

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

June 13-16

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Date: **June 17, 2019**

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

1. OSCE condemns 'elections' conducted in Russia-occupied Tskhinvali region

The so-called parliamentary elections conducted in occupied Tskhinvali region of Georgia on June 9 were discussed and condemned at the OSCE Permanent Council Session. The Georgian delegation provided the council with information on the illegal elections.

The speakers of the OSCE Group of Friends of Georgia unanimously stated the 'elections' and their results are illegal given they are against the principles of international law (*Agenda.ge, June 14, 2019*).

❖ **Foreign Affairs**

2. Georgian Foreign Ministry denies mass detention of Georgians in Israel

Georgian Foreign Ministry has denied the mass detention of Georgian citizens in Israel as reported by several of Georgian media outlets.

The ministry reported earlier today that 24 Georgians have been brought to the deportation centre of Israel's immigration service in the past few days.

Israel constantly checks foreign nationals in the country and if they find those living and working illegally, such individuals are deported from the country," the ministry stated.

The ministry says that 12 of 24 Georgian nationals already have tickets and they have been informed regarding the deportation date. Georgian citizens were allowed to travel visa free to Israel in 2014 (*Agenda.ge, June 13, 2019*).

3. US, EU welcome bill on judicial reform in Georgia 'drafted with broad consensus'

The US Embassy to Georgia and the European Union delegation to the country say that they welcome the final bill on the "fourth wave" of judicial reform in Georgia, which has been made as a result of a broad consensus in a working group composed of different players, including the international community, civil society and the judicial sector.

"In our view, the draft incorporates our key recommendations, based on best international practices that aim to create greater transparency, accountability and independence in Georgia's judiciary. We look forward to parliament passing this legislation and to the judicial institutions implementing it, and we stand ready to assist with the implementation and further reforms," reads the statement released by the US Embassy to Georgia (*Agenda.ge, June 13, 2019*).

4. US, Georgia agree to enhance bilateral trade relations

The United States Department of Commerce and the Georgian Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation to enhance bilateral trade relations.

The document was signed after the meeting between the Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze and the US Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross in Washington DC on June 13 (*Agenda.ge, June 14, 2019*).

5. Russia unhappy with US State Secretary's advice to Georgia on Anaklia Port

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gregory Karasin says that the "tone used" towards Russia by US State Secretary Mike Pompeo during his meeting with Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze "is not something that is in Russian interests."

Pompeo expressed hope earlier this week that Georgia will construct the Anaklia deep-sea port, which will help the country avoid Russian and Chinese economic influence.

"We are interested in Georgia's economic, social, cultural and other development. It is up to Georgia to decide what to do with the Anaklia Port. However, what has been said towards Russia and China is not the tone we like," Karasin said, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reports (*Agenda.ge, June 14, 2019*).

6. PM Bakhtadze reponds to Russian official: Georgia's future not set by Kremlin

"Georgia is an independent country and its future is not set by the Kremlin", Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze said.

In an interview with Imedi TV, PM Bakhtadze referred to the recent statement of the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gregory Karasin (*Agenda.ge, June 15, 2019*).

7. Slovenia puts Georgia on safe country list

Slovenia has added Georgia to the list of safe countries of origin, joining the other 13 countries in the EU/Schengen zone to do the same.

Only 20 countries in the EU/Schengen zone have the official 'safe country' list, the representative of Georgian Foreign Ministry, Vladimer Konstantinidi said.

The other countries that listed Georgia as a 'safe country' are Bulgaria, France, Lichtenstein, Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, Iceland, Luxembourg, Ireland, Estonia, Denmark, the Czech Republic and Cyprus (*Agenda.ge, June 15, 2019*).

8. Georgian PM granted status of honorary citizen of Dallas

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze has been granted the status of honorary citizen of Dallas. PM Bakhtadze was awarded on behalf of the Mayor of Dallas Mike Rawlings after a meeting at the World Affairs Council of Dallas. Mamuka Bakhtadze thanked the Mayor of Dallas for the award and the State of Texas - for hospitality.

He said receiving this award is very emotional for him and that it belongs to his people. I assure you that Georgia is and will always be your strong and loyal partner", PM Bakhtadze stated (*Agenda.ge, June 15, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

9. Founders of Rustavi 2 TV ask for continued investigation into 'illegal seizure' of channel

Founders of one of Georgia's leading private broadcasters, Rustavi 2, David Dvali and Jarji Akimidze, who founded the channel with now deceased politician Erosi Kitsmarishvili in 1994, have asked for the continuation of the investigation around the 'illegal seizure of the channel from lawful owners' in 2004, under the United National Movement leadership.

Dvali and Akimidze say that the case limitation period, 15 years, expires on June 16 and nobody has been punished so far for the illegal seizure of the property "when offenders and victims are well-known to public." (*Agenda.ge, June 14, 2019*).

10. First ever Tbilisi Pride is coming Georgian church urge cancellation of event

LGBT Pride Week is set to be held between June 18-23 in Tbilisi to raise the awareness about sexual minorities.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia stated at the end of May that they will be unable to protect the participants of the events if they are to hold activities on the crowded Rustaveli Avenue or on Freedom Square in central Tbilisi, as per the organisers' programme.

The Georgian Patriarchate has urged the government earlier today not to allow the event to take place, "as it is known beforehand that the event will lead to unrest."

The church says that sexual minorities in Georgia are trying to display themselves as victims and attract international donations (*Agenda.ge, June 14, 2019*).

11. Two protest rallies in front of the State Administration

LGBT activists announced earlier on Friday that they would gather in the evening demanding from the state officials, including Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze, Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia and Parliamentary Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze, to share their position about the Tbilisi Pride scheduled next week.

The organisers of Tbilisi Pride decided to gather after the Georgian Patriarchate released a statement condemning the pride and calling on the state officials not to support the LGBT propaganda.

However, some radical groups, including a Georgian businessman Levan Vasadze, who has been rather harsh against the LGBT activists and supporters, came to the Administrative building of the Government of Georgia much earlier to hinder the peaceful demonstrators from exercising their right to freedom of assembly and expression.

LGBT activists have left the territory of the Administrative building of the Government of Georgia on mini buses provided by the Interior Ministry after the six-hour peaceful demonstration on Friday.

The activists demanded protection of their rights during the Tbilisi Pride, which is set to be held in Tbilisi between June 18-23 to raise the awareness about sexual minorities.

Conservative groups, who rallied against the LGBT Pride Week, which is the main reason of yesterday's demonstrations, remain in front of the Chancellery.

Some of the civic activists, including Nata Peradze, who joined the LGBT demonstration later on Friday also stays there.

The LGBT activists said while leaving the territory that they will not surrender but rather continue communication over the next week's issues with the authorities behind the closed doors (*Agenda.ge, June 14-15, 2019*).

12. 21 released, 7 remain in custody after clash over Tbilisi Pride

28 people were detained for resisting police officers and other petty hooliganism during last night's demonstration against Tbilisi Pride in front of the Administrative building of the Government of Georgia.

The Georgian Interior Ministry reported today that the detainees tried to break the police cordon and threw eggs at the peaceful demonstrators supporting LGBT rights. Seven, who were especially aggressive, remain in preliminary detention facilities, while the other 21 left the police department late at night.

"The Ministry protects and will further protect the right of assembly, as well as freedom of expression of every person, despite their political views, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and other features, if their freedom of expression does not exceed the limits granted by law," the Interior Ministry stated (*Agenda.ge, June 15, 2019*).

13. Georgian ultra-conservative millionaire plans to unleash vigilante patrols against Tbilisi Pride

"We'll establish people's squadrons. [...] Among the crowd gathered here there are a lot of individuals with military experience, a lot of athletes, rugby players, and wrestlers," Levan Vasadze said at a gathering of conservative activists in Tbilisi center on Sunday evening.

We shall not allow the "propagandists of perversion" to carry out a march here, he said, waving a cross and wearing traditional apparel.

"We will tie their hands with belts and take them away," he addressed several hundred supporters and asked them not to resort to physical violence.

Vasadze, who strives to further the rise of radical conservatism in the country (for a recent study, click this link), also warned the police not to interfere, otherwise, he cautioned, they will be pushed off. He called on the crowd to bring wooden clubs in order to confront the police (*DFWatch.net, June 16, 2019*).

14. Stupid foreign ambassadors, who do not understand what is their job, we can tie their hands up including their guards – Vasadze

"Everyone who visits our country, before plain approaches the Tbilisi airport, it is perfectly visible statue of Kartlis Deda (Mother of Georgia) on Narikala. She holds two things - the wine bowl is a symbol of hospitality and a sword that Georgians will fight until the end.

"Of course, we will not meet them with the sword but for sure we give a negative answer. Stupid foreign ambassadors, who do not understand what is their job, who walks in the streets and teaches us our state, attacks representatives of our state or church, tells us what to do, he is no longer an ambassador, he is an impolite, non-diplomatic provocateur who interferes in the internal affairs of the country and if they want to be tied up with their security guards, this does not represent any problem for us. We'll tie their hands up and take back to the Embassy, single hair will not fall down from them." – Levan Vasadze said during the gathering of traditionalist (conservative) representatives of Georgia (*GHN.GE, June 16, 2019*).

15. Georgia prepares for first LGBT pride amid threats of violence

Six years on, the violent scene remains imprinted in the minds of Georgia's LGBT community: dozens of gay rights demonstrators being beaten in the streets of Tbilisi by black-frocked priests and far-right protesters, some bearing clubs and other weapons. The modern-day pogrom in 2013 seemed like a warning: whatever Georgia's aspirations to join Europe, its queer community would be left behind.

But this week activists are planning the country's first LGBT pride events in a gambit to convert the underground explosion of queer culture in Georgia into political change. Arrayed against them are conservative and Christian activists and a police force that says they can't guarantee the safety of the protesters. Many fear the violence of 2013 could be repeated.

"Pride is always controversial," said Giorgi Tabagari, one of the organisers of this year's events, which will conclude with a "dignity march". "But how long can we hide? If we saw government was effective at combating homophobia and moving in a different direction, maybe there would not be a need for us to do a risky decision like pride. But we need to decide whether to remain with the status quo or to push harder." (*Guardian, June 16, 2019*).

16. MIA launches investigation into Levan Vasadze's "militia units" remarks

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia has launched an investigation into the statement of businessman Levan Vashadze. According to the Ministry the investigation is being carried out under Paragraph I, Article 223 of the Criminal Code of Georgia, involving creation or management of an illegal formation (militia, units, detachments or other groups) (*Ipne.ge, June 17, 2019*).

17. Reports : Healthcare minister will resign

According to unofficial information, health minister Davit Sergeenko is leaving his post. "Rustavi 2" TV has reported that Sergeenko will make a statement about resignation today.

A Cabinet meeting is scheduled for 2:00pm today. Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze plans to hold a briefing.

Reportedly, Davit Sergeenko will be replaced by Ekaterine Tikaradze, Director of Sachkhere Clinic (*lpn.ge, June 17, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

18. Georgia's external trade at \$4.95 billion in Jan-May 2019

Georgia's external trade amounted to \$4.95 billion in January-May 2019, says the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

This was one per cent higher year-on-year. In the reporting period the value of Georgian exports increased by 14.2% to \$1.46 billion, while the value of imports decreased by 3.6% to \$3.49 billion with respect to 2018, said Geostat.

Georgia's trade deficit came out to \$2.02 billion, which was a 40.8% share of the country's total trade turnover (*Geostat.ge, June 13, 2019*).

19. New bill to help commercial banks in Georgia recover financial health

The National Bank of Georgia (NBG) and the Finance Ministry of Georgia are joining forces to create new legislation for commercial banks in Georgia, aiming to identify early financial difficulties of commercial banks and eliminate the problem in the initial stages.

Another goal of the legislation is to reduce the risk of spreading financial problems to other players of the financial sector and to protect depositors and clients.

If the NBG's involvement in the problem elimination process is ineffective and the commercial bank faces having its license revoked, the NBG will move to restructuring in order to maintain the financial stability and the critical functions of the bank, with minimum expenses to the state budget (*Agenda.ge, June 13, 2019*).

20. Q1 2019: 918,400 Georgians spend 121.7m GEL on domestic tourism

About 918,400 Georgian tourists aged 15 years or more made 1.1 million visits (+11.9%) on the territory of Georgia in the first quarter of 2019, reports the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

People aged 31-50 were the most avid domestic travellers (37.6%). 53.4 per cent of visits were made by women, says Geostat.

About 28.3 per cent of visitors were residents of Georgian capital of Tbilisi, 16.8 per cent - Imereti, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti region, 12.8 per cent – Adjara region.

The main purpose of the majority visits (55.1%) was visiting friends/relatives, while the majority of the visits came from Tbilisi (average 298,800 visits per month) and Imereti region (213,600 visits per month) (*Agenda.ge, June 14, 2019*).

21. Georgian exports to Russia increase dramatically in 6 years, Georgian special envoy for Russian relations says

Georgia has exported 1.5 billion USD worth of products to Russia since 2012, Georgian Special Envoy to Russia Zurab Abashidze stated after his meeting with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gregory Karasin in Prague on June 13.

"It is a big figure, as in 2012 [when the Georgian Dream leadership offered to restore trade-economic relations with Russia], exports to Russia stood at zero," Abashidze said. Karasin stated that 1.5 million Russian citizens visited Georgia last year.

"I have information that the number of Russian visitors in Georgia in the first five months of 2019 will be more than last year's annual figure," Karasin said.

He also stated that Russia is among the top countries from where Georgia receives a greater portion of its remittances (*Agenda.g,e June 14, 2019*).

22. Georgian Economy Minister: 'Free trade – best way to deepen economic relations between Georgia, US'

Georgian Economy Minister Natia Turnava stated at the 3rd annual US-Georgia strategic partnership conference in Washington D.C. that a free trade agreement between Georgia and the US is the best way to deepen economic cooperation between the countries.

Turnava talked about free trade opportunities at the session 'Trade and Commerce: Regional Hub for Economic Growth' which was held as part of the conference on June 13 (*Agenda.ge, June 14, 2019*).

23. Georgia promoted in South Korea as ski and mountain tourism destination

The Embassy of Georgia to the Republic of Korea hosted a series of [events to promote](#) Georgia as a ski and mountain tourism destination on June 12-14.

Georgian Ski Federation President Zurab Kostava and the Head of Mountain Resorts Development Company Teimuraz Gamtsemlidze are visiting Korea to discuss the development of mountain resorts and to learn from South Korea's experience in organising international sports events.

Georgian officials visited the Korean ski resort of Yongpyeong, which hosted the 2018 Winter Olympic Games to speak with representatives there, given Georgia will host the 2023 Freestyle Ski and Snowboard World Championships (*Agenda.ge, June 14, 2019*).

24. Summer tourist season officially opens in Batumi

Tourist season has officially opened in Georgia's Black Sea town of Batumi. The Batumi beach, located in the country's west, is the main summer destination for Georgian and foreign visitors.

For the first time, 20 female lifeguards will patrol Batumi coast this summer together with their male colleagues, to prevent incidents and help those in danger (*Agenda.ge, June 16, 2019*).

❖ Sports and Culture

25. Georgia's Mutso heritage site in public vote for Europa Nostra Public Choice Award

Georgia's highland settlement of Mutso, a recipient of this year's European Heritage Award for Conservation, could also take the Public Choice Award from the Europa Nostra organisation, with the prize being decided through an online vote.

The tiny village, perched on a mountaintop in the hilly terrain of the north-eastern Khevsureti province, is in the running for the honour among 27 sites and projects across Europe, from the Oratory of the Partial Palace in the Alhambra in Spain to the Digital Archive of the Roma in Germany (*Agenda.ge, June 14, 2019*).

26. Book on Georgian alphabet and writing published and presented in UK

A presentation of a Georgian book titled 'Living Alphabet' was held in London on June 12. The event was organised by the Georgian Embassy to the UK and diaspora official Tsira Kemularia.

The book written by Georgian Professor Aleksandre Mikaberidze is based on a unique manuscript – a Georgian-Georgian dictionary by Georgian writer and diplomat Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani who lived in 1658 – 1725 (*Agenda.ge, June 14, 2019*).

Additional Information

June 17, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.7468 GEL

1 GBP - 3.4753 GEL








100 RUB - 4.2700 GEL

1 EUR - 3.0943 GEL

1 TRY - 0.4663 GEL

100 JPY - 2.5379 GEL

Monday 17 June	Tuesday 18 June	Wednesday 19 June	Thursday 20 June	Friday 21 June
				
20° 33°	19° 31°	19° 31°	19° 31°	19° 29°

-  **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](#)**