

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

May 13-15

Compiled by: **Aleksandre Davitashvili**

Date: **May 16, 2019**

## ❖ Foreign Affairs

### **1. Georgia negotiating with Germany, France, Poland, Israel on legal employment**

Georgia is negotiating with three EU member states, Germany, France and Poland to allow for the legal employment of Georgians in those countries, as well as with Israel, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia reports. An agreement has already been achieved with France.

“Legal employment of Georgians is one of the priorities for the ministry of Foreign Affairs, as such deals will decrease the number of illegal migrants and boost the qualification of Georgian nationals,” the Foreign Ministry says. A pilot project is underway with Poland, with up to 45 Georgian citizens legally employed, the ministry says (*Agenda.ge, May 13, 2019*).

### **2. Georgia elected as United Nations Statistical Commission member for 2020-2023**

Georgia was unanimously elected as a member of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) for a period of four years, announces the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat). The membership mandate will span from 2020-2023.

A total of eight new members of the UNSC were elected for the same period on May 7 in New York at the meeting of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (*Agenda.ge, May 14, 2019*).

### **3. President of European Commission Tusk: 10 years on there is more Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine in EU**

President of the European Commission Donald Tusk stated on the 10th anniversary of the EU’s Eastern Partnership format that there is more Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in the EU.

“And I believe there is more EU in all of your countries than ever before. We are not only neighbours – we are members of the same European family”, he said during the reception of leaders from the six Eastern Partnership countries (*Agenda.ge, May 14, 2019*).

### **4. European Commission head Juncker says Georgia is a ‘100% European state’**

Head of the European Commission Jean Claude Juncker says that Georgia is a “100 per cent European state” and the leader of the EU’s Eastern Partnership format.

Juncker made the statement during his meeting with Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze in Brussels, Belgium, during the conference dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the Eastern Partnership (*Agenda.ge, May 14, 2019*).

### **5. President of EU Bank: ‘EIB wishes to support innovative projects in Georgia’**

Vice President of the European Investment Bank (EIB) Vazil Hudak said that Georgia is a key partner of EIB in the Eastern Partnership and "we will continue supporting East-West connectivity, along with significant projects implemented in the energy sector of the country".

Hudak met Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze today in Brussels within the 10th anniversary of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) (*Agenda.ge, May 14, 2019*).

#### **6. Georgian PM: 'new, more ambitious' plans needed, like Eastern Partnership 10 years ago**

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has stayed Georgia needs more ambitious plans, like that of the Eastern Partnership 10 years ago. He also said the country is "ready to make large steps forward."

At a discussion held during a conference devoted to the Eastern Partnership's ten year anniversary he said that Georgia's past was European and its future will also be European.

Bakhtadze assessed the last decade as a 'journey' full of obstacles adding Georgia is a good example of the transformative power the EU has (*Agenda.ge, May 14, 2019*).

#### **7. Renewed Georgia-Azerbaijani border demarcation commission resumes talks**

The joint commission working on the demarcation of the Georgia-Azerbaijani border resumed its work today.

Chaired by the Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia Lasha Darsalia and his Azerbaijani counterpart, Deputy FM Khalaf Khalafov, the Commission held its first meeting in Baku.

The parties discussed the border delimitation process, noting that 2/3 of the border has been agreed on and now it needs further communication over the remaining sections (*Agenda.ge, May 14, 2019*).

#### **8. 'We'd be happy to take their place': Georgia bids to nab UK's spot in EU**

Georgia has made a tongue-in-cheek bid to take the United Kingdom's place at Europe's top table. The country's pro-EU president, Salome Zourabichvili, was speaking to Euronews at the European elections debate in Paris on Tuesday.

"One thing we do not understand is what Great Britain is doing [on Brexit]," she said. "We will be very happy to take the place left by them."

While other countries on the fringes of the EU are a battleground for influence between Brussels and Moscow, Georgia is a bit different.

A conflict a decade ago with Russia over the breakaway region of South Ossetia helped to put Tbilisi on a path to EU membership.

"We are in a world where there are many problems. But our answer to the many challenges — and we are living all these challenges even closer than most European countries — our answer to these challenges is to be closer, and to be in Europe," continued Zourabichvili (*Euronews, May 14, 2019*).

#### **9. Salomé Zourabichvili, French diplomat became Georgian president**

Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili is the headline of a Paris conference organized by Euronews on Tuesday. This is the second time in six months that the new president of Georgia moves to France, and probably not the last: until last year, she was still French.

During the campaign, Salomé Zourabichvili had pretended to want to resume her language with Moscow, but today, the former diplomat notes that the time is still not for negotiation: "All the daily actions, whether

the taking hostage on the confrontation line, the Russification of the occupied territories, the creation of multiple military bases, both in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, all these are Russian provocations, while Georgia, meanwhile, welcomes over a million Russian tourists every year and it's going very well. "

When asked if she imagines that she will ever be able to negotiate on an equal footing with Russian President Vladimir Putin, she simply remarks that "you have to be two to negotiate and make progress" and that, for the moment, "the availability of Russia is not here. " (*Franceinter.fr*, May 14, 2019).

#### **10. Georgian President in Latvia: we need allies' support to convince Russia that Georgia's course is irreversible**

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili has told Latvian President Raimonds Vejonis in Riga that Georgia needs the support of partner states to convince Russia and remind the country that Georgia's Euro-Atlantic course is irreversible.

Zurbishvili thanked the Latvian government for its "continued support" for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic Integration and sharing of its experience, and mentioned the April 9, 1989 tragedy in Georgia, when Georgians took to the streets demanding the independence from the Soviet Union (*Agenda.ge*, May 15, 2019).

### **❖ Internal Affairs**

#### **11. Georgian teachers' salaries increase, teachers of retirement age offered leave incentive**

Georgian Education Minister Mikheil Batiashvili has stated that the salaries of senior, leader or mentor teachers will increase from September 2019, while the teachers in their pension age will be able to receive two-year salary in advance, if they decide to leave.

"The salaries of all senior, leader and mentor teachers [teachers with higher status based on passed exams and achievements at school] will increase by 150 GEL [54 USD] and more and the increase will continue in all following years. The average salary of teachers must reach at least 1,500 GEL [543 USD] in 2022," Batiashvili said (*Agenda.ge*, May 13, 2019).

#### **12. Georgian Interior Minister vows to specify the number of policemen at polling stations after consultations with allies**

Georgian Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia said that he will consult with foreign partners and international observers to decide on how many policemen will be sent to different polling stations around Georgia during the May 19 by elections. "The decision will be made after studying the situation and the consultations," Gakharia said.

- He stated that the Georgian Dream leadership will not allow anyone to discredit the elections with the use of provocations and disinformation.
- Six international and 49 local organisations will observe the elections in Tbilisi and regions.
- The elections will be held in Tbilisi to elect the MP for the Mtatsminda district, to replace current President Salome Zurbishvili in parliament.

- Voters in the Sagarejo, Akhmeta, Adigeni, Zestaponi, Chiatura, Tkibuli, Tskaltubo and Ozurgeti regions, both in eastern and western Georgia, will elect the members of their city councils on the day.
- Mayors of Marneuli, Zestaponi, Chiatura, Zugdidi and Khulo regions will also be elected, as three resigned and two were charged with crimes.

### **13. Police detain one for election-related violence, involving former first lady Sandra Roelofs**

Police have detained one person for violence after an incident in the yard of the Dadiani Palace in the Samegrelo region of western Georgia, where former first lady Sandra Roelofs was giving an interview to Odishi TV channel, amid the May 19 by elections.

The United National Movement opposition party (UNM), which presented Roelofs for the Zugdidi Mayor in the upcoming elections, reports that several individuals attacked journalists and a cameraman, attacked party member Nika Vacheishvili and verbally insulted Roelofs (*Agenda.ge, May 14, 2019*).

### **14. Georgian Election Commission dismisses opposition allegations on voters' lists**

The Georgian Central Election Commission (CEC) has dismissed allegations of the United National Movement opposition party that voters' lists were handed out earlier than was planned to Zugdidi polling stations, in western Georgia, which could may have been used to influence voters.

Voters' lists, which are used in the polling stations on the election day, include personal information, as well as the photo of the voter.

The opposition stated that the lists were to have been made available on May 17, two days before the upcoming by-elections in Tbilisi and the regions (*Agenda.ge, May 15, 2019*).

### **15. Ruling party urges dip corps, observers to closely monitor Zugdidi by elections, as 'opposition wants unrest'**

Vice Parliament Speaker of Georgia Tamar Chugoshvili has urged dip corps in Georgia, local and foreign organisations to particularly monitor the by elections in Zugdidi, western Georgia, "as there are obvious signs that the opposition have plans to stir unrest there."

The statement comes after the rally of the United National Movement (UNM) opposition and its allied parties in front of Zugdidi district election commission today, saying they are protesting verbal and physical abuse of the UNM members and their mayoral candidate yesterday and the handing over of voters' lists to polling stations in Zugdidi "through the violation of law."

### **16. Giorgi Kobulia says he may continue political activity in Georgia**

"I was probably too principled. I think some of the decisions I opposed were harmful to the country. I will not specify the decisions, as I do not think it will have a positive outcome for our country," Kobulia said.

According to the former minister, he is going to stay in Georgia and continue his activity here. The former minister did not rule out to continue political activity in Georgia (*1TV.Ge, May 15, 2019*).

### **17. Public marching to be held on May 17 at Patriarchate's initiative**

Public marching will be held on May 17 in connection with Family Purity Day at the initiative of Georgia's Patriarchate.

The marching will begin from Republic Square at 17:00 and will end at Sameba (Holy Trinity) Cathedral where Catholicos-Patriarch, His Holiness and Beatitude Ilia II will bless the participants.

“The activity will be peaceful and has no connection with any kind of aggression. It will be an expression of support of our society to traditional values. The church merges from violence,” reads the statement of the Patriarchate (*ITV, May 15, 2019*).

## ❖ **Economy and Social Affairs**

### **18. Georgia’s external trade at \$3.86 billion in Jan-April 2019**

Georgia’s external trade amounted to \$3.86 billion in January-April 2019, says the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat). This was 2.3% higher year-on-year.

In the reporting period the value of Georgian exports increased by 17.9% to \$1.13 billion, while the value of imports decreased by 3.1% to \$2.72 billion with respect to 2018, said Geostat (*Agenda.ge, May 13, 2019*).

### **19. IMF to offer \$40 million to Georgia within its Extended Fund Facility programme**

Georgia will get about \$40 million from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) after the fourth review of the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) programme is finalised.

After the fourth review the amount of money allocated for Georgia will amount to \$210 million within the programme, said head of the IMF mission Mercedes Vera-Martin at the press conference held today together with the Finance Minister of Georgia and the President of the National Bank of Georgia.

The IMF approved the \$285 million, large-scale technical assistance programme EFF for Georgia in 2017 in an effort to support the country’s economic policy.

Today the IMF mission and the Georgian authorities have reached an agreement on completing the fourth review of the programme. Vera-Martin said that IMF believes the economy of Georgia is developing “at a very strong pace”.

She said that Georgia’s economic growth forecast for 2019 is 4.6%, and inflation will slightly exceed the 3% target, “mainly due to the increase in excise taxes on tobacco” (*Agenda.ge, May 13, 2019*).

### **20. Georgia receives \$137.1 mln in remittances in April 2019**

Georgia received \$137.1 million from abroad in April 2019, which is 10.1% more than the amount in April 2018, says the National Bank of Georgia.

Russia (\$34.35 million), Italy (\$18.44 million) and Greece (\$16.34 million) were the largest remittance senders in April 2019. Overall, the vast majority (93.7%) of all money transfers from abroad came from 17 countries (*Agenda.ge, May 15, 2019*).

### **21. Tender on Samgori-Lilo and Samgori-Rustavi overground subway projects to be announced**

The tender on Samgori-Lilo and Samgori-Rustavi overground subway projects will be announced in the nearest future – Kakha Kaladze, Tbilisi Mayor said during the city governmental sitting.

According to Kaladze, an Austrian Company ILF Consulting Engineers won in the competition announced by Tbilisi Transport Company.

Kaladze said that the Austrian Company will carry out technical-economic research on both lines and prepare corresponding documentation. The budget for both projects is about 13 million GEL (*ITV, May 15, 2019*).

## ❖ Sports and Culture

### 22. Jared Leto and 30 Seconds to Mars coming to Georgia’s Black Sea Arena

Hollywood star Jared Leto will hold a concert at Georgia’s Black Sea Arena with his musical band Thirty Seconds to Mars on August 13.

Tickets will be on sale starting May 20 and will be available online at [tkt.ge](http://tkt.ge) and [eventer.ge](http://eventer.ge). The ticket price will be between 50 and 200 GEL.

Two brothers, Jared and Shannon Leto, founded Thirty Seconds to Mars in 1998 and achieved success in 2005 when their first album *A Beautiful Lie* was issued (*Agenda.ge, May 14, 2019*).

## Additional Information

**May 16, 2019**

**OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD - 2.7425 GEL	1 GBP - 3.5406 GEL	100 RUB -4.2348 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0711 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4523 GEL	100 JPY - 2.5075 GEL

Thursday 16 May	Friday 17 May	Saturday 18 May	Sunday 19 May	Monday 20 May
				
15° 28°	16° 29°	16° 29°	15° 29°	15° 26°

-  [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](#)