

NEWS DIGEST ON GEORGIA

July 2-3

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❖ Occupied Regions

❖ Abkhazia Region

1. University applicants from occupied Abkhazia allowed onto Tbilisi-administered territory to take exams

University applicants living in Georgia's occupied Abkhazia will be able to cross over onto Tbilisi-administered territory to sit exams, Georgian Minister for Reconciliation and Civil Equality Ketevan Tsikhelashvili says. EU's eyes and ears on Russia's creeping occupation of Georgia.

"We are trying our utmost to remove the limitation. As of now, students, individuals who are in need of medical assistance and pensioners are allowed to leave the region," Tsikhelashvili stated (*Agenda.ge, July 2, 2019*).

2. Georgian student injured while trying to cross occupation line to sit entrance exams



A Georgian student has severely cut his hand while trying to cross the occupation line between Georgia and its western occupied Abkhazia region yesterday, as the de facto authorities closed the only checkpoint with the rest of Georgia on June 27.

Students living in the Russia-controlled region, had to use alternative, dangerous routes to sit

university exams on Tbilisi-administered Zugdidi region.

A photo of the student went viral, with several stitches on his hand, after he received treatment at a local hospital in Zugdidi (*Agenda.ge, July 3, 2019*).

❖ Tskhinvali Region (so called South Ossetia)

3. Amnesty International: post-conflict boundary in Georgia splits communities, leaves thousands in limbo

Amnesty International says that the attempts to physically demarcate a boundary between Georgia's occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) and the rest of Georgia by Russia and the regions' de facto authorities have led to severe human rights violations.

"Families are separated by barbed wire fences, cut off their livelihoods and at risk of arbitrary detention if they try to cross," reads the report.

The report points at "the devastating impact" of efforts by Russian forces and the de facto authorities to set up an "international border" along the disputed boundary by installing barbed wire fences, ditches

and other physical barriers which divide communities and cut villagers off from farmland, water sources, places of worship and even family burial sites (*Agenda.ge, July 3, 2019*).

❖ Foreign Affairs

4. Russian deputy FM: we were ready to abolish visa requirements for Georgia, but now postponed

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gregory Karasin says that the Russian government was ready to abolish visa requirements for Georgia.

"However, the protests in Tbilisi, which were sparked by the presence of Russian MPs in the Georgian parliament, postponed the possibility. Indeed, we were discussing the issue and we were ready for this," Karasin told Kommersant.

A journalist said that the reason for the negative attitude of the Georgian youth against Russia could also be the visa regime, "which prevents them from visiting the country [Russia]." (*Agenda.ge, July 2, 2019*).

5. CoE anti-corruption agency on Georgia: progress made across the board, further efforts required

The Council of Europe's anti-corruption body GRECO has published a new report on how Georgia has complied with GRECO's 16 recommendations on preventing corruption among MPs, judges and prosecutors provided to the Georgian authorities back in January 2017.

"Obvious progress has been made [across the board]. However, further efforts are necessary to implement the remaining recommendations within the next 18 months," reads the statement.

GRECO reports that Georgia has implemented satisfactorily five of the sixteen recommendations contained in the Fourth Round Evaluation Report.

"Of the remaining recommendations, eight have been partly implemented and three have not been implemented," reads the statement (*Agenda.ge, July 2, 2019*).

6. Russian opposition party members in Tbilisi: ongoing protests are justified

Members of the Russians social-liberal opposition party Yabloko, who are in Georgia to participate in the Georgian Development Platform, say that they respect Georgia's territorial integrity and justify the ongoing protest of the Georgian people triggered by the recent conduct of a Russian MP in the Georgian parliament.

"Decisions made by the Russian government in 2008 unilaterally [to start the war with Georgia], of course, did not benefit friendly and neighbourly relations and ending of conflicts in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali [two breakaway regions of Georgia]. Taking this into account, I understand the feelings of the Georgian people who were angry when they saw Russian MP Sergey Gavrillov in the seat of the Georgian parliamentary speaker. It was an incorrect step. During such a visit it is important to take the political background into account," Deputy head of the party Alexander Grezdilov told IPN (*IPN.GE, July 3, 2019*).

7. EU Spokesperson: Russia flight ban 'unjustified and disproportionate'

The European Union Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Maja Kocijancic said in today's statement that EU considers the Russian decision to ban flights to Georgia as of 8 July "unjustified and disproportionate".

Kocijancic said the latest developments in relations between Russia and Georgia "risk having a negative impact on the citizens of both countries".

"Additionally, the restrictions that were imposed on the two crossing points at the Abkhaz Administrative Boundary Line as of 27 June severely affect freedom of movement and cause further difficulties for the conflict affected population", she also said (*Agenda.ge, July 3, 2019*).

❖ Internal Affairs

8. Opposition MP charged with incitement to violence to wear monitoring bracelet

Opposition United National Movement party member Nika Melia, who is charged with incitement to violence during the recent Tbilisi protests, will have to wear an electronic bracelet to be monitored, as the Court of Appeals did not change the decision of Tbilisi City Court earlier today and accepted Melia's release on bail.

Melia was released on 30,000 GEL [\$10,000] bail on June 27 and was prohibited from leaving home without previously informing law enforcers, making public statements in public areas and communicating with witnesses.

Wearing the electronic bracelet, which will allow the court monitor how the MP adheres to its decision, was a condition added by the judge of the Court of Appeals today, as demanded by the prosecution (*Agenda.ge, July 2, 2019*).

9. Tbilisi protests to change format, organisers say

Starting from today Tbilisi rallies will be focused on communication, changing the public's views, and discussions, organisers say.

"We will gather in front of the parliament building, read poems, discuss various issues, show films, discuss the films, etc.," one of the organisers of the protests, Shota Digmelashvili said.

He stated that there will be a board placed in front of the parliament building in Tbilisi, where organisers will write about planned, large-scaled events, like marches (*1TV, July 3, 2019*).

10. Opposition demands election reform group to be expanded

15 opposition parties have addressed new Parliamentary Speaker Archil Talakvadze and demanded that the parliamentary group working on election reform be expanded.

The opposition says that the list of the parties involved in the working group should be revised and the reform group should be of a more inclusive nature.

Currently, the working group includes the following parties: European Georgia- Movement for Freedom, United National Movement, Labour Party, Democratic Movement – Unified Georgia and Free Georgia (*Agenda.ge, July 3, 2019*).

❖ Economy and Social Affairs

11. New 10 GEL bills to be released in October



The National Bank of Georgia will release new 10 GEL bills starting October 1. Old banknotes will remain valid tender. President of the National Bank of Georgia Koba Gvenetadze presented the new banknotes today.

The National Bank of Georgia announced the modernization of the national currency's

banknotes in 2015, on the 20th anniversary of the Georgian Lari (*Agenda.ge, July 2, 2019*).

12. Leading Danish manufacturer Danfoss Group to open office in Georgia

Global equipment and machinery manufacturer Danfoss Group will open an office in October in Georgia.

Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze and Danfoss Group Head Jorgen Clausen held a meeting during the World Economic Forum in Dalian, China today and discussed the issue of the office opening. Clausen reported Danfoss Group plans to finance the Technical University of Georgia with \$25,000 in order for the university to set up a laboratory (*Agenda.ge, July 2, 2019*).

13. Georgia named leader in SME policy index in Eastern Partnership countries

Georgia is the leader among the countries of the Eastern Partnership in the small and medium enterprises policy index, announces the Ministry of Economy of Georgia.

Out of 12 indicators, Georgia received the best rating in nine indicators in a study conducted under the aegis of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The nine indicators in which Georgia came out on top are:

- Regulatory environment
- Entrepreneurial environment
- Supporting services for SMEs and start-ups
- State procurement
- Access to finances
- Standards and technical regulations
- Entrepreneurial skills
- Innovations
- Internationalisation of SMEs (*Agenda.ge, July 3, 2019*).

14. Jan-June 2019: Georgia earns \$98 mln by exporting 40 mln bottles of wine

Georgia exported about 40.5 million bottles of wine to 44 countries in January-June of 2019, which is a 6% increase compared to the same period of 2018, announces the Georgian National Wine Agency.

In the reporting period Georgia generated over \$98 million from the sale of wine abroad – 9% increase year-on-year.

The top five countries that imported the most bottles of Georgian wine in January-June 2019 were:

- Russia – 25,582,447 bottles
- Ukraine – 3,752,488 bottles
- China – 3,554,127 bottles
- Poland – 1,821,802 bottles

- Kazakhstan – 1,656,318 bottles (*Agenda.ge, July 3, 2019*).

15. Number of tourists visiting Georgia increases 18% in June 2019

Georgia hosted 471,979 tourists (+18%) and 873,966 international travellers (+20.2%) in June 2019, announces the Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA).

Most visitors came from:

- Russia (+30.8%)
- Turkey (+45.8%)
- Azerbaijan (+8.8%)
- Armenia (+9.7%) (*Agenda.ge, July 3, 2019*).

16. Inflation in June: price for food, non-alcoholic beverages decreases by 3.9%

The price of food and non-alcoholic beverages decreased by 3.9% in June 2019, show the latest inflation data by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

In particular, prices decreased for the following subgroups:

- Vegetables (-27.9%)
- Fruit and grapes (-5.8%)

In the meantime, prices increased for sugar, jam, honey, chocolate and confectionery (1.3%), also for milk, cheese and eggs (0.7 percent) (*Agenda.ge, July 3, 2019*).

❖ Sports and Culture

17. Japanese calligraphy by artist Koshu coming to Georgian town of Signaghi

The unique art of Japanese calligraphy will join the picturesque surroundings of Georgia’s winemaking Kakheti province this week, as artist Koshu hosts a personal display inspired by her visit of the local town of Signaghi.

At the Signaghi Museum the creative will bring works bringing together ideas from contrasting realms of different eras and cultures.

The selected artwork will illustrate practices of the artist that embody “the fusion of the ancient and the modern, the eastern and the western, and the before and the after”, a preview for the display said.

The creations were born out of the brushes of Koshu — also known by her name Akemi Lucas — since her 2018 acquaintance with Georgia during series of Georgian National Museum exhibitions titled Tokugawa and the Masters.

“[I hope] my love for Georgia poured into my artwork, is reflected and resonates in people’s hearts, rippling out and leaving an echo for the future” — Koshu

Known as a Japanese calligraphy master, the creative is currently based in the United Kingdom, leading workshops and working on commissioned projects beside being featured in displays (*Agenda.ge, July 3, 2019*).

18. Russian rugby club dismisses Georgian players after they express support for Tbilisi rallies



Russian rugby club Slava has suspended contracts with two Georgian rugby players Rezi Brodzeli and Saba Iluridze after the two celebrated a try in a match in Russia with one of their eyes covered, expressing solidarity with the Tbilisi rallies.

“With the gesture I expressed support for my people not for politicians. They [the club leadership] thought

that the action had a political connotation and that we were negative towards Russians,” Brodzeli told Rugby TV.

Rallies in Tbilisi broke out after Russian MP Sergey Gavrilov took the seat of the Georgian parliamentary speaker on June 20, during the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy held in the Georgian parliament building (*Agenda.ge, July 3, 2019*).

Additional Information

July 4, 2019

OFFICIAL EXCHANGE RATES

1 USD - 2.8155 GEL	1 GBP - 3.5408 GEL	100 RUB - 4.4339 GEL
1 EUR - 3.1804 GEL	1 TRY - 0.4996 GEL	100 JPY - 2.6154 GEL

Thursday 2 May	Friday 3 May	Saturday 4 May	Sunday 5 May	Monday 6 May
				
12° 25°	13° 24°	11° 17°	11° 22°	13° 24°

-  **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](#)**