

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

May 20-22

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Date: **May 23, 2019**

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. **Opposition stops protests in Georgia's occupied Abkhazia, deal reached on 'election' date with de facto gov't**

The opposition in Georgia's western occupied Abkhazia region has stopped protests as an agreement has been reached with the de facto government regarding the date of so the-called presidential elections.

The parties agreed that the "elections" will be conducted on August 26, 2019, instead of the previously named date of July 21.

The opposition demanded the postponement of the "elections" to October, as their leader Aslan Bzhania was allegedly poisoned a little more than a month ago.

The opposition says that traces of heavy metals of aluminium and mercury were found in Bzhania's blood, which could not have made their way there naturally (*Agenda.ge, May 22, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

2. **Georgian president attends inauguration of Ukrainian President Zelensky, urges stronger EU-NATO cooperation**

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili attended the inauguration of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv yesterday, stating during a face-to-face meeting that Georgia and Ukraine should merge forces for their Euro-Atlantic integration, the Ukrainian president's press office reports.

"Both presidents said that strategic cooperation between the two countries should become stronger," Zelensky's press office reported (*Agenda.ge, May 21, 2019*).

3. **Georgia-US to sign 3-year-defence deal to speed up Georgian integration into NATO**

Georgia and the United States will sign a three-year agreement in the autumn in the defence field, which will strengthen the country's defence capabilities and speed up Georgia's NATO integration, the Georgian Defence Ministry reports.

The statement came after the meetings of Georgian Defence Minister Levan Izoria in Pentagon, in the United States on Monday.

"The agreement will provide opportunities for Georgia to come closer to NATO and be ready for membership in the alliance," the Georgia Defence Ministry says (*Agenda.ge, May 21, 2019*).

4. Salome Zurabishvili: I will not have a dialogue with Putin, I will only remind him that he violated all the obligations

"I wonder what Putin would tell me. He must take the first step. Today the problem of all European partners in relation with Russia is that Russia acts improperly with the international community and does not respect anything. This applies not only to Georgia, but everyone in general. So what type of dialogue can we have under such conditions? I will not have a dialogue with Putin, I will only remind him that he has violated all the obligations," – Salome Zurabishvili said.

In addition, the Estonian Public Broadcaster journalist asked the question about frozen conflicts with Russia. Salome Zurabishvili answered that these are not frozen conflicts but occupied territories (*ITV, May 23, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

5. UNM Leaders Divided over Post-Election Strategy

Post-election remarks of Sandra Roelofs, the wife of ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili, announcing countrywide protests, has sparked intense debate within the United National Movement, with MP Nika Melia openly questioning effectiveness of this strategy.

Roelofs, mayoral candidate of the United Opposition, a coalition of twelve opposition led by the United National Movement, made the announcement mid-night on May 19, after preliminary results gave lead to the ruling party candidate, Giorgi Shengelia.

Speaking in village Ganmukhuri of Zugdidi, Sandra Roelofs said "if the authorities declare their victory in the first round, we will not accept the results because this does not conform to reality; if they still announce victory... I will travel throughout the country, village-by-village... If they announce victory, they will get mass protests." (*Civil.ge, May 21, 2019*).

6. Irakli Gharibashvili – Georgian Dream received big trust from population during elections

Georgian Dream once again received big trust from the population during the May 19 elections and now the party has to respond to this new challenge adequately – Irakli Gharibashvili, Political Secretary of Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia Party said in Free Vision Program of Georgian First Channel.

According to Gharibashvili, some directions were detected during the elections aside of good results that had to be strengthened by Georgian Dream in the future.

Gharibashvili said that May 19 by-elections in Georgia were characterized by low voter turnout and that nihilism was natural in the society that had to be juxtaposed by active work on part of the ruling team (*ITV, May 22, 2019*).

7. Majority of NDI respondents praise Kakha Kaladze's performance

According to the survey of the National Democratic Institute (NDI), Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze has the highest support of the population.

More specifically, 33% of interviewed respondents think that Kakha Kaladze works well, 10% thinks – “very well”, 30% – “average”, 16% – “badly”, 7 % – “very badly”. 3% said they did not know how to answer the question, while the rest refused to answer.

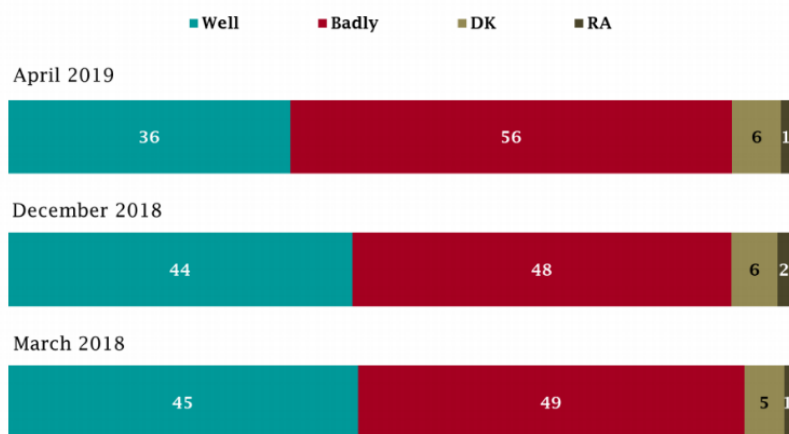
As for other leaders, Salome Zourabichvili’s rating is as follows: 1% think she works “well”, 19% – “very well”, 38% – “average”, 21% – “badly”, 9% – “very badly”, 12% – “does not know”.

Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze: 3% thinks he works “very well”, 17% – “well”, 44% – “average”, 17% “badly”, 5% – “very badly”.

Speaker of Parliament Irakli Kobakhidze: 2% thinks he works “very well”, 14% – “well”, 38% – “average”, 25% “badly”, 8% – “very badly” (1TV, May 22, 2019).

Government performance

Using this card, please tell me, how would you rate the performance of the current government? (q2)



garnered 15 per cent (Agenda.ge, May 22, 2019).

9. Underground waste containers to be installed on Chavchavadze Avenue, Tbilisi

Underground waste containers will be installed on Chavchavadze Avenue, Tbilisi, during a pilot project that includes a full renovation of the area.

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze stated the project will also be implemented at other renovated streets in the future.

He said the current waste containers placed at central roads are not visually attractive and cause many problems (Agenda.ge, May 22, 2019).

10. From Tbilisi to Mestia, here is how Georgia will celebrate Independence Day this Sunday

Georgian cities across the country will be marking Independence Day this coming Sunday with a range of events and activities from historical exhibitions, educational games, craft displays and music shows.

In over a dozen locations, from capital Tbilisi to winemaking city of Telavi, highland province of Svaneti and Black Sea regional centres, artists, innovators, farmers and professionals from various industries will host visitors in public celebration of the May 26 date (Agenda.ge, May 23, 2019).

11. Court sends fourth to prison for Khorava street murder of teenagers in Tbilisi

Tbilisi city court has sent a fourth individual to prison for the high-profile murder case on Khorava Street in central Tbilisi last year, claiming the lives of two minors - David Saralidze and Levan Dadunashvili.

8. NDI polls: support for political parties continues to remain low

The political part of the survey conducted by the Georgian Office of the US National Democratic Institute (NDI) reads that the support for political parties continues to remain low in Georgia, with 37 per cent of Georgians unable to identify a party to which they feel closest.

The ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party has 21 per cent support, while the opposition party United National Movement (UNM)

The individual was sentenced to prison for three years for giving false testimony, and was a minor at that time in 2017 when the incident took place.

He will have to spend one year and nine months in prison, as he has already spent six months in prison and the initial three year was decreased to two years and three months according to the Juvenile Code of Georgia (*Agenda.ge, May 22, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

12. Georgia's Foreign Trade in January-April 2019

Georgia's foreign trade turnover in the first four months of 2019 increased by 2.3%, compared to the same period last year, amounting to USD 3.86 billion, according to the preliminary figures released by the National Statistics Office, Geostat, on May 20.

Exports from Georgia were up by 17.9% year-on-year to USD 1.13 billion, and imports were down by 3.1% y/y to USD 2.73 billion in January-April. The trade gap stood at USD 1.59 billion.

Trade turnover with the European Union (EU) member states stood at USD 985.9 million, which is a 8.2% decrease over the same period of last year. Exports from Georgia to the EU-member states increased by 14.3% y/y to USD 276.2 million, while imports constituted USD 709.7 million, which is 14.7% lower than last year (*Civil.ge, May 20, 2019*).

13. New German factory to produce solar panels in Kutaisi, Georgia

A new factory has opened in Georgia's third largest city of Kutaisi to produce solar panels that will be exported to the European Union, United States and Middle East.

The factory was opened today by German company AE SOLAR, which is one of the world's leaders in producing solar panels.

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze who attended the factory opening ceremony in Kutaisi thanked the investor for "choosing Georgia for implementing this project" (*Agenda.ge, May 21, 2019*).

14. Negotiations held on Anaklia Port: What issues remain unsolved between state, financial institutions?

Representatives of the Georgian government, the Anaklia Development Consortium and international finance organisations (EBRD, OPIC, ADB, AIIB) met today to discuss the details of the Anaklia Deep Sea Water project development.

Today's meeting discussed those [eight demands](#) that the international financial institutions requested to be fulfilled in order to further invest in the project.

The proposed changes include insurance of commercial risks of an investor, regulation of development phases of the port and reimbursement of damage generated by legislative amendments (*Agenda.ge, May 21, 2019*).

15. Georgia, Ukraine amend free trade agreement

Georgia and Ukraine have today introduced amendments to the free trade agreement, which will allow the two countries to use identical rules of origin of goods in bilateral trade and apply the clauses of the Regional Convention on pan-Euro-Mediterranean preferential rules of origin.

First Deputy Prime Minister Stepan Kubiv and Georgian Minister of Economy Natia Turnava signed the protocol amending the free trade agreement between the two countries today within the 2nd informal Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) Ministerial meeting in Kyiv (*Agenda.ge, May 21, 2019*).

❖ Sports and Culture

16. State Security Service arrests footballers for fixing matches

The Anti-Corruption Agency of the State Security Service of Georgia has arrested eight current and three former footballers of three football teams for bribery and fixing matches in both minor and major leagues of Georgia. Police say the organised group contacted footballers and concluded agreements with them to lose games.

On April 3, 2019, FC Lanchkhuti's Guria, having taken a bribe from the organised group, lost with two goals down in the second half of the match with FC Tbilisi Merani during the 2nd league of the National Championship.

Similarly, FC Wit Georgia lost two goals down to FC Batumi Dinamo in the major league, according to a preliminary agreement. The organized group and footballers received 93,500 lari (about \$34,061/€30,513) in total (*Agenda.ge, May 20, 2019*).

17.4 sent to pre-trial detention, 7 released on bail for fixing matches in Georgian football leagues

Four have been sent to pretrial detention and seven have been released on bail for fixing matches in the both minor and major leagues of Georgia, receiving 93,500 GEL (\$34,061/€30,513) in profits. The detainees, who were arrested on May 20 and arraigned yesterday, are former and current footballers.

Of the detainees, four: Vakhtabg Jakheli, Irakli Khuchua, Lasha Chapidze and Nika Daushvili have been sent to pre-trial detention, while Irakli Bajelidze, Robert Imerlishvili, Joni Sherozhia, Giorgi Bediashvili, Paata Ghudushauri, Nikoloz Maisuradze and Nodar Kiknavelidze have been released on 10,000 GEL [3,600 USD] bail.

Chapidze told the judge that he made a mistake and asked him to take his situation into account: that his mother is ill and that he has a wedding in June (*Agenda.ge, May 22, 2019*).

18. Mutso cultural heritage renovation project wins EU Prize for Cultural Heritage

One of the most complicated and large-scaled renovation project of iconic Mutso village in Georgia's highlands has won the prestigious EU Prize for Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra Awards, the Georgian Ministry of Education has reported.

Thanks to the work the buildings in Mutso have been rehabilitated, which provided good conditions for living. Communication and electricity problems have been settled. A museum-reserve has been created in Mutso and three families have decided to live permanently in the village," the Ministry of Education

reports. The village is located in the Khevsureti province and perched 1,880 metres above sea level (Agenda.ge, May 21, 2019).

Additional Information

May 23, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.7756 GEL	1 GBP - 3.5153 GEL	100 RUB -4.3239 GEL
1 EUR - 3.1001 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4549 GEL	100 JPY - 2.5134 GEL

Thursday 23 May	Friday 24 May	Saturday 25 May	Sunday 26 May	Monday 27 May
				
13° 23°	16° 26°	15° 27°	14° 28°	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](#)**