge, May 8, 2019*).

### **17. Counter rallies on VE day in Tbilisi**

The 74th anniversary of the Victory in Europe (VE) day was controversial in Tbilisi on May 9, as two confronting groups – pro-Russia and pro-Western – held simultaneous rallies in central Vake Park.

„Immortal Regiment“ – an official, Kremlin-endorsed project – held a rally in the Vake Park holding red flags and Joseph Stalin’s photos. Messages supporting Russia, denigrating Georgia’s state policies and the West were heard. Some said Georgia should join the Eurasian Union – a customs and loose political union sponsored by the Kremlin.

Some of the demonstrators, apparently nostalgic for the Soviet Union and communism, hailed Russia’s current president Vladimir Putin, denied Russia’s being an occupying power in Georgia, arguing that Russia’s military occupation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia was the outcome of “the government’s mistaken foreign policy”. They said, in fact, Georgia was occupied by the U.S., whose stooges run the country, in their view (*Civil.ge, May 9, 2019*).

### **18. Police detain five as Russian-encouraged demonstrators and rival groups clash in Tbilisi**

Police have detained five individuals and later released them after the participants of the Russian-encouraged Immortal Regiment march- held over May 9 to commemorate the victory of the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany-and their opposers clashed near Vake Park in central Tbilisi earlier today.

Groups opposing the immortal regiment’s march stated that they will never tolerate the occupation of the two occupied regions of Georgia Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) by Russia.

Georgian Vice Parliament Speaker Tamar Chugoshvili has reacted to the rally, stating that Russia is an occupant state and she is disappointed when people in the country think differently (*Agenda.ge, May 9, 2019*).

### **19. Georgian political party Girchi opens brothel in headquarters**

Georgian Political party Girchi, which is demanding the legalisation of drug consumption and prostitution, has opened a brothel by the name of Pioneer [a children’s communist organisation in the Soviet Union], in its office in the Mtastminda district in central Tbilisi.

The decision came after the detention of a hotel owner in Tbilisi earlier this week for ‘enabling prostitution.’ “Since the Soviet period the government treats sex workers as if they are not humans”, party founder Zurab Zaparidze said.

He stated that those who want to pay for sex will be able to rent out a room in party headquarters for 49.90 GEL [18 USD] an hour, which is a criminal offence in Georgia, punishable by three to six years in prison (*Agenda.ge, May 10, 2019*).



### **20. Tbilisi ‘rave-olution’ protesters mark one year anniversary of night club raids that sparked movement**

This is a reference to protests last year against heavy handed police action during a crackdown on two Tbilisi popular nightclubs, Bassiani and Gallery.

Minister of Internal Affairs Giorgi Gakharia said those exact words when he addressed one of the rallies in the capital in spring of 2018, which created headlines internationally and were dubbed a ‘rave-olution’.

Apart from the bust, the protesters also installed white banners throughout the city of Tbilisi poking fun at Gakharia, as well as the billionaire Georgian Dream chair Bidzina Ivanishvili – referred to as an ‘oligarch’ – and the authorities in

general (*DFWatch.net, May 12, 2019*).

## ❖ Economy and Social Affairs

### **21. EBRD Named TBC Bank most Active International Financing Bank in Georgia**

"Trade financing is one of the most important components of economic development. Every successful step towards using new markets and financing companies is thanks to our partner banks. We want to express our gratitude and respect for financial institutions today, with these awards," said Nick Tesseyman, managing director of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (*CBW.GE, May 11, 2019*).

### **22. EBRD Forecasts Georgia's GDP Growth of 4.5% this Year**

"Economic output expanded by 4.7 percent in 2018, driven largely by growth in trade, real estate, transport and financial intermediation. The hospitality sector continued to boom, supporting overall economic performance; the share of tourism-related services in the whole economy increased from an average of 7.3 percent in 2015-17 to 8.1 percent in 2018. However, the output of the construction sector declined by 3.1 percent, marking the first contraction in the sector since 2013" - is noted in EBRD statement (*CBW.GE, May 11, 2019*).

### **23. Capitol Group Plans to Develop Tourism Business in Shovi, 60 million USD Project Coming**

BM.Ge was told at Partnership Fund that the interested party has already submitted a proposal and negotiations are underway.

Giorgi Jakhutashvili, head of the supervisory board of Symmetry explains that in partnership with the Kazakh investor, Symmetry has been developing a general design for Shovi development. The group considers financial cooperation issue with the Partnership Fund.

According to preliminary estimations, 60 million USD will be spent on Shovi tourism infrastructure development, including 15 million USD will be co-financed by Partnership Fund. The construction works will start in 2020 (*CBW.GE, May 11, 2019*).

## ❖ Sports and Culture

### **24. Seoul festival awards 'The Harvest' by filmmaker Misho Antadze**

Georgian director Misho Antadze's documentary *The Harvest* collected the Network for the Promotion of Asian Cinema (NETPAC)'s Award at the Jeonju International Film Festival in Seoul this week, distinguishing the film about the relationship between nature, technology, and the changing landscape (*Agenda.ge, May 10, 2019*).








## **Additional Information**

**May 13, 2019**

### **OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD - 2.7400 GEL      1 GBP - 3.5675 GEL      100 RUB -4.2049 GEL  
1 EUR - 3.0770 GEL      1 TRY - 0.4473 GEL      100 JPY - 2.4943 GEL

Monday 13 May	Tuesday 14 May	Wednesday 15 May	Thursday 16 May	Friday 17 May
				
10° 22°	12° 25°	13° 27°	15° 27°	16° 28°

-  **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](#)**