

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

June 24-26

Compiled by: **Aleksandre Davitashvili**

Date: **May 6, 2019**

❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1.

❖ Tskhinvali Region (*so called South Ossetia*)

2.

❖ Foreign Affairs

3. Defense Minister says NATO-Georgia cooperation is tighter, more extensive

Georgian Defense Minister Levan Izoria has said that NATO-Georgia cooperation is becoming tighter and more extensive.

His comment comes after he visited the NATO Allied Joint Force Command center in Naples, Italy last week.

United States Navy Admiral James Foggo hosted Levan Izoria and discussed strategic aspects of NATO-Georgia partnership and future plans with him (*Agenda.ge, June 25, 2019*).

4. CoE official, PACE co-rapporteurs welcome Georgian ruling party's offer on elections

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) co-rapporteurs for the monitoring of Georgia, Titus Corlatean and Claude Kern, and head of the Council of Europe (CoE) Office in Georgia Christian Urse have welcomed the offer of the ruling Georgian Dream party to introduce a fully proportional election system with a zero per cent threshold by 2020.

"The introduction of a fully proportional election system before the next legislative elections take place has been a long-standing recommendation of PACE, so we strongly support this initiative", Corlatean and Kern said.

They said that there will need to be a change in the transitional provisions of the Georgian constitution, "which is unlikely to succeed without the support of the opposition" (*Agenda.ge, June 26, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

5. Interior Minister Gakharia requests to speak in parliament on Tbilisi protests

Georgian Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia has requested parliament in an official letter to allow him to speak about the June 20-21 developments and rallies in Tbilisi at the parliament's plenary session

tomorrow, the Ministry of Internal Affairs says. Gakharia has come to parliament five times this year to speak and answer legislators' questions.

Demonstrators in Tbilisi are demanding Gakharia's resignation due to the June 20 rally dispersal in Tbilisi, which left 240 injured and 305 detained, with two young people losing an eye due to rubber bullets (*Agenda.ge, June 24, 2019*).

6. Protesters welcome ruling party decision to hold 2020 elections on proportional system, continue rallying

The demonstrators in front of the parliament of Georgia have welcomed the Georgian Dream ruling party's announcement to conduct the 2020 parliamentary elections on the proportional electoral system alone, which has been one of their top demands.

Monday's peaceful demonstration ended at around 12 a.m. with the protesters, mainly youth, marching around the parliament of Georgia holding hands and singing the national anthem (*Agenda.ge, June 25, 2019*).

7. PM Bakhtadze says Georgia may have a coalition gov't after 2020 elections

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze says that after 2020 parliamentary elections the country may have a coalition government, as, for the first time, the race is likely to take place with the proportional electoral system with a zero threshold.

"Of course, the creation of such a government [in which different political parties cooperate as no party managed to gain majority in parliament] might be dependent on the results of the elections. During the previous parliamentary elections we enjoyed high public support," Bakhtadze told Imedi TV.

Bakhtadze stated that holding proportional elections with a zero threshold is an "unprecedented offer" by the Georgian Dream ruling party, which has "huge benefits for the country's democratic development in the long-term perspective," and also has "several drawbacks." (*Agenda.ge, June 25, 2019*).

8. Georgian parliament elects new chairperson

Archil Talakvadze, 36, a leader of the Georgian Dream ruling party majority, has been elected the new chairperson of the legislative body after the resignation of Irakli Kobakhidze on June 21.

Talakvadze was elected to the post with 94 votes with none against, as the opposition parties declined to participate in the plenary session earlier today after the Georgian Dream refused to discuss their resolution text on the dismissal of Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia.

Kobakhidze resigned after the protests in Tbilisi, which were sparked by the presence of Russian MPs in the Georgian parliament and an address made by Russian MP Segey Gavrillov from the chair of the Georgian parliamentary speaker during the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy on June 20 (*Agenda.ge, June 25, 2019*).

9. PM Bakhtadze blames opposition for Tbilisi unrest, commenting a charge against opposition MP

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze says that the "destructive and irresponsible" calls and appeals by the opposition transformed "a peaceful and justified" rally in Tbilisi into unrest on June 20 and the

opposition members carry responsibility for that, commenting on recent charges against United National Movement MP Nika Melia.

"The developments we saw on Rustaveli came after the provocations of opposition members. Giving a legal assessment is the duty of the Georgian Chief Prosecutor's Office, which started the investigation. As for the political evaluation, I can once again state, that it was a deliberate provocation by the opposition which caused what we have seen," Bakhtadze said (*Agenda.ge, June 26, 2019*).

10. Cartu Foundation ready to finance treatment of injured during Tbilisi protests

Cartu Foundation is willing to finance treatment of injured during the clash with police in front of the parliament of Georgia on June 20-21.

Avtandil Talakvadze, Director at the Emergency Situation Coordination and Urgent Assistance Centre said only ten people remain in hospitals as of today (*Agenda.ge, June 26, 2019*).

11. Parliament gives consent to detention of opposition MP Melia

The Georgian parliament has voted to suspend MP immunity for United National Movement opposition MP Nika Melia, upholding yesterday's request from the Georgian Chief Prosecutor's Office yesterday to detain the legislator for possible incitement to violence during the June 20 rally in Tbilisi. 91 voted for the suspension of Melia's MP immunity in the 150-member parliament.

From the United National Movement and the European Opposition parties only Melia attended the plenary session.

The two parties boycotted the session as they believe Melia is being politically persecuted and the Chief Prosecutor's Office failed to present evidence justifying his detention (*Agenda.ge, June 26, 2019*).

12. US Embassy calls for 'dialogue among all political actors' amid Tbilisi protests

The United States Embassy in Georgia released a statement on June 26, saying it is "following closely developments in Georgia" after the June 20 protests in Tbilisi.

"Although it is important that acts of violence, as well as incidents of excessive use of force against demonstrators, be investigated, we urge the Georgian authorities to proceed with balance and restraint", the Embassy stated.

It further underscored that "a dialogue among all political actors" is the most needed at this time in order to "strengthen Georgia's democracy" (*Agenda.ge, June 26, 2019*).

13. Former, vice mayor of Zugdidi sentenced to two years in jail

Former Mayor of Georgian town of Zugdidi Lasha Gogia and vice Mayor Gia Gulordava have been sentenced to two years in jail and four years of parole respectively.

The two were convicted of taking especially large bribes. The Georgian State Security Service reported that the convicts took \$21,500 bribe in the first half of 2018 (*Agenda.ge, June 25, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

14. Basketball star Zaza Pachulia invites fans to Georgia amid Russia flight ban

A well-known Georgian basketball player Zaza Pachulia has joined the 'Visit Georgia' campaign and called on his fans to visit Georgia amid Russia's ban on flights to the country.

He has posted photos of Georgian landscapes on his Facebook and Instagram accounts, calling on all his followers and NBA fans from all over the world to visit this 'amazing country' (*Agenda.ge, June 24, 2019*).

15. Former Ukrainian president Poroshenko urges citizens to travel to Georgia

Ukraine's former president Petro Poroshenko has urged citizens of his country to travel to Georgian resorts and counter Russia's efforts to "weaken Georgia economically" following president Vladimir Putin's ban on flights to the country.

In a video address released through his Twitter account, the former head of the state likened Russian government's announcement of banning flights to Georgia starting July 8 to "methods" used by the Kremlin against Ukraine.

Saying the moves were aimed at striking Georgia's tourism industry, Poroshenko called on Ukrainians planning for vacation to pick the Caucasus country as their destination in solidarity with the state (*Agenda.ge, June 24, 2019*).

16. Georgian wine agency responds to Russia's warning on 'strengthening control'

There is hardly any reason that would put the quality of Georgian wine production under the question mark, the National Wine Agency of Georgia responded to Russia's recent warning on "strengthening control" over alcoholic drinks imported from Georgia.

Coming in the wake of political tensions in Georgia following an appearance of Russian State Duma MP in the Tbilisi parliament last week, the announcement of the Russian Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection and Human Wellbeing was released earlier on Monday.

17. Ex Georgian FM: Russia unleashed economic war against Georgia

Former Foreign Minister of Georgia Irakli Menagarishvili says that Russia has unleashed an economic war against Georgia and it is very likely the country will gradually ban Georgian products on its markets which were only recently re-allowed in 2013.

"The call of Russia to its citizens not to visit Georgia will be followed by other steps. The 2006 scenario, when Russia banned Georgian products, is likely to be repeated. They will ban Georgian wine, then greens and other imported products," Menagarishvili told the Rezonansi newspaper (*Rezonansi, June 25, 2019*).

18. Georgian Economy Minister: "Georgia is a safe country for everyone, including Russian tourists"

"Georgia is one of the safest countries for tourism and for travellers from any country, including Russian tourists", says the Economy Minister of Georgia Natia Turnava.

"I will use all platforms to say that Georgia remains one of the most hospitable, open and safe countries in the world, welcoming with equal pleasure European, Korean, Ukrainian or Russian tourists", said Turnava today while meeting with representatives from the hospitality sector of the Adjara region of Georgia.

Hospitality sector representatives asked Turnava to speak about the challenges they will face this summer after Russian President Vladimir Putin's banned flights to Georgia.

They claimed that most of the hostels in Kobuleti as well as in the entire region of Adjara used to serve tourists coming from Russia and the travel embargo would “significantly reduce” their income (*Agenda.ge*, June 25, 2019).

19. New overpass to offload road traffic at the entrance of Tbilisi

Construction of a two-lane overpass at the entrance to the Georgian capital of Tbilisi is completed, announces Tbilisi City Hall.

The overpass stretches 246 meters, has two lanes and is eight meters wide – it starts from Sarajishvili Street, passes over Marshal Gelovani Avenue and joins the same avenue in the direction of Mtskheta.

Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze who opened the new overpass on June 23 said that the project aims to decrease traffic congestion in the Vashlijvari settlement and will increase the flow of traffic between Dighomi and Saburtalo districts. Furthermore, vehicles will be able to move freely through Vashlijvari from Nutsubidze plateaus to Dighomi and vice versa (*Agenda.ge*, June 25, 2019).

20. Aerial filming underway to create 3D map of Tbilisi

Aerial shooting is underway to create a 3D map of Tbilisi by means of aerial photographs. Tbilisi City Hall reports the filming with a Cessna 172 aircraft will continue until July 5. Israeli company Offtek is the aircraft owner as it won the tender to conduct the work (*Agenda.ge*, June 26, 2019).

21. Business society ask Georgian PM to explain cancellation of simplified customs procedures for ‘golden list’ companies

The business society of Georgia has called on Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze to explain the cancellation of customs procedures for companies included on the so called ‘golden list’.

Many members of the business society of Georgia are disappointed with this decision of the Georgian Finance Minister and have requested a clarification of the reasons for making the decision without preliminary consultations with the business community earlier this month.

However, as the business society announces today “unfortunately we have not received an answer” from the minister and now they have addressed Bakhtadze personally to give them explanations (*Agenda.ge*, June 26, 2019).

❖ Sports and Culture

22. Georgian athletes sweep 20 medals, place country third at ongoing European Games

Georgian athletes have elevated their team to third place in medal rankings after a haul of prizes over the first four days of the European Games held in Minsk.

While wrestlers of the team have predictably carried most of the country's gains, competitors under the Georgian flag also distinguished themselves in trampoline gymnastics and shooting.

In the latter, three-time Olympic medal-winner Nino Salukvadze was joined among bronze medallists in the Belarusian capital by none other than her son Tsotne Machavariani, with both marking their appearance in the Rifle & Pistol discipline.

Competing in sambo and judo fixtures at the tournament, Georgian wrestlers have so far swept 17 medals, including six gold, to contribute most to the team's results (*Agenda.ge*, June 25, 2019).

Additional Information

June 27, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.8470 GEL	1 GBP - 3.6143 GEL	100 RUB -4.5039 GEL
1 EUR - 3.2356 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4932 GEL	100 JPY - 2.6439 GEL

Thursday 27 June	Friday 28 June	Saturday 29 June	Sunday 30 June	Monday 1 July
				
19° 34°	19° 33°	16° 30°	16° 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](#)**