

# NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

May 6-7

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## ❖ Occupied Regions

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

#### 1. Occupying forces abduct 80-year-old man

Occupying forces have abducted 80-year-old Amiran Meladze from the Kvesheti village of the Gori municipality, near Georgia's Russian-occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region.

The Georgian State Security Service says that the man was illegally detained on May 5, while he was picking greens in his garden. The European Union Monitoring mission has been informed of the illegal detention (*Agenda.ge, May 6, 2019*).

#### 2. Occupied Tskhinvali closes so-called border with Georgia for two days

The de facto leadership of Georgia's eastern occupied Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) region has announced plans to close the so-called border with Georgia for two days, due to May 9 celebrations.

"In connection with the provision of security measures during the events dedicated to the 74th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War, from 8 pm on May 8, 2019, the border with Georgia will be closed," Tskhinvali reported (*Agenda.ge, May 6, 2019*).

## ❖ Foreign Affairs

### 3. Georgia hosting first defence logistics exercise with NATO, partner forces

Georgia's Ministry of Defence and armed forces are hosting their partners, including NATO member states, in LOGDEV 19, a multinational exercise aimed at developing logistical capability of their armed forces.

"Held in the country for the first time, the drills - formally known as Logistics Development - involve 130 service members from a dozen countries and are led by the Joint Force Development Directorate of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The exercise aims to bring logistical support up to NATO standards and enable us to operate in a multinational environment," Defence Minister Levan Izoria told personnel from participating nations at the opening of the drills earlier today (*Agenda.ge, May 6, 2019*).

### 4. Georgian FM at V4 and EaP meeting: Georgia is the leader of the Eastern Partnership format

Georgian Foreign Minister David Zalkaliani has stated at a meeting of the Visegrad Four and the foreign ministers of the Eastern Partnership in Bratislava on Monday that Georgia is the leader of the EU Eastern Partnership format and the achievements Georgia has made over the course of past 10 years are recognised by its partners (*Agenda.ge, May 6, 2019*).

## **5. Saudi sisters 'thrilled to announce' a start to a new life, leaving Georgia**

Maha and Wafa al-Subaie, two Saudi sisters who fled their country and family and sought refuge in Georgia, have just posted on Twitter that they are departing for a new country to start a new life.

They have released a video showing them holding Georgian passports as they were provided with asylum in Georgia.

"We are still in disbelief this is happening and we cannot express how happy we are to have found a new home," they say in their twitter posts.

Earlier in April the girls posted on Twitter they were in Georgia and needed UNHCR protection as their brothers and father also were in Georgia looking for them. The Georgian Interior Ministry sent the girls to a special protected shelter (*News360.com, May 7, 2019*).

## **6. Georgian, Polish presidents meet - Euro-Atlantic issues, occupation in focus**

Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili has met Polish President Andrzej Duda in Warsaw earlier today, where she stated the importance of further support for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration and briefed Duda about the severe human rights situation in the two Russian-occupied regions of Georgia.

"Zurbishvili once again stated that the EU and its partners should give proper assessments to Georgia's achievements as only common evaluations are not sufficient and said that Georgia's sectoral integration into the EU need to be actively supported," the president's press office reports (*Agenda.ge, May 7, 2019*).

## **7. Georgian embassies to monitor foreign markets to avoid falsification of Georgian products**

Georgian embassies are now obliged to monitor foreign markets in order to avoid falsification of Georgian agricultural products and wine, announces Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia Alexander Khvtisiashvili.

Khvtisiashvili said that as a result, counterfeit products will be identified and the "relevant agencies" will work to eliminate the problem (*Agenda.ge, May 7, 2019*).

## **8. Anti-occupation movement Power Is in Unity starts patrolling in Davit Gareji from today**

"Today we start patrolling on the Davit Gareji territory, which will be absolutely peaceful. Our aim is primarily to prevent creation of an informational vacuum that often affects the interests of our states. I mean what has lately happened in Davit Gareji, when there was a 3-day vacuum and the society was not informed about the problem at all. We learned only on the 4th day that Azeri border guards had crossed the border and roads leading to the church. So our movement will be more of an anti-occupation format, than a public movement", Davit Katsarava said (*lpn.ge, May 6, 2019*).

## **9. Meeting held with Ambassador of Azerbaijan over Davit Gareji issue in Patriarchate**

"The Patriarchate will be actively involved in solving the problem related to the Gareji monastery. On May 4 and 5, a meeting was held with the Ambassador of Azerbaijan and the head of the All-Caucasian Muslims' Union issue in the Patriarchate of Georgia. The topic of the meeting was the processes related to the Davit Gareji monastery. It was underlined at the meeting that the friendly relationship between the two countries need to be protected and it is unacceptable to stir confrontation. The Davit Gareji monastery is the most important Georgian sacred monument and problems should be solved as soon as possible", Andria Jagmaidze, head of the Patriarchate's press service said.

## ❖ Internal Affairs

### **10. Sanctions to become tougher for driving under the influence of alcohol**

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia has drafted a bill which provides tougher punishment for driving under the influence of alcohol, for speeding and parking in the wrong place, Deputy Interior Minister Nino Javakhadze says. She stated that further details will be made public in the coming days.

Driving under the influence of alcohol is an administrative offence in Georgia, banning driving for offenders for six months.

A repeat driving exam after six months or a payment of 1,000 GEL are mandatory to be allowed to drive again (*Agenda.ge, May 6, 2019*).

### **11. Two Iranian citizens sentenced to 16 years in jail for drug offence**

Rustavi City Court has sentenced two Iranian citizens to 16 years in jail for the smuggling and possession of narcotics in especially large quantities into Georgia.

The police report the detainees brought the drugs into Georgia by means of hiding them in their body cavities on December 4, 2018.

Law enforcers arrested both of them on the same day in Rustavi. They had been in pretrial detention since then (*Agenda.ge, May 6, 2019*).

### **12. Mikheil Saakashvili says he has “big plans” in Georgia**

"I have big plans in Georgia. It needs help to be survived. I am now consolidating all Georgian emigrants around the world. We have a big Munich congress ahead and we will start the saving process of Georgia, and put it on development tracks. I believe that Ukraine will be the superstate of our region, but at the same time, Georgia will be the most successful country on the background of Ukraine. Georgia is small and it's easy to move it on the tacks of development. Georgia will be the Singapore, Dubai, Hong Kong of Caucasus. Ukraine is my home, but surviving Georgia is the priority issue for me. That does not mean that I will not arrive in Kiev. I will definitely arrive in Ukraine and then, in Tbilisi," Mikheil Saakashvili said (*lpn.ge, May 6, 2019*).

### **13. Former Economy Minister Clarifies Details of his Dismissal**

Former Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, Giorgi Kobulia, spoke on May 5 on details of his dismissal from Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze's cabinet last month.

In his interview with the Forbes Week, a business news program aired by Rustavi 2 TV every Sunday, Kobulia said: "the real reason for my departure was that I came to realize that we did not have convergence of visions and principles that I thought we had agreed in the beginning."

Kobulia confirmed reports that GD leaders insisted on his resignation before deciding to fire him. "There was a request that I resign, but I did not do it because until the very last moment I had hoped that I would be able to convey my visions to the ruling party and convince them."

Asked who he was talking to on the matter, the former economy minister said: "I was primarily communicating with the Prime Minister, but, of course, we also went through the issue with the ruling party leader, [Bidzina Ivanishvili]." (*Civil.ge, May 6, 2019*).

### **14. Seven detained for online drug trafficking, four from one family**

The Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs has detained seven individuals for online drug trafficking, four are a family of a mother, father and two children. Police seized 2,125 packages of different drugs from the group.

The detainees were selling drugs via the shop named MEGASHOP, registered on the internet platform Matanga," the ministry reported. The crime is punishable by eight to 20 years in prison or life imprisonment.

The ministry says that from January 1, 2019 up to now 676 individuals have been detained for drug crimes, 55 were drug dealers (*Agenda.ge, May 7, 2019*).

### **15. Tbilisi City Hall launches Mtkvari River cleaning project after Estonian Embassy publishes photos of polluted river**

Tbilisi City Hall has launched a project to clean the Mtkvari River after the Estonian Embassy to Georgia posted photos of the polluted river on Facebook earlier today. All waste, plastic bottles and packages will be taken out of the river near the Metekhi Bridge (*Agenda.ge, May 7, 2019*).

### **16. Georgia's Security Service: father of deceased suspect planned terrorist attack on former security official**

Father of deceased terror suspect Temirlan Machalikashvili, Malkhaz Machalikashvili, attempted to kill the former deputy head of Georgia's State Security Service (SSS) Ioseb Gogashvili, the State Security Service of Georgia announced at a special briefing earlier today.

The SSS said that Gogashvili, who served in the agency in December 2017 when 19-year-old Temirlan Machalikashvili was shot during an anti-terrorist raid in Georgia's Muslim-populated Pankisi Gorge, may have been the target of a terrorist attack at the grave of his father in the village of Zemo Machkhaani, in the eastern Kakheti region of Georgia.

The agency says that Machalikashvili instructed his brother's son, Moris Machalikashvili, to collect all necessary information and take photos of the grave "to plan the following steps." (*Agenda.ge, May 7, 2019*).

### **17. Malkhaz Machalikashvili: They are doing their best to destroy me, but this will not happen**

"I demand the punishment of my son's killer, this crime was committed by the state. They are doing their best to destroy me, but this will not happen, -Malkhaz Machalikashvili told journalists in front of the Parliament while commenting on the allegations of the State Security Service against him.

Machalikashvili has already left the territory of the parliament by taxi. He said he was going to pray, but did not specify where exactly he was going to (*lpn.ge, May 7, 2019*).

### **18. Malkhaz Machalikasahvili: I am staying in the tent and will continue the legal battle**

"I am staying in the tent and will continue the legal battle, - Malkhaz Machalikashvili writes on his Facebook page, responding to the allegations released by the State Security Service against him. At the same time, he is ready to be detained by law enforcement agencies if they think that he poses a threat. "I have been standing in the center of Tbilisi for 9 months. If I pose a threat to the country, if I am a terrorist, why have not they detained me so far? They call me a terrorist due to the remarks made on an amotionl background two months ago...Permanent persecution of an embittered father, the father of a killed son and persecution and release of his emotional words - is this the function of the state," Machalikashvili wrote (*lpn.ge, May 7, 2019*).

## **19. Shareholder files lawsuit against Rustavi 2**

Nino Nizharadze, who inherited nine percent of shares of Rustavi 2 – one of the largest private companies in Georgia - from her husband Gogi Gegeshidze, is demanding 28 million GEL (about \$10.3m/€9.2m).

Her lawyer Giorgi Kavlashvili explained that Nizharadze's lawsuit is directed against the channel's director Nika Gvaramia and the larger shareholders. The plaintiff is demanding compensation for damages she and Rustavi 2 suffered because of mismanagement.

Nino Nizharadze had a client who was buying her shares for about 1.5 million GEL (about \$588.2m/€524.6m) and if the larger shareholders would not give their consent, other partners of Rustavi 2 were offered to buy the shares", the lawyer said.

Kavlashvili also stated that neither Nizharadze was allowed to sell the shares, nor were other shareholders willing to buy them. Now, she is demanding 1.6 million GEL for personal damage and the rest for the TV company.

### **Position of Rustavi 2**

Director of Rustavi 2 Nika Gvaramia believes this is the ruling party's "new phase of attack" against the TV company and that the real reason of the lawsuit is to change the channel's "editorial policy" and to abolish "the main oppositional channel".

During his news briefing last night, Gvaramia offered Nizharadze to dismiss the lawsuit from the Georgian court and to file it in any international arbitration.

Let us argue in the court in which the both sides trust. We, Rustavi 2, do not trust the Georgian court", he said urging that the TV company "will win this battle".

The company's lawyer Tamta Muradashvili also stated that this lawsuit is "absurd" and politically motivated.

### **The ownership of Rustavi 2 has a very controversial history.**

- Established in 1994,
- the broadcasting company changed ownership numerous times between 2004 and 2012.
- In March 2017 Georgia's Supreme Court delivered a verdict in favor of Its former shareholder 2004-2006) Kibar Khalvashi, who had filed a lawsuit in 2015.
- Few days later the European Court of Human Rights suspended the enforcement of the Georgian Supreme Court's verdict.
- Currently 91% of the TV company's shares is owned by brothers Giorgi and Levan Karamanishvili (*Agenda.ge, May 7, 2019*).

## **20. Salome Zourabichvili responds to Rustavi 2 case, says freedom of speech is protected in the country**

President Salome Zourabichvili has responded to the developments around Rustavi 2 TV, saying that freedom of speech is protected in the country.

President's spokesperson Khatia Moissprishvili introduced Zurabishvili's position to journalists. According to her, all resources will be used to ensure that this right is fully protected in the country.

"According to the President of Georgia, freedom of speech is protected in the country and is guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia. Accordingly, all legal resources will be used in order to

ensure that freedom of speech is fully protected in the country", - said Moistsrapishvili (*lpn.ge, May 7, 2019*).

### **21. United opposition accuses government of launching a new attack on freedom of expression**

"For seven years, Ivanishvili's regime has led to three serious crises: political, social, and economic, which resulted in mass emigration from the towns and villages, impoverished population and suspension of necessary economic projects. And now Ivanishvili's occupational regime wants to confront the public, strengthen the persecution of the opposition and suppress free speech. But we will not let them make this country look like Ivanishvili's beloved Russian Federation," - said Vashadze (*lpn.ge, May 7, 2019*).

### **22. Georgia's domestic intelligence service warns May 9 rally organizers not to use Communist symbols**

Georgia's counter-intelligence service SSSG on Tuesday warned the organizers of a May 9 rally to commemorate Soviet victory in World War 2 that they may not use Communist symbols. Such symbols are prohibited by a law Georgia introduced eight years ago called the Freedom Charter.

But the organizers of the rally "Immortal Regiment" still plan to use pictures of Josef Stalin to at the event, despite receiving a written warning from the State Security Service (abbreviated SUS in Georgian).

Gulbaat Rtskhiladze, one of the organizers, responded to the letter in an update on his Facebook page. "Let me decide myself what symbols to use, especially since I already announced that our movement, The Immortal Regiment of Georgia, will come out at the demonstration with portraits of our glorious ancestors who fought against Fascism, flowers and other festive attributes permitted by law, among which symbolically, in deference to history, there will be one photograph depicting the Supreme Commander of the Soviet Union, who put an end to World War II. Let your subordinates not try to provoke me with additional letters and warnings, but rather warn the terrorist media [Rustavi 2]," Rtskhiladze wrote on Facebook.

Immortal Regiment of Georgia plans to hold demonstrations on May 9 in Tbilisi, Batumi, Ninotsminda, Akhalkalaki and Gori. The Regiment holds its first large march in Tbilisi.

The Freedom Charter, adopted by the Parliament of Georgia in 2011, prohibits the use of communist and fascist symbols in public places. However, the relevant paragraphs are not clearly formulated and thus allow for wide interpretation.

The Immortal Regiment movement, sponsored by the Russian state and personally by President Vladimir Putin, is nominally dedicated to the memory of those killed and fighting in WW2, although many believe that this is actually a Kremlin propaganda campaign. The movement covers more than 80 countries, and, mainly gathers activists from pro-Russian groups or Communist parties (*DFWatch.ge, May 7, 2019*).

## **❖ Economy and Social Affairs**

### **23. New 240m long glass bridge to give perfect view of Georgia's Dashbashi Canyon**

A 240-meter long glass bridge will be built at Dashbashi Canyon, in Georgia's Tsalka region, where about \$60 million will be invested, announces the Agency of Protected Areas of Georgia.

The project will be implemented by new Georgian company Kass Land which is founded with Israeli investments (*Agenda.ge, May 6, 2019*).

#### 24. Cargo Transshipment from Georgia via Turkish Ports Reaches Almost 700k Tons

In March 2019, the volume of cargo transshipment from Georgia through the ports of Turkey amounted to 695,283 tons. The ministry noted that in March 2019 the volume of cargo transshipment from Georgia by ships flying the Turkish flag amounted to 437,253 tons, while ships flying flags of other countries accounted to 4,258,030 tons of cargo (*Caspian Policy Center, May 7, 2019*).

#### 25. Georgia starts electricity export to Turkey and Russia

Georgia has begun exporting electricity to Turkey and Russia, announces the Electricity System Commercial Operator (ESCO) of Georgia.

Export started in May this year and so far Georgia exported 2.78 million kWh hour to Turkey and 2.61 kWh hour to Russia.

ESCO explained that the increased amount of electricity generated at Georgia's hydro power plants made it possible to start exporting to Turkey and Russia. This year Georgia plans to export 700 million kWh hour which will be four times less than imports (*Agenda.ge, May 7, 2019*).

### **Additional Information**

**May 8, 2019**  
**OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES**

1 USD - 2.7248 GEL	1 GBP - 3.5659 GEL	100 RUB - 4.1818 GEL
1 EUR - 3.0510 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4442 GEL	100 JPY - 2.4632 GEL

  

Wednesday 8 May	Thursday 9 May	Friday 10 May	Saturday 11 May	Sunday 12 May
				
12° 26°	13° 26°	12° 21°	12° 23°	12° 23°

  

-  **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](#)**